



Ollscoil na Gaillimhe
University of Galway

University of Galway *Widening Participation* Committee

Annual Report 2024-25



University of Galway.ie

"The reporting period has been characterised by substantial progress in advancing equitable access to education for underrepresented groups, alongside the continued embedding of widening participation principles across the institution."





Chair's Foreword



The University of Galway's Widening Participation Committee (WPC), a subcommittee of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Campus Committee (EDICC), is charged with supporting, guiding, and monitoring the University's strategic commitments to widening participation. The Committee comprises representatives from the University's four Colleges, in addition to students, professional services staff, and external stakeholders.

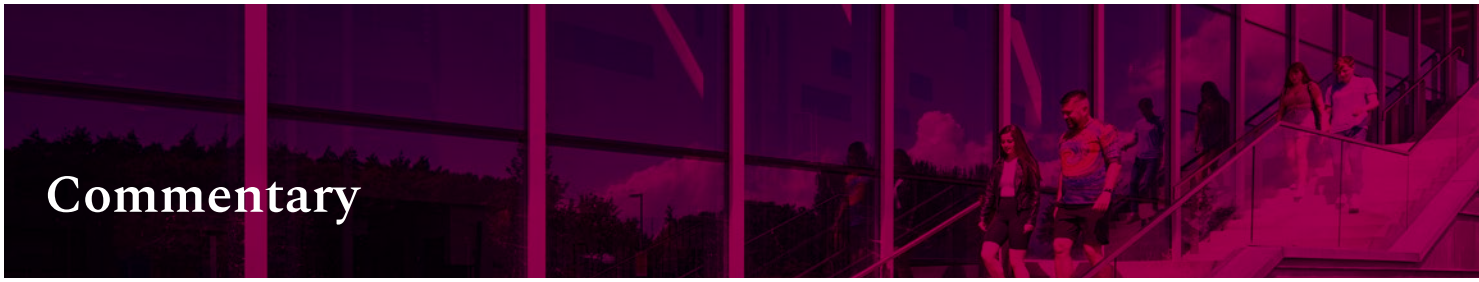
The reporting period has been characterised by substantial progress in advancing equitable access to education for underrepresented groups, alongside the continued embedding of widening participation principles across the institution. A significant milestone was the formal launch of the University's inaugural Widening Participation Strategy 2025–2028 in June 2025, announced during the European Access Network (EAN) Conference hosted by the University. This represented a major advancement in articulating a coherent institutional vision and a defined framework for action in this domain.

Further progress is evidenced by the development of the Cumas programme, which supports students with intellectual disabilities. This initiative underscores the importance of sustained and meaningful collaboration between University staff and community stakeholders in the design and delivery of inclusive educational opportunities. The return of the European Access Network (EAN) Conference to Galway also provided a valuable forum to highlight such initiatives and to engage with international partners on shared challenges and emerging best practices in universal design and the expansion of access and participation across higher education.

The impact of widening participation initiatives across the student lifecycle continues to expand and evolve in response to the needs of the wider community. I wish to express my sincere appreciation to University staff and members of the Students' Union for their continued commitment to this agenda, both within their professional roles and through their everyday engagement with students. It is through this sustained and collective endeavour that the University advances an inclusive environment in which all students are afforded the opportunity to succeed.

Imelda Byrne

Head of the Access Centre and Chair of the Widening Participation Committee



Commentary

Four years have passed since the publication of University of Galway's first Widening Participation Committee Report. In that time, the national landscape has evolved significantly, most notably with the launch of the Higher Education Authority's (HEA) National Access Plan 2022–2028 and the introduction of new legislative commitments within the HEA Act 2022, which require Higher Education Institutions to develop strategic action plans that advance equity of access, participation, and student success.

At an institutional level, the 2024/25 academic year marked an important period of strategic development for the University. This included the launch of the University's first Widening Participation Strategy 2025–2028, unveiled during the European Access Network (EAN) conference in June, and the launch of the University's broader Strategic Plan Of Galway, For the World 2025–2030. The Widening Participation Strategy represents the culmination of extensive engagement with internal stakeholders and external partners. Its four goals establish a clear and ambitious roadmap for the University which is aligned with the lifecycle of the current National Access Plan.

Importantly, the University's longstanding and pioneering work in widening participation has been recognised as a key enabler of the University's strategic priorities in its Strategic Plan 2025-2030, namely, Distinctive Research Impact, Education for the Future, and Effective and Sustainable Organisation. This formal recognition reinforces the central role of widening participation in achieving the University's broader mission and ambitions in the years ahead.

The reporting period also witnessed strong progress against targets set out in the Performance Agreement 2024–2028 between the HEA and University of Galway. Notably, the University exceeded its 2024/25 targets for first-year progression rates among priority student groups. Progression rates for Higher Education Access Route (HEAR) students reached 93.3%, exceeding the target by 6.3 percentage points, while progression rates for students with disabilities reached 92.7%, surpassing the target by 5.2 percentage points. In addition, a baseline for progression rates among members of the Irish Traveller community has now been successfully established.

Looking ahead in this space, efforts will focus on further strengthening student engagement and progression through enhanced monitoring mechanisms, including the University's Early Alert System (EAS). This student services-led initiative, originally supported through the HEA's Performance Fund, continues to play a transformative role in embedding a data-informed approach to student success. The transformative impact of HEA Performance Funding has also been felt in the University's pioneering work with care-experienced students, where both quantitative and qualitative evidence indicates increased access, improved progression, and the value of dedicated support structures. This work has also contributed to the establishment of the Care Experienced Educational Network of Ireland (CEENI), extending the University's reputation and influence in this area nationally.



During the reporting period, important developments also took place in relation to the HEA's Programme for Access to Higher Education (PATH) funding. In May 2025, the Government announced the mainstreaming of PATH 1 and PATH 3, transitioning these initiatives into permanent, multi-annual funding streams in support of National Access Plan objectives. PATH 1 funding will continue to support increased access to initial teacher education (ITE) for under-represented groups, while PATH 3 funds will continue the development of regional and community partnerships to enhance access, participation and success for underrepresented groups in higher education access.

Finally, we were delighted to see the commencement of the University's Cumas programme for students with intellectual disabilities in 2024/25, with 13 students enrolling on the programme. While funding for the programme is currently secured until 2028, we remain hopeful that it will follow the trajectory of other PATH initiatives in becoming a permanent feature of the higher education landscape.

Dr. Daniel Savery
Widening Participation Officer



Abbreviations

APT	Access to Post-Primary Teaching
CALPD	Centre for Adult Learning and Professional Development
CASSCS	College of Arts, Social Science and Celtic Studies
CBPPL	College of Business, Public Policy and Law
CMNHS	College of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences
CSE	College of Science and Engineering
DARE	Disability Access Route to Education
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
DIS	Deprivation Index Score
EAS	Equal Access Survey
EDI	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
ETP	Educational Transition Project
FAF	Financial Aid Fund
FET	Further Education and Training
FSD	Fund for Students with Disabilities
GRETB	Galway and Roscommon Education and Training Board
HE	Higher Education
HEA	Higher Education Authority
HEAR	Higher Education Access Route
HEI	Higher Education Institute
PATH	Programme for Access to Higher Education
SAF	Student Assistance Fund
SLA	School Leavers' Access
SRS	Student Record System
UD	Universal Design
UDL	Universal Design for Learning
UoS	University of Sanctuary
WP	Widening Participation

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Governance

Established in 2020, the **University of Galway's Widening Participation (WP) Committee** operates as a subcommittee of the **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Campus Committee (EDICC)**. Its purpose is to provide strategic oversight, coordination, and advocacy in the University's efforts to ensure equitable access, participation, and success for students from underrepresented groups.

The Committee reports directly to the EDICC and contributes to the implementation of both the **University's Strategic Plan 2025–2030**, the **Widening Participation Strategy 2025-2028**, and the **HEA National Access Plan 2022–2028**. Its terms of reference include:

- To develop and monitor the implementation of strategic initiatives in the area of widening participation at University of Galway, particularly the University's Widening Participation Strategy and corresponding goals, actions and KPI's.
- To consider and review the progress of widening participation groups, including part-time and flexible learners, across the student lifecycle, including outcomes on access, student success, progression and graduation.
- To identify good practice in widening participation data collection and evaluation and make recommendations which ensure an evidence-driven approach is central to the achievement of the University's widening participation objectives.
- To review the University's outreach and community engagement policies and activities, with a view to identifying barriers to participation for underrepresented groups, recommending the actions necessary to address same, and establish a process to monitor progress in this regard.
- To identify good policy and practice nationally and internationally, which enables under-represented students to participate and succeed in higher education and recommend policies and practices that will ensure University of Galway is keeping pace with these developments.
- To consider measures to support priority group students who wish to study on a part-time or flexible basis and recommend innovative curriculum pathways to enable underrepresented students' engagement with their learning at University of Galway.
- To consider the teaching and learning, built and digital environments, and make recommendations, which enable and facilitate the participation of under-represented students in inclusive, universally designed environments.
- To consider the range and provision of support(s) for underrepresented students, identifying barriers to meaningful participation and success, and making recommendations which address these issues.
- To consider how to contribute to the reputation of the University as an open, diverse and inclusive educational environment and champion of widening participation.
- To monitor, evaluate and report on the progress of recommendations made.

The WP Committee meets regularly throughout the academic year and reports directly to the Equality Diversity and Inclusion Campus Committee (EDICC).

Figure 1: Widening Participation Committee Governance Structure



1. Widening Participation Defined

To progress the widening participation agenda across the University, the Committee agreed on a shared institutional definition that captures both policy intent and practice.

Definition:

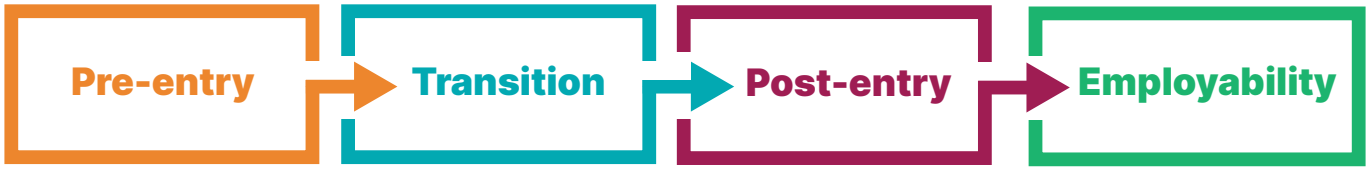
> "Widening Participation refers to a set of policies and activities which aim to create a more inclusive environment for students who would traditionally be regarded as underrepresented in higher education. These activities cover the full duration of the student lifecycle – pre-entry, transition, post-entry, and employability."

This definition recognises three key elements:

1. **Inclusivity**: Creating an environment where all students, regardless of background, can access and succeed in higher education.
2. **Equity of Opportunity**: Developing targeted supports that address structural and individual barriers to participation.
3. **Lifecycle Approach**: Embedding widening participation interventions before, during, and after university study.

The University's widening participation activities therefore extend from outreach with primary and secondary schools to post-entry supports and graduate employability initiatives.

Figure 2: The Student Lifecycle



At a Glance:

- WP is both a policy framework and a lived practice.
- It involves every stage of the student journey.
- It aims to reflect the diversity of society within the University community.

1.1 Widening Participation – Baseline Data

Entry Routes

Accurate data is essential to measure progress towards a more diverse student body. Analysis of the Student Record System (SRS) shows a steady increase in students entering through WP routes over time. Between 2010 and 2024, for example, the University of Galway has seen over 9,500 students entering as undergraduate new entrants via widening participation pathways.

Table 1. Undergraduate New Entrants by Access Route, 2019/20–2024/25

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
HEAR Merit	149	162	113	90	95	70
HEAR Supported	77	68	77	63	67	55
DARE Merit	94	118	168	179	218	205
DARE Supported	67	70	79	102	134	95
Foundation	11	21	16	7	8	8
FET	99	153	134	94	114	119
Mature	73	79	86	71	63	32
Mature Access	23	29	34	19	16	24
School Leavers Access	36	38	27	19	24	11
Total	629	738	734	644	739	619

Number of undergraduate New Entrants (NE) as a proportion of the total number of undergraduate students, from 2019/20 to 2024/25

Key Observations:

- **HEAR (Higher Education Access Route) and DARE (Disability Access Route to Education)** remain central to WP growth.
- The proportion of students entering via **Further Education and Training (FET)** routes has increased significantly in line with national objectives.
- **Mature Student** and **Access/Foundation** entry routes continue to diversify the student profile, although participation fluctuates year to year.

1.2 Disability Support Service

Aim

To ensure equitable participation and success for students with disabilities through reasonable accommodations, assistive technology, and advocacy.

Activity

The Disability Support Service (DSS) continued to provide tailored support to over 1,500 students. Services include needs assessments, assistive technology provision, exam accommodations, and awareness training for staff.

The University remains an active member of the DAWN (Disability Advisors Working Network), contributing to national policy development and practice-sharing.

Impact

- 132% increase in students registered for disability support since 2016.
- Enhanced accessibility in teaching and assessment processes.
- Strong collaboration with the Access Centre, Student Services, and academic units.

Looking Ahead

The DSS will continue to expand technology-enhanced supports and staff training, with a focus on intersectionality and inclusion of neurodivergent students.

Figure 5. Total Undergraduate and Postgraduate Students registering for Disability Support from 2015/16 to 2024/25

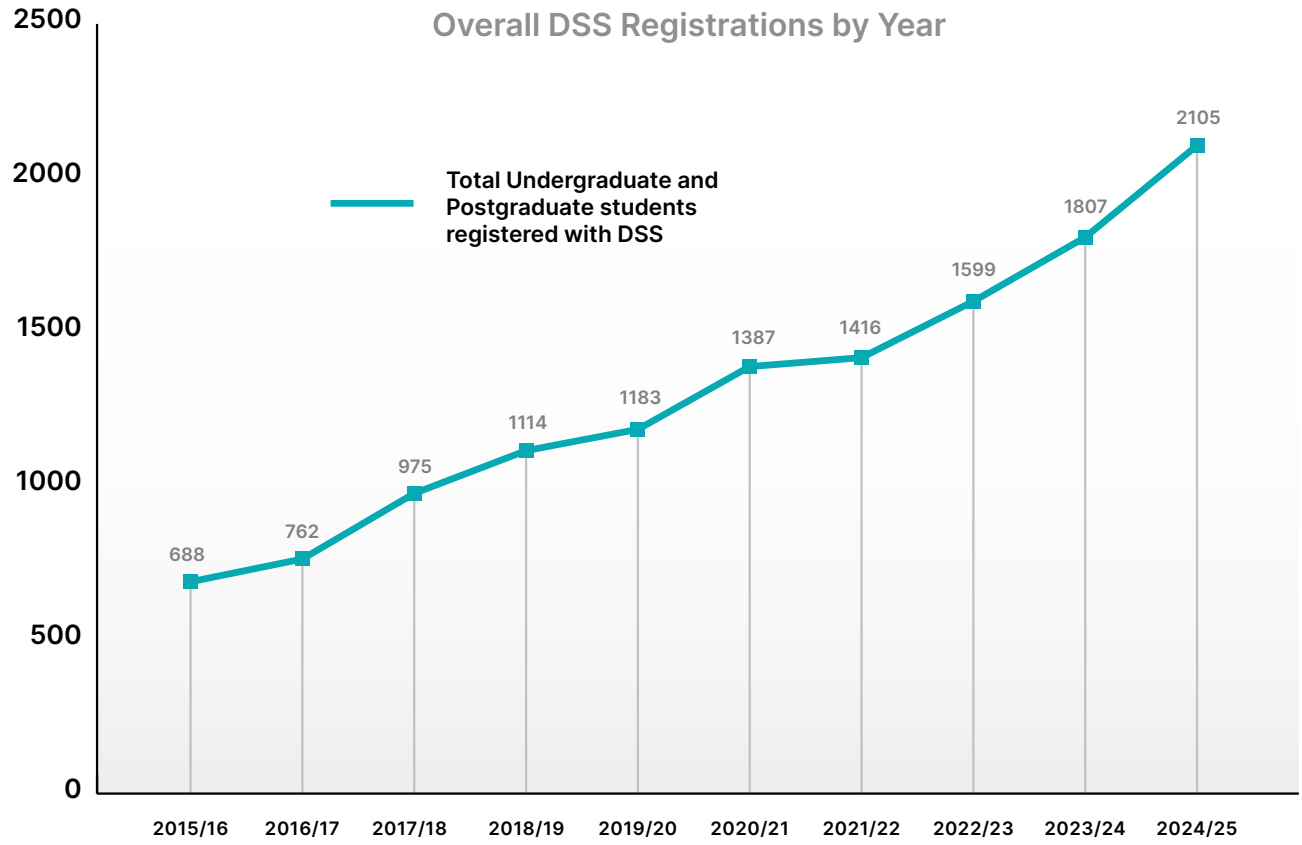


Table 5. Disability Registrations by Primary Disability Category 2015/16 to 2024/25

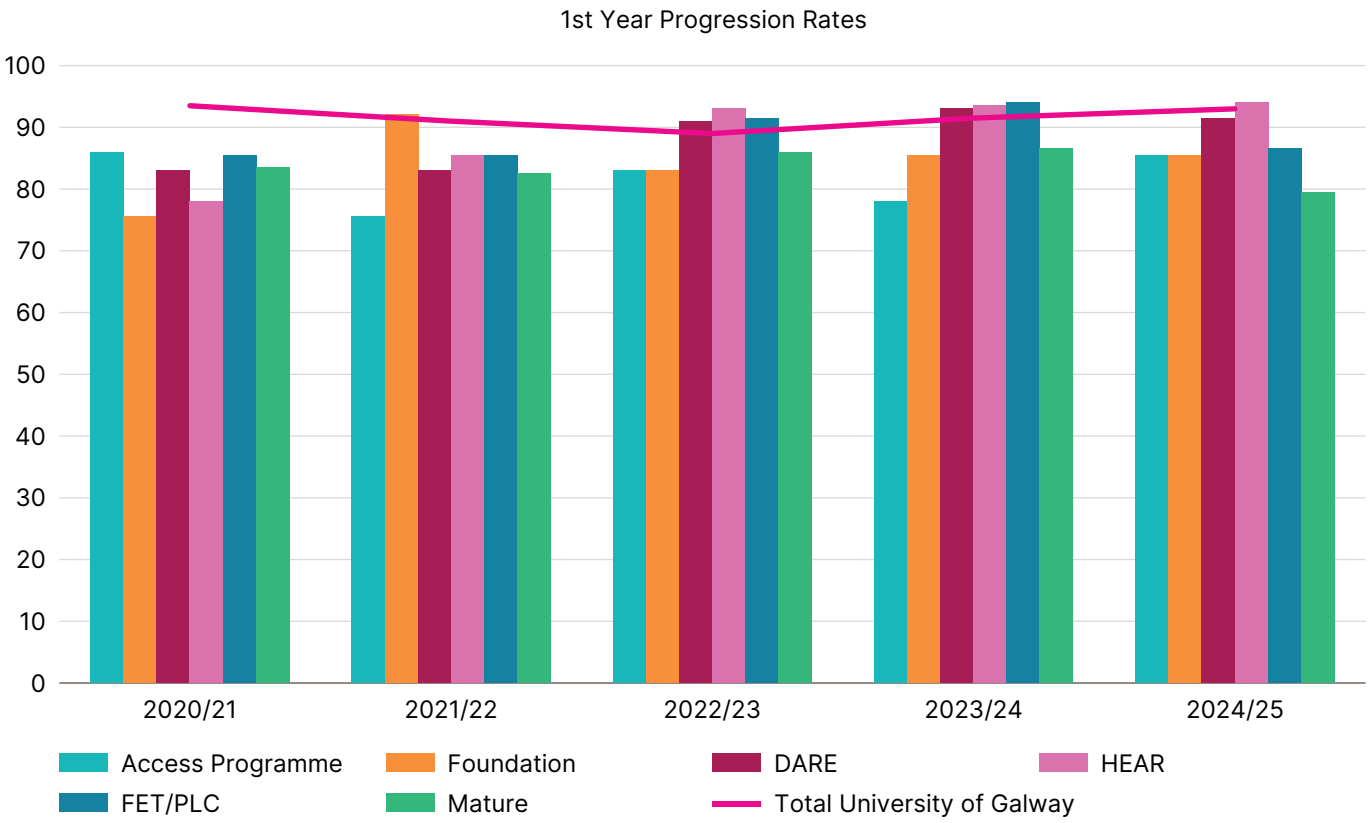
Primary Disability Category (UG&PG)	2015 /16	2016 /17	2017 /18	2018 /19	2019 /20	2020 /21	2021 /22	2022 /23	2023 /24	2024 /25
Attention Deficit (Hyperactivity) Disorder (ADD/ADHD)	25	28	39	44	62	74	105	155	203	298
Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)	33	39	51	59	67	77	92	107	139	175
Blind/Vision Impaired (B/VI)	15	20	22	25	30	25	30	36	27	34
Deaf/Hearing Impaired (D/HI)	12	13	21	25	24	39	44	40	44	48
Developmental Coordination Disorder(DCD)/ Dyspraxia/Dysgraphia	25	24	31	40	43	59	61	67	82	83
Mental Health	86	117	207	262	290	327	297	365	411	460
Neurological	42	49	54	68	66	97	90	98	99	83
Physical/Mobility	54	57	74	87	89	80	88	92	97	119
Specific Learning Difficulty (SLD) – Dyslexia, Dyscalculia	286	300	329	347	341	433	441	438	483	522
Significant Ongoing Illness (SOI)	110	115	147	157	171	176	167	200	214	264
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	8	1
TOTAL	688	762	975	1114	1183	1387	1416	1599	1807	2105



1.3 Progression

Monitoring progression rates ensures that widening participation efforts translate into student success. The data below demonstrates continued strong performance across all access routes. This is particularly important given the strategic commitment to high progression rates for some of these cohorts in the Performance Agreement 2024–2028 between the HEA and University of Galway.

Table 2. First-Year Progression* Rates by Entry Route 2020/21 to 2024/25



	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Access Programme	**85.9%**	**75.6%**	**83.3%**	**78.4%**	**85.7%**
Foundation	**75.6%**	**92.3%**	**83.3%**	**85.7%**	**85.7%**
DARE	**83.3%**	**83.3%**	**91.3%**	**93.2%**	**91.4%**
HEAR	**78.4%**	**85.7%**	**93.2%**	**93.3%**	**93.8%**
FET/PLC	**85.7%**	**85.7%**	**91.4%**	**93.8%**	**86.7%**
Mature	**83.8%**	**82.5%**	**86.3%**	**86.5%**	**79.3%**
Aggregated Underrepresented Students	**88.8%**	**85.8%**	**91.4%**	**91%**	**90.1%**
Total University of Galway	**93.7%**	**91%**	**88.7%**	**91.7%**	**92.8%**

*Following the HEA definition of progressed, a new entrant is deemed as progressed if they are present (repeating year 1 or advancing to year 2) in the same HEI the following academic year as per the SRS return.

1.4 Socio-Economic Profile (DIS Data)

Using **Pobal Deprivation Index Score (DIS)** data[1], 6.77% of University of Galway students come from areas classified as disadvantaged, and 27.78% from areas that are marginally below average. This data reinforces the need for continued outreach to low-income and underrepresented communities.

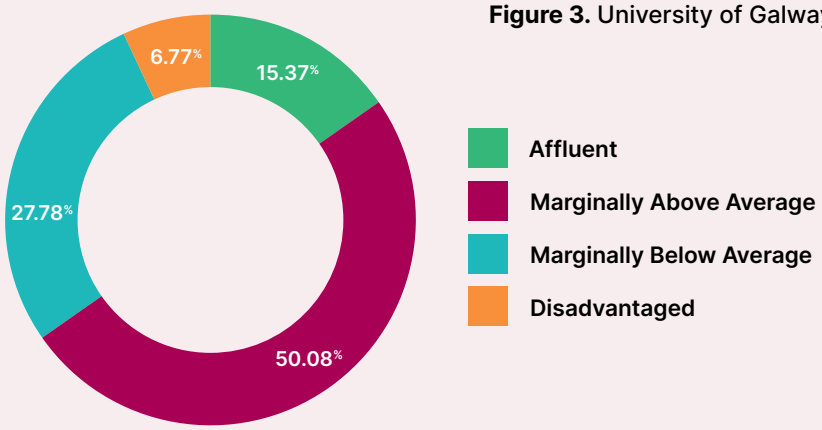


Figure 3. University of Galway Deprivation Index Score Data 23/24

1.5 Ethnicity Data

Using **Equal Access Survey Data** we can see the changing diversity in terms of ethnicity since 2010.

Table 3. Equal Access Survey Results 2010/11 to 2024/25

Ethnic/ Cultural Background	2010 /11	2011 /12	2012 /13	2013 /14	2014 /15	2015 /16	2016 /17	2017 /18	2018 /19	2019 /20	2020 /21	2021 /22	2022 /23	2023 /24	2024 /25
White Irish	90.95%	92.37%	93.16%	92.54%	93.32%	92.5%	91.9%	88.9%	87.2%	87.1%	82.96%	83.04%	75%	76.33%	75.98%
Irish Traveller (and Roma added in 2020/21)	0.1%	0.08%	0.08%	0.2%	0.15%	0.1%	0.2%	0.4%	0.39%	0.1%	0.51%	0.55%	0.76%	0.9%	0.65%
Any Other White Background	6.09%	5.45%	5.17%	6.36%	5.61%	6.1%	6.1%	6.6%	7.17%	7.5%	7.78%	7.95%	12.34%	12.07%	11.27%
Black or Black Irish African	0.3%	1.12%	0.71%	0.41%	0.47%	0.6%	1.0%	1.3%	2.09%	1.7%	2.59%	2.27%	2.28%	2.42%	2.46%
Other Black Background (new category in 2011/12)		0.32%	0.14%	0.20%	0%	0.1%	0.2%	0.2%	0.39%	0.6%	0.36%	0.27%	0.19%	0.24%	0.46%
Asian or Asian Irish Chinese	0.71%	0.24%	0.26%	0.1%	0.21%	0.2%	0.3%	1.1%	1.06%	0.9%	0.74%	0.47%	0.69%	0.92%	0.76%
Other Asian Background	1.82%	0.40%	0.44%	0.15%	0.21%	0.4%	0.3%	1.5%	1.66%	2.1%	2.23%	2.32%	3.57%	3.35%	2.9%
Other (new category in 2020/21)											2.79%	3.10%	3.57%	3.77%	3.9%

[1] Based on 2023-24 date.

2. Pre-Entry: Creating Pathways and Raising Aspirations

Widening participation begins long before entry to university. University of Galway engages with children, young people, families, and educators across Ireland to foster curiosity, confidence, and a belief that higher education is within reach.

These pre-entry initiatives combine outreach, mentoring, and partnership with schools and community organisations to create multiple, inclusive pathways into higher education.

2.1 Uni4U

Aim

To raise educational aspirations among pupils from DEIS and DEIS-linked primary schools by providing early exposure to the university environment and learning opportunities in a supportive, inclusive context.

Activity

The Uni4U programme, funded under PATH 3, welcomed over 200 pupils from DEIS and DEIS-linked schools Radharc na Mara, Scoil Bhríde, Scoil Chroí Íosa, Merlin Woods, and Mercy Primary School. Pupils and their teachers visit the University campus once a week for six weeks and part in a wide variety of interactive workshops delivered by university departments, schools, and external partners. Throughout the programme, pupils are accompanied by their Uni4U mentors, current University of Galway students.

Each year, the programme culminates in a special event held on campus and attended by the sixth-class pupils, parents, teachers, mentors, and University staff. In 2025, pupils from each school spoke about their Uni4U experience, and the evening was a celebration of everything they achieved during their time on campus.

In addition to the six-week programme, Uni4U also offered a summer camp opportunity in collaboration with the Kingfisher Gym on campus. This experience built on the confidence, friendship, and familiarity with the university environment.

Mentoring remains central to the Uni4U model, with trained university students guiding participants through academic, social, and confidence-building activities. Schools reported strengthened links with the University and enhanced motivation among pupils to consider higher education pathways.

Impact

- 200+ primary pupils participated across multiple schools.
- 13 undergraduate students trained to become Uni4U mentors
- 100% of teachers surveyed agreed that the programme improved pupils' confidence and interest in learning.

Looking Ahead

Uni4U will expand to more schools and include new workshops focusing on creativity and wellbeing.



"Before doing Uni4U, I was like 'Ugh, I don't want to go to university' but that turned into 'Oh my gosh, it's Monday, we have Uni4U, what are we going to do today?' I wish we had more time here. I hope I'll come back here and graduate in 10 years' time."

6th Class pupil, Mercy Primary School

"One of the things I loved most about Uni4U was all the different things we got to try like engineering, economics and cheerleading which are things I'd most likely never do on my own but really enjoyed."

6th Class pupil, Scoil Bhríde

2.2 Uni4U+

Aim

To increase awareness of higher education pathways among secondary school students, particularly those in DEIS schools, through sustained engagement with the Access Centre and structured in-school and on-campus initiatives.

Activity

Uni4U+ was delivered to 27 DEIS schools and 6 linked non-DEIS schools across Galway, Clare, Roscommon, and Mayo.

During semester one, the in-school programme engaged 1,171 sixth-year students, 528 second-year students, and 94 parents. Delivery included presentations on Pathways to Higher Education, alongside Study Skills and Public Speaking workshops designed to build confidence and academic preparedness.

In semester two, 257 students participated in on-campus engagement activities. These included school visits during July Provision for students with disabilities, an Easter Revision Course for third- and sixth-year students, and two new initiatives delivered in collaboration with partner schools and Acadamh na hOllscolaíochta Gaeilge.

Ninety-six first-year students from Merlin College, Coláiste Cholmcille, Archbishop McHale College, Galway Community College and Scoil Phobail Mhic Dara participated in a 3v3 basketball competition, with mixed-school teams fostering peer connection and cross-school relationship building.

A further 97 fifth-year students from Coláiste Cholmcille and Scoil Chuimsitheach Chiaráin engaged in workshops including grammar sessions, a table quiz, pathways to education presentation, campus tours, and an introduction to courses offered through Acadamh na hOllscolaíochta Gaeilge.

Impact

- Engagement with 2,050 secondary school students and 94 parents across four counties.
- Strong DEIS school participation and sustained regional reach.
- Introduction of innovative engagement models combining sport, culture, and academic preparation.
- Enhanced awareness of higher education pathways among early- and senior-cycle students.

Looking Ahead

Uni4U+ will continue to strengthen regional school partnerships while expanding blended in-school and on-campus engagement.

2.3 TARGET Grinds

Aim

The aim of TARGET grinds is to support academic attainment and confidence among junior and senior-cycle Irish Traveller and Roma Community students through targeted online tutoring. This collaboration between the Access Centre and the School of Education's Postgraduate Masters in Education (PME) students is funded under the HEA's PATH 5 fund.

Activity

During 2024–25, 532 online grinds sessions were delivered across 10 partner schools in subjects across the junior and leaving cert curriculum. The programme was delivered collaboratively with the Access Centre and School of Education using digital learning platforms designed to enhance accessibility and engagement.

Impact

- 10 schools participated nationally.
- 100% of surveyed participants reported increased subject confidence.
- Teachers cited improved exam performance and engagement.

Looking Ahead

The next phase will focus on expanding the programme to additional schools contributing to increased progression rates to HE and achieving targets outlined in the University's Widening Participation Strategy 2025-2028.

2.4 Traveller Ethnicity Week

Aim

Traveller Ethnicity Week at the University of Galway celebrates Irish Traveller culture and identity while promoting respect, inclusion, and engagement between the University and Traveller communities.

Activity

In collaboration with the Access Centre, Mincéirs Whiden Society, and Traveller organisations, the University hosted Traveller Ethnicity Week featuring workshops, exhibitions, and discussions highlighting Irish Traveller culture and contributions to Irish society. The event was officially opened by Dr Hannagh McGinley, and the Michael Mc Donagh Award for Irish Traveller Ally Excellence Award was presented to Aidan Harte, University of Sanctuary Officer.

Impact

- Over 300 students and staff participated.
- Strengthened partnerships with community organisations.
- Enhanced cultural awareness and visibility within campus life.



Looking Ahead

This event will continue to deliver on the University's commitments under the Race Equality Framework and Action Plan 2023-27 and the Widening Participation Strategy 2025-2028, through activities that raise awareness and promote belonging and inclusion.

2.5 STEM Outreach: Cell Explorers, START, and Youth Academy

Aim

To make STEM accessible and exciting for young people, particularly those from underrepresented backgrounds.

Activity

The Cell Explorers programme reached 2,859 young people nationwide, bringing hands-on science workshops to primary and secondary schools. The START competition engaged students in team-based science challenges, while the Youth Academy continued to offer university-style learning for children aged 10–13, reaching over 8,000 participants since its inception.

Impact

- National reach across multiple counties.
- Increased visibility of STEM pathways for students from DEIS schools.

Looking Ahead

Building on the strong foundation established through these initiatives, STEM outreach will continue to evolve in line with institutional priorities and emerging opportunities.

"It was the first time I met a real scientist — now I want to become one."
Youth Academy participant







2.6 University of Sanctuary – Schools of Sanctuary

Aim

To promote inclusion, belonging, and access for students from refugee, International Protection and Irish Traveller backgrounds.

Activity

As part of the University of Sanctuary designation, the OVPEDI and Access Centre supported a growing network of Schools of Sanctuary. Staff provided outreach talks, resource packs, and campus visits to students and teachers, fostering awareness of higher education opportunities.

Impact

- Engagement with 6 new Schools of Sanctuary, this includes 2 schools who were awarded Champion status in 2024/25.
- The UoS Scholarship Programme welcomed 7 new students to the University for the 2024-2025 academic year.
- The programme has welcomed a cumulative total of 71 students from 24 different countries to the University to date.
- Hosted on-campus events to mark World Refugee Day, this including a visit by Galway Educate N.S to the University.



Looking Ahead

As per the Race Equality Framework and Action Plan 2023-27, there will be an external review and evaluation of the University of Sanctuary initiative to ensure high level of supports for international protection applicants, refugees, vulnerable immigrant groups and Irish Travellers. This will also help to ensure that the designation of University of Sanctuary is retained.

We will continue to engage with Schools of Sanctuary Ireland and Galway City Partnership to promote the Schools of Sanctuary programme.

3. Transition: Bridging to Higher Education

The transition to higher education represents a pivotal stage in the student lifecycle. The University of Galway's Widening Participation Strategy 2025–28 commits to ensuring that learners from diverse pathways are supported to enter and thrive in university life.

Programmes and supports at this stage focus on orientation, connection, and academic readiness — recognising that belonging and confidence are critical to student success.

3.1 Access and Foundation Programmes

Aim

To provide an accessible bridge to higher education for students from underrepresented backgrounds through tailored academic preparation and holistic support.

Activity

The Access and Foundation Programmes continue to serve as vital entry routes for mature students, school-leavers from DEIS schools, and those from low-income or underrepresented groups. Delivered across multiple disciplines, these programmes combine academic modules, mentoring, and guidance on study skills, digital literacy, and university life.

Participants are supported through peer mentoring, workshops on academic writing and wellbeing, and engagement with College-based Access Coordinators. The inclusion of a Peer Engagement module has proven particularly effective in developing leadership and community-building among Access students.

Peer Engagement Module (PEM)

Aim

To provide experiential, mentor-supported learning that strengthens the transition from the Access Programme to higher education, building leadership, confidence, and a sense of belonging among students from underrepresented backgrounds.

Activity

The Peer Engagement Module (PEM) is an experiential learning component embedded within the University of Galway's Diploma in Foundation Studies: Access Programme.

This module pairs Access students (Mentees) with professional mentors from partner organisations, creating a structured learning experience based on reflection, interaction, and career exploration.

Since its inception, the PEM has operated in partnership with external industry mentors who support students' personal and professional development:

1. Grant Thornton – Since 2018, students in the Business stream have participated in mentoring with Grant Thornton professionals. In the last year, 12 students completed the module with assigned mentors.
2. Medtronic – In 2023, the PEM expanded to include Science and Engineering students through collaboration with Medtronic, with 10 students taking part in mentoring activities during the year.

Impact (PEM)

Participation in the PEM provides Access students with authentic insights into the world of work and supports career readiness through:

- Exposure to professional environments and workplace culture.
- Enhanced understanding of career progression pathways.
- Development of employability and communication skills.
- Formation of supportive mentoring relationships.
- Increased confidence and belonging within the university and professional community.

Looking Ahead (PEM)

Plans for 2025–26 include extending the PEM to additional disciplines, including the School of Education for Arts students to enhance students' experiential learning and employability outcomes.

Impact (Overall Programme)

- Increased student confidence and progression to degree-level study. Peer Engagement module strengthened belonging and participation.
- Enhanced collaboration between Colleges and the Access Centre in supporting transitions.

Looking Ahead (Overall Programme)

Planned developments include embedding digital readiness training within the curriculum and enhancing progression pathways into high-demand disciplines.



3.2 Educational Transition Programme (ETP)



Aim

The Educational and Employment Transition Programme (ETP) is a HEA PATH 5 funded programme. ETP supports Irish Traveller students in successfully transitioning into education and employment by building confidence, academic and employment skills, and a sense of belonging. The aim of the programme is to increase employment, participation, and progression into education.

Activity

The programme provides a structured approach to developing skills in employment, university learning, assessment methods, and digital platforms. Students engage in workshops on digital literacy, self-management, academic skills, and wellbeing.

Delivered in partnership between the Access Centre and the Office of the Vice-President of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (OVPEDI) the ETP has evolved to include hybrid formats, ensuring flexibility and accessibility for students across Ireland.

Impact

- The ETP for Irish Traveller students in July saw 18 participants receiving certificates
- Evaluation data show improved confidence in navigating academic systems.
- Early engagement correlated with stronger retention and sense of belonging.
- The ETP for Refugees and International Protection applicants saw 122 participants receiving certificates.

Looking Ahead

ETP will continue to deliver a structured introduction to employment and education, contributing to broadening widening participation and achieving targets in the University's Widening Participation Strategy 2025-2028.

3.3 Laptop Loan Scheme

Aim
To reduce digital inequality and ensure all students have equitable access to technology for learning.

Activity
Through funding from the HEA's Covid Contingency Fund, 1,617 laptops have been distributed to eligible students across undergraduate and postgraduate programmes since 2020. The Access Centre managed the application, distribution, and support processes of the scheme ensuring devices reached those most in need, including students in rural areas and those balancing study with caring responsibilities.

Impact
- **181** students supported in 2024–25.
- Enhanced digital participation and reduced withdrawal risk linked to a lack of equipment.
- Positive feedback from students highlighting improved academic engagement.

Looking Ahead
The scheme will continue under the current HEA funding cycle, with a focus on sustainability and refurbishment of devices for redistribution.

> *"Without the laptop scheme, I couldn't have continued my studies during the semester."*
> Undergraduate student, College of Arts

3.4 1916 Bursary Fund

Aim
To support students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds through multi-annual financial bursaries.

Activity
The 1916 Bursary Fund, co-funded by the Government of Ireland and the European Union, and managed regionally by the University of Galway and Atlantic Technological University (ATU) and nationally by SUSI, provided 76 bursaries to New Entrants in 2024–25. Recipients include students from low-income backgrounds, ethnic minorities, lone parents, care-experienced, mature learners, and those with disabilities.

The fund has had transformative impact, reducing financial barriers and enabling recipients to focus on study and personal development.

Impact
- €2.5 million disbursed regionally since the fund's inception.
- From the 76 students allocated funding this year, 36 were Tier 1, 18 were Tier 2, and 22 were Tier 3
- Retention rates among recipients exceed 90%.

Looking Ahead
Future priorities include extending mentoring and employability supports for bursary recipients and enhancing alumni engagement through peer networks.

3.5 Meissner and Google Insight Scholarships

Aim

To promote diversity in technology and business education by supporting students from underrepresented backgrounds.

Activity

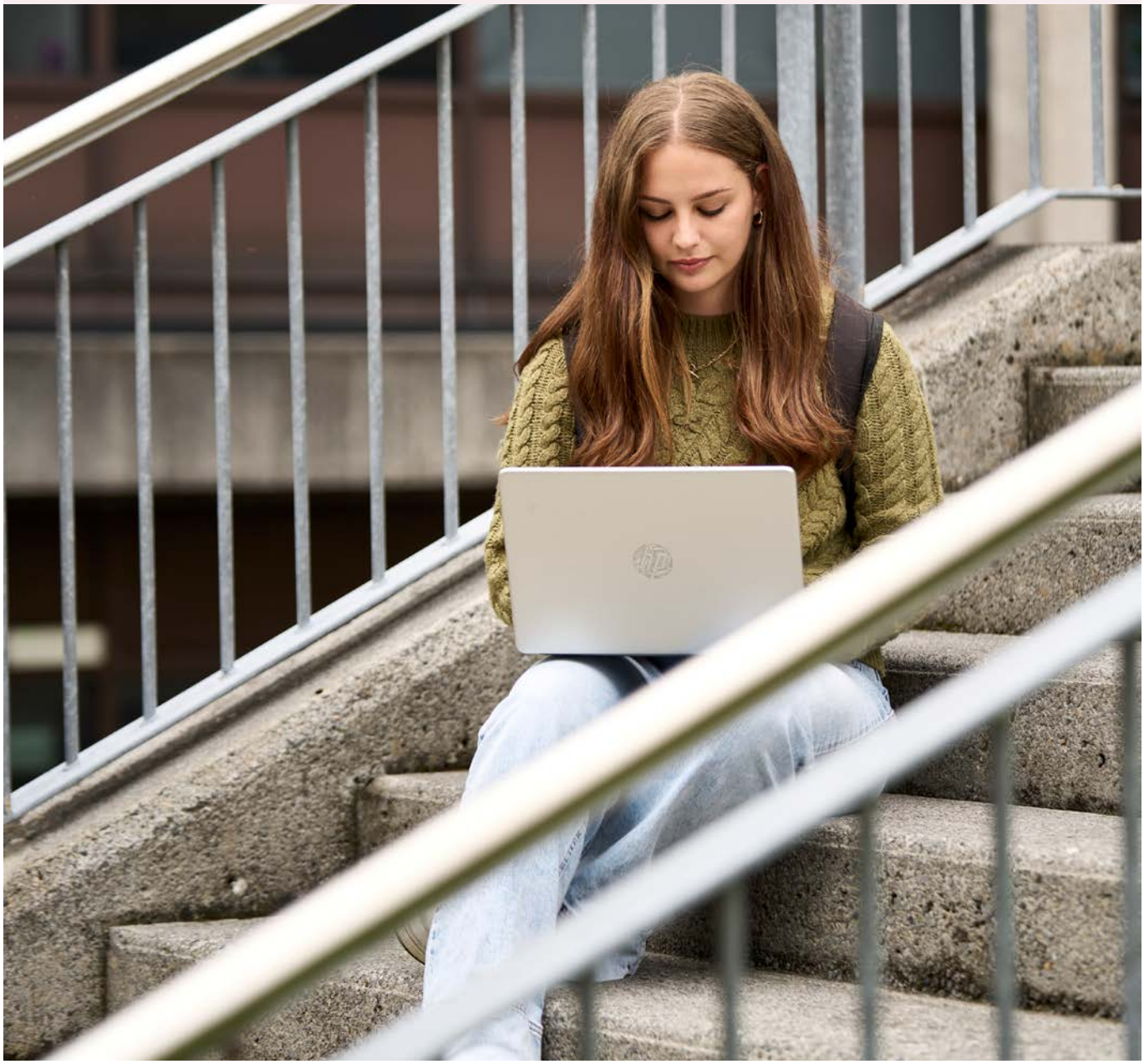
The Meissner Scholarship and Google Insight Scholarship schemes provide financial support, mentoring, and professional development opportunities. In 2024–25, recipients of the Google Insight Scholarship engaged in workshops with industry mentors, enhancing both academic and career confidence. The Meissner Scholarship was awarded to first year Bachelor of Commerce student Hannah Clancy from Dromahair, Co Leitrim.

Impact

- Scholarships awarded to students across STEM and business disciplines.
- Enhanced career-readiness through mentor engagement.
- Strengthened collaboration between the University and industry partners.

Looking Ahead

The Widening Participation Strategy commits to developing more scholarship opportunities for students.



3.6 Inclusive Education: Cumas Programme

Aim

To widen participation in higher education by providing an inclusive, accredited pathway for students with intellectual disabilities through the Level 5 Certificate in Foundational Learning & Community.



Activity

The Cumas programme was formally established in January 2025.

A full multidisciplinary team was appointed, including Programme Coordinator (August 2024), Academic Lead, Practice Educator and Senior Occupational Therapist (February 2025), and Educational Support Workers (March 2025).

Between September and November 2024, the Programme Coordinator engaged extensively with relevant agencies and visited multiple day services to promote awareness of Cumas. Three information sessions were delivered in December 2024, attended by approximately 100 prospective students, families, and stakeholders.

The programme received 22 applications. All applicants were invited to interview using a collaborative model developed with the UCC id+ programme. The process incorporated group activities and individual interviews. Thirteen students were offered places, with a 100% acceptance rate.

Semester 1 commenced on 26 February 2025 and ran for 12 weeks. Students participated in a structured orientation to campus life, including navigation of university services, library training, and use of the Canvas virtual learning environment. They engaged in lectures and collaborative group activities alongside wider student cohorts.

From June to August 2025, the team developed module content in preparation for programme expansion. Engagement with academic staff across Colleges initiated the co-learning model, with strong positive response and co-learning modules confirmed for delivery in 2026.

Work placement development commenced through structured engagement with services and relevant government departments. A collaborative framework was agreed to support the implementation of the placement component in 2026.

Impact

- Successful launch of the University's first accredited programme for students with intellectual disabilities.
- Strong stakeholder engagement across agencies, families, academic staff, and government partners.
- 100% acceptance rate among selected students.
- Establishment of co-learning opportunities across all Colleges for 2026 delivery.
- Foundational structures in place to support inclusive work placements.

Looking Ahead

The programme, now funded until 2028, will consolidate its first cohort experience while expanding co-learning and work placement opportunities. Continued cross-College collaboration and external partnership development will strengthen inclusive pathways and support embedding Cumas as a sustainable model of widening participation within the University.

4. Post-Entry: Participation, Belonging, and Success

The transition to higher education represents a pivotal stage in the student lifecycle. The University of Galway's Widening Participation Strategy 2025–28 commits to ensuring that learners from diverse pathways are supported to enter and thrive in university life.

Programmes and supports at this stage focus on orientation, connection, and academic readiness — recognising that belonging and confidence are critical to student success.

4.1 Universal Design

Aim

To embed the principles of Universal Design (UD) in the built, digital, services and learning, teaching environments.

Activity

The appointment of the University's first Universal Design Manager in January 2025 marked a significant milestone in the implementation of UD at University of Galway.

Key developments included:

- Delivery of the European Access Network Conference 2025 in partnership with Ireland's Centre for Excellence in Universal Design (CEUD).
- Continued delivery of the University's strategic priorities in its EDI Strategy 2020-25 and Universal Design and Accessibility Policy
- Provision of the Calm Zone to over 500 students during University exam sessions.
- Collaboration with the Buildings and Estates Office to further embed UD in the built Environment.

Impact

- Increased accessibility on campus and online for staff and students.
- Creation of new inclusive, low-stimulation environments, such as the Calm Zone.
- Stronger integration of UD in institutional policy and practice.

Looking Ahead

UDL will continue to be embedded across the pillars of the built, digital, services and learning, teaching environments.

4.2 The Calm Zone

Aim

To provide a sensory-friendly, inclusive space that promotes wellbeing and belonging for all students, particularly those who are neurodivergent.

Activity

The Calm Zone, developed under the PATH 4: Inclusive Environment funding stream, was co-designed by neurodivergent students and staff. It offers a quiet, low-stimulation environment on campus for self-regulation, study, and social connection.

The initiative exemplifies UD in action — designed by students, for students — creating both physical and psychological safety within the learning environment.

Impact

- Over 500 student visits recorded in 2024–25.
- Positive feedback highlighting improved wellbeing and academic focus.
- Recognition as a model of inclusive design nationally through HEA case study submission.

Looking Ahead

Plans include integrating the Calm Zone into wellbeing and orientation communications for all students.

"It's a space where I can recharge and feel part of the university without sensory overload."
Student participant



4.3 PATH 4: Inclusive Environment

Aim
To advance inclusive teaching, learning, and physical spaces through targeted HEA funding.

Activity
Funded by the Programme for Access to Higher Education (PATH) 4, the Inclusive Environment project secured €202,095 in 2024–25, €29,618 of this allocation is ring-fenced for anti-racism measures. Activities included:

- Development of inclusive learning spaces and signage.
- UD training workshops for academic and support staff.
- Accessibility audits of digital and physical environments.
- Launch of the Calm Zone and Inclusive Teaching Toolkit.

Impact
- Institutional integration of inclusion principles across learning design.
- Creation of new resources supporting staff to embed UD.
- National recognition of the University's leadership in inclusive campus design.

Looking Ahead
Further cross-unit and campus collaboration will expand inclusive infrastructure and professional development programmes in 2025–26.

4.4 Financial Supports and Student Assistance Fund

Aim
To provide timely financial support for students experiencing economic hardship, ensuring retention and success.

Activity
The Financial Aid Fund (FAF) and related hardship schemes administered over €1.2 million in 2024–25, supporting students from low-income and underrepresented backgrounds.

Support included emergency grants, transport assistance, and support for digital access needs. Financial supports are available for tuition fees, with subsidies provided by the Higher Education Authority (HEA), Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI), and Skillnet Ireland.

Impact
- Over 1,000 students supported.
- Demonstrable contribution to student retention and wellbeing.
- Increased awareness of financial supports through targeted communication campaigns.

Looking Ahead
Support for underrepresented students will continue to be provided through FAF, with additional supplementary funding to the scheme provided by Galway University Foundation.

4.5 Cultural Inclusion and Belonging Initiatives

Aim

To promote a culture of inclusion and belonging for all students through events, peer networks, and advocacy.

Activity

Initiatives such as Care Day, Traveller Ethnicity Week, Nelson Mandela anti-racism week, and other cultural celebration events were delivered collaboratively across the Access Centre, Student Services, and Office of the Vice-president for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (OVPEDI). These events recognised diverse identities and experiences, including care-experienced students, international learners, and those from minority ethnic backgrounds.

Impact

- Enhanced visibility and representation of diverse student communities.
- Increased peer engagement and sense of belonging.
- Stronger alignment with the University's Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) objectives.

Looking Ahead

Plans include co-creating new belonging campaigns with students and integrating these initiatives into the upcoming Widening Participation Strategy Action Plan.



5. Employability and Lifelong Learning

The final stage of the student lifecycle emphasises employability, lifelong learning, and community contribution. The University of Galway's widening participation ethos extends beyond graduation — supporting learners to transition successfully into employment, further study, and civic engagement.

This stage also recognises the importance of flexible learning and Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in enabling adults to upskill and reskill throughout life.

5.1 Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

Aim

To value and formally recognise learning achieved outside traditional education settings, supporting flexible access, progression, and employability.

Activity

The University's Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) framework continued to evolve through 2024–25, offering pathways for adult learners and professionals to gain credit for prior formal, non-formal, and experiential learning.

Key developments included:

- Integration of RPL processes into undergraduate and postgraduate admissions.
- Launch of a pilot digital RPL application system, improving accessibility and consistency.
- Cross-College RPL training for academic staff to ensure equitable assessment of evidence.
- Collaboration with national RPL networks to share best practice and policy alignment.

Impact

- Increased awareness and uptake of RPL across Colleges.
- Streamlined application process reducing barriers for adult learners.
- Enhanced credibility of RPL as a tool for widening participation and employability.

> *"RPL gave me the confidence to return to education and apply what I'd learned at work."*
> Adult learner, Business Programme

Looking Ahead

The University will continue to engage with industry and organisations to identify workforce development needs and provide progression pathways for learners from underrepresented groups to continue in lifelong learning.

5.2 Centre for Adult Learning and Professional Development (CALPD)



Aim

To provide accessible and flexible learning opportunities for adults seeking to re-engage with education or advance their professional development.

Activity

The Centre for Adult Learning and Professional Development (CALPD) delivered over 90 programmes across undergraduate, postgraduate, and short-course levels in 2024–25.

Delivery modes included blended, online, and evening classes, ensuring flexibility for learners balancing study, work, and family commitments.

Partnerships with industry and public sector organisations enabled the co-design of courses aligned with regional and national skills priorities.

Impact

- Over 3,500 adult learners enrolled in CALPD programmes.
- Increased participation among mature learners, carers, and part-time students.
- Enhanced employability outcomes and upskilling opportunities for the regional workforce.
- Expanded collaboration with Access Centre to strengthen re-entry pathways for non-traditional learners.

Looking Ahead

Future priorities include continuing to develop strategic opportunities with Enterprise and Community Organisations to increase the number of employees engaging in lifelong learning at all levels of the NFQ (OCED Action Plan).

5.3 Alumni and Community Engagement

Aim

To foster continued engagement between the University, its alumni, and communities, supporting lifelong learning and advocacy for widening participation.

Activity

The 2024/25 academic year saw the launch of our Access Alumni programme. To date, 45 alumni have signed up.

Alumni receive a quarterly newsletter featuring University events and updates from the Access Centre, helping former students to remain informed and connected.

Impact

- Connection between current and former students which enhances career social networksAccess Alumni were invited to take part in a research study on the impact of the Diploma Foundation Studies.
- Alumni represented the Access Centre at events and spoke to prospective students about their experiences of University.

Looking Ahead

An Access Ambassador Programme will be introduced, offering Access Alumni and students connected to the Access Centre opportunities to support pre-entry programmes, events, and outreach activities. This initiative will enable participants to share their experiences while promoting inclusivity and a sense of belonging across the campus community.



6. Strategic Development and Next Steps



The University of Galway's widening participation journey continues to evolve through strategic planning, innovation, and partnership.

During 2024–25, the University continued its pioneering work in widening participation, with the launch of the new Widening Participation Strategy 2025–2028 at the European Access Network (EAN) Conference 2025.

6.1 Launch of the Widening Participation Strategy 2025–2030

Aim

To provide a unified, institution-wide framework to ensure that the student body accessing and participating at University of Galway reflects the diversity we find more broadly throughout society.

Activity

The new Widening Participation Strategy 2025–2028, launched at EAN 2025, was co-created through extensive consultation with students, staff, community partners, and policy stakeholders.

The strategy articulates Four strategic pillars:

1. To increase access and participation in higher education for people from underrepresented socio-economic
2. To engage with schools, FET providers, community groups, employers and the wider community to foster sustained change in beliefs and attitudes about higher education.
3. To develop collaborative strategic partnerships internally within the university to promote the widening participation agenda.
4. To collect and disseminate research on widening participation activities delivered throughout the University.

Impact

- Formal institutional commitment to widening participation across the student lifecycle.
- Increased collaboration between the Access Centre and the wider University.
- Delivery on the HEA Act's 2022 requirement to develop institutional strategic plans in this area.

Looking Ahead

Measurable outcomes under each of the four goals will be overseen and monitored by the University's Widening Participation committee.

6.2 Data, Evaluation, and Continuous Improvement

Aim

To strengthen data-informed decision-making and ensure transparency in measuring impact.

Activity

- Enhancement of data integration between the Student Record System, Access Centre dashboards, and institutional analytics.
- Development of data dashboards for the full student lifecycle of underrepresented students.
- Use of both quantitative and qualitative evidence (case studies, surveys, focus groups) to capture the lived experience of students.

Impact

- Improved capacity to monitor trends and target resources effectively.
- Greater understanding of intersectionality in student experiences.
- Public reporting reinforcing institutional accountability and trust.

Looking Ahead

The University will publish annual WP Reports and produce a qualitative report in 2026 to outline the lived experience of underrepresented students in higher education.

6.3 Future Priorities for 2025–26

Aim

To sustain momentum and deepen the impact of widening participation through targeted actions.

Planned Priorities

- Implement the Widening Participation Strategy 2025–28
- Delver on objectives outlined in the Performance Agreement 2024–2028 between the HEA and University of Galway
- Annual report to the HEA on the University's implementation of the National Access Plan 2022-2028
- Establish the Widening Participation Alumni Network to mentor and inspire new entrants.
- Qualitative report on the lived experience of underrepresented students at University of Galway by the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre and Access Centre to be launched.

Impact

These actions will continue to embed widening participation across the University, ensuring that inclusion remains a defining feature of the University of Galway's identity.

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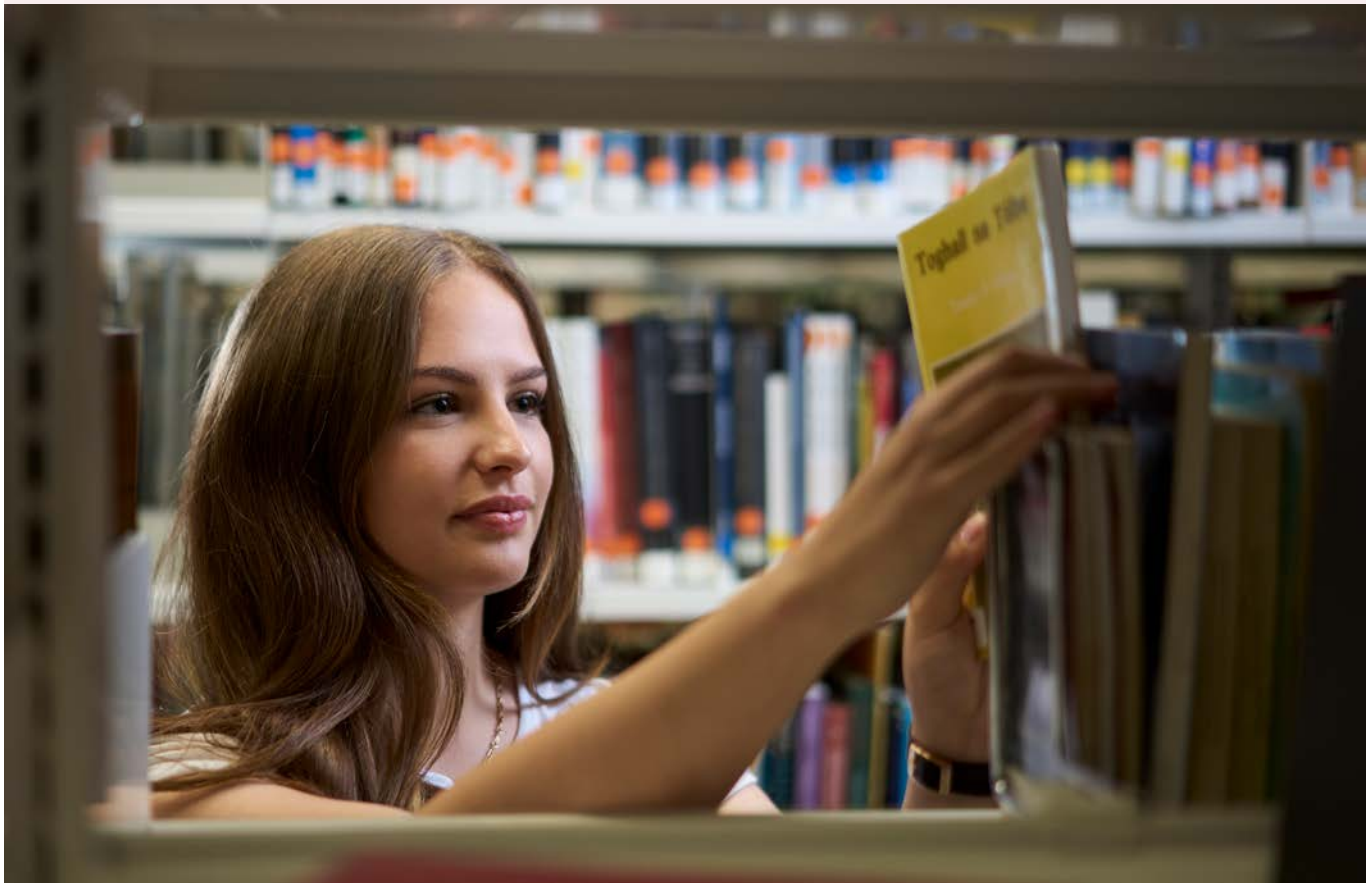
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8. Appendices and Membership

The following appendices provide supporting detail for the Widening Participation Annual Report 2024–25. They document the governance, membership, and data sources underpinning the University's inclusive education agenda.

Appendix 1: Widening Participation Committee Membership 2024–25

Purpose and Role

The Widening Participation Committee (WPC) is responsible for advancing the University's vision of equitable access, participation, and success in higher education.

Operating as a sub-committee of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Campus Committee (EDICC), the WPC ensures that widening participation is embedded across all Colleges, Schools, and Professional Services.

The Committee meets four times annually and reports to EDICC on key performance indicators, funding outcomes, and strategic initiatives.

Membership 2024–25

Name	Title	Unit/School/College
(Chair) Imelda Byrne	Head of the Access Centre	Access Centre
Dr. Daniel Savery	Widening Participation Officer	Access Centre
Nuala McGuinn	Director, Centre for Adult Learning and Professional Development (CALPD)	Centre for Adult Learning and Professional Development
Lisa McCormack	Interim Director of Student Services	Student Services
Jane Ennis	Interim Student Support Manager/ Student Success Manager	Student Services
Mary Liddy	Deputy Admissions Officer	Admissions Office
Prof. Elaine Keane	Head of Discipline	School of Education
Owen Ward	Race Equality Programme Manager	Office of the Vice President for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
Dr. Deirdre McHugh	Universal Design Manager	Office of the Vice President for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
Aidan Harte	University of Sanctuary Officer	Office of the Vice President for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
Dr. Ann J O'Brien	Community Engagement Manager	Community Knowledge Initiative
Sarah Geraghty	Director	Student Recruitment and Outreach
Dr. Muriel Grenon	Cell Explorers	School of Biological & Chemical Sciences
Dr. Maura Farrell	School of Geography	College of Arts, Social Sciences and Celtic Studies
Dr. Sarah-Anne Buckley	Vice Dean EDI	College of Arts, Social Sciences and Celtic Studies
Dr. Deirdre Curran	Vice Dean, EDI	College of Business, Public Policy and Law
Prof. Maureen Kelly	Widening Participation	College of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences

Name	Title	Unit/School/College
Dr. Gavin Collins	School of Biological & Chemical Sciences	College of Science and Engineering
Dr. Maria Tuohy	School of Biological & Chemical Sciences	College of Science and Engineering
Dr. Florence Abram	School of Biological & Chemical Sciences	College of Science and Engineering
Prof. Donal Leech	Dean of Graduate Studies	Graduate Studies
Seán De Búrca	Education Officer	Students Union
Paddy Murnane	Welfare Officer	Students Union

Note: Membership reflects a cross-section of academic, professional, and student voices to ensure shared governance and co-creation of inclusive practice.

Appendix 2: Data Sources and Methodology

Data Sources

The quantitative and qualitative data presented in this report were derived from the following institutional and national systems:

- **Student Record System (SRS)** – enrolment, access route, and progression data.
- **HEA Equal Access Survey** – socio-economic and demographic profiles.
- **Disability Support Service records** – registration and accommodation data.
- **PATH funding reports** – participation and project outcomes.
- **Survey and focus group data** – student experience and engagement measures.
- **External benchmarking** – comparisons using HEA, AHEAD, and EAN frameworks.

Methodology

Data were analysed longitudinally to identify trends in access, participation, and progression.

Qualitative insights were incorporated through student testimonials, case studies, and programme evaluations.

All reporting aligns with General Data Protection Regulations.

Appendix 3: Acknowledgements and Funder Credits

The *Widening Participation Committee Annual Report 2024–25* was produced by the University's Widening Participation committee, in collaboration with colleagues, partners, and students who contribute daily to widening participation across the institution.

Report Contributors

This report reflects the collective efforts of staff, students, and stakeholders dedicated to creating equitable access and success in higher education.

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Dr. Daniel Savery

Contributors and Reviewers
Members of the University's Widening Participation Committee.

The Widening Participation Committee acknowledges the invaluable contributions of students, alumni, and community partners whose experiences and insights continue to shape the University's widening participation mission.



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