

# Trinity Ability co\_op Response to the HEA National Access plan consultation process.

June 2021

Trinity  
Ability co\_op

## Introduction:

Since May 2020, the Trinity Ability co\_op has operated within Trinity College Dublin as a collaborative project between students, staff, and other stakeholders, with the aim of promoting disability inclusion and participation at all levels. Long term, the co\_op's goal is to provide opportunities for its members to work towards a more radical view of inclusion within the third level system. The founding of the co\_op and its continued work has been guided by the Trinity strategic plan objective 1.9 to "Engage the wider university community in empowering students with disabilities."

## Methodology:

In undertaking this review submission, the Trinity Ability co\_op has followed the consultation process outlined originally by the HEA. The submission has been heavily informed by surveys and data collected by the co\_op over the past two years. Students with disabilities from Trinity were also sent specific surveys referencing the HEA submission process to encourage engagement. With these resources, the co\_op has built up a vital archive of student experiences which will continue to be utilised going forward.

Additionally, the co\_op members facilitated a few focus group sessions for students. These sessions served as an opportunity for students to expand further on their experiences of Trinity and become more familiar with the work of the co\_op. Thanks to these groups, the facilitators were able to identify several areas of concern for students with disabilities, which we will outline throughout the duration of this report.

## Context:

The Trinity Ability co\_op serves as a space for students to come together and discuss ways in which Trinity can become a more inclusive college for students with disabilities. The members work closely with the Trinity Disability Service (DS) to ensure that their thoughts, experiences, and needs are considered at a decision-making level.

In terms of structure, the co\_op contains a leadership team consisting of nine students, which is split into three separate thematic areas. These are advocacy & mentorship, communication & media and lastly, a representative group.

A key strategy of the Trinity Ability co\_op is to ensure that inclusion training is provided for all Trinity staff and students to guarantee that disabled students' rights are respected. The leadership team also consistently works to grow the co\_op's presence on social media platforms. A key pillar of this has been the efforts to raise awareness of the many difficulties faced by students with disabilities and how Trinity can begin to mitigate these.

Unfortunately, many of the difficulties encountered by students with disabilities within Trinity are not unique to the college itself. Instead, these challenges are because of systematic failures within the third level education system, which serve as significant barriers to students with disabilities. While enormous progress has been achieved over the past two decades, particularly with the DARE (Disability Access Route to Education) programme and other initiatives, these supports are increasingly unsuited to the requirement of students and college in 2021.

## The Student Voice:

While the Trinity Ability co\_op welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the HEA regarding the experiences of students with disabilities within Trinity, more must be done to include students in these processes. Consultations such as this one must always be user-led and centred to ensure that the experiences of students with disabilities are integrated into the decision-making process. Without these steps, the co\_op believes that the current system will continue to fall short in providing support and services to students.

As the NAP enters its next stage from 2022 to 2026, we would like to see more student-led groups such as the Trinity Ability co\_op founded within other third-level institutions. Encouraging and supporting groups of this sort would allow students to advocate as a collective and give them a contact point to engage with consultations such as this one. Developing these groups would also help to alleviate any fears of tokenism and box-ticking, which many students with disabilities have come to expect when liaising with service providers. In addition, all access & disability services should be developed in conjunction with us and for us, not without us. We are experts by lived experiences and should guide and direct access & disability supports going forward.

The partnership developing between the Trinity Disability Service and the Trinity Ability co\_op is a good start. Paid internships and payment for all resources rolled out in 2020-21 is a way of working worth exploring. Clearly defined partnerships with effective and meaningful deliverables and decision-making are mechanisms that will lead to positive changes. Along with working with Student Unions and clubs, and societies, this will lead to a more inclusive university.

## DARE Quotas:

One glaring example of this would be with regards to the allocation of DARE quotas within college courses. With each passing year, the number of students applying for places in college through the DARE programme has steadily increased, yet the number of available places within the system has hardly changed in ten years. In effect, this results in an increased level of competition within the DARE process itself, which undermines the entire point of the programme, as students are subjected to more stress than would previously have been the case.

Without some mechanism to increase the number of places set aside for DARE students, we fear that the DARE programme may become another outlet for the points race, which already causes so many issues within the Leaving Certificate. This will exclude students with disabilities from the university system as a whole and create a two-tier system regarding access to education for those with a disability. In addition, those students with financial support and conditions that can be more easily managed will be equipped far better to capitalise on the DARE system than their peers without any of those external supports.

In a survey conducted by the disability service, one respondent explained: "I believe the biggest barrier for students with disabilities when accessing college is the leaving certificate points race with CAO (Central Admissions Office) and little spaces available in each course for DARE students."

## Pre-entry supports:

The HEA and National Access Plan are currently focused heavily on the number of students with disabilities entering third-level every year. The co\_op members believe that this is an extremely crucial area, but focusing solely on it is incredibly short-sighted. Equal emphasis must be placed on the progression rates for students with disabilities, especially certain cohorts which have historically faced many difficulties within higher education.

A straightforward tactic for improving participation and inclusion for students with disabilities would be to increase the level of pre-entry support available to students once they have been accepted into their course. At present, many students must wait for several months, often until their lectures have begun before they can liaise with support services. For many students, this is a cause of enormous stress, as they are attempting to put in place the support systems they need while also juggling their coursework.

The ability to contact the Disability Service over the summer months and identify the necessary supports and structures required would mean that students could hit the ground running in September. This would also be beneficial for the Disability Services themselves, as they could address these issues during the quieter summer months rather than juggle the needs of incoming and current students simultaneously at the start of the academic year.

One student explained the difficulties they faced when entering Trinity:

“I think that often people are unaware of the college supports available. My guidance counsellor at a school never informed me about these. So I had to find out myself.”

“Transferring from youth health services to adult health services. The transition is often bumpy, and you lose supports you have relied on for years.”

Another student summed up their situation as such:

“I don't know my way around campus, and I haven't met people from my course. As a result, my stress and anxiety have gotten a lot worse. I now have social anxiety too.”

### **Accommodation:**

Accommodation costs are another significant hurdle which many students with disabilities encounter during their time in college. This situation is challenging for students with mobility issues, such as wheelchair users and those with blindness. These students are often forced to rent on-campus accommodation due to the proximity to their lecture theatres, labs, and other college facilities. Additionally, it has proven extremely difficult to find any suitable private accommodation outside of the college campus, especially if the students require any support, such as guide dogs.

Consequently, students are faced with no other option but to pay the enormously high rents for on-campus accommodation. In the case of Trinity, this means paying in the region of eight thousand euros per academic year. Again, this serves as a significant barrier to equality of access and participation within the university system. The circumstances in Dublin may present the most severe case, but the situation in Cork and Galway is becoming increasingly concerning. Without significant support from the HEA and universities themselves, the cost of on-campus accommodation will continue to rise until only those students with disabilities who enjoy considerable financial support can pay the rental fees.

### **Fund for Students with Disabilities:**

The Fund for Students with Disabilities has operated as an important support mechanism for students with disabilities over the past two decades. It has played a key role in facilitating the increase in students with disabilities within the university system. However, as the number of students with disabilities within the system has increased from a few hundred to over two thousand, the current support systems have proven to be increasingly inadequate.

From a practical and financial perspective, the individualised method of allocating supports and assistive technologies utilised by the Fund for Students with Disabilities is not viable going forward. As the number of students with disabilities continues to grow, the Fund is likely to become overwhelmed by the demands of meeting each student's requirements. The financial support necessary to continue running the Fund in its current form is also unlikely to be provided given the current state of the third level sector.



Rather than continue with a system that is not sustainable, the co\_op members believe that the system should be reformed in line with Universal Design principles. This would involve designing a structure that is inherently accessible to students with disabilities to mitigate any challenges they may face because of their condition. As a result, the need to allocate supports and assistive technology student by student would be removed, meaning that additional support can be directed towards the students who need significant specialist support.

### **Progression rates for specific cohorts of students with disabilities:**

The current National Access Plan (NAP) had set a target of 8% for the percentage of students within the university system who have a disability. Currently, the rate is 12%, which is encouraging to see, as it means that the current system has exceeded expectations. However, the 12% figure does mask some issues experienced by students with disabilities, particularly several specific cohorts within the disability community. It has been shown that amongst the disabled community at third level, students with physical & sensory impairments, Autism and mental health issues are at a disadvantage compared to other students with disabilities.

These cohorts suffer from a lower progression rate through the third level system than their peers and encounter numerous challenges throughout their degrees. Several factors contribute to these issues. Students with physical impairments are often in need of specialist support, and many aspects of college are inaccessible to them, particularly if they require a wheelchair.

In the case of students with Autism and mental health issues, again significant support can be required to support some of these students. When these supports are not in place or inadequate, these students can often be overwhelmed by their course workload and disengage from the system entirely. The result of this is that students can end up failing their course or dropping out of college entirely.

One particular concern for students with disabilities and these cohorts is the role placements play in college courses. Placement heavy courses, such as those in the medical industry, often place enormous strain on students, both physically and mentally. When this is combined with the limitations placed on students by their disabilities, many struggle enormously to get through the placement itself.

Considering the key role and perspective students with disabilities can offer, particularly in a medical setting, the co\_op members believe that more should be done to support these students during their placements. This could take the form of modified placement programmes, for example, with reduced hours or altered roles within the institution. Steps should also be taken within the academic departments and schools responsible for these placements to ensure that they understand and appreciate the needs of their disabled students so that the necessary procedures can be implemented to meaningfully support them.

Some of the difficulties that students encounter on placement are explained below:

“Sometimes during clinical placements, some practice educators have difficulty understanding that I need extra time to read and understand medical files. However, I have also had really excellent and understanding practice educators”.

### **SUSI funding issues:**

Without the financial support provided by the SUSI grant scheme, many students would be unable to attend university, and this is particularly true for students with disabilities. Usually, students with disabilities find it extremely difficult to secure part-time employment due to their medical issues, which leaves them reliant on the grant scheme for the duration of their studies.

However, this reality is not reflected in the grants awarded to students with disabilities, which is a serious source of stress for many. It is widely acknowledged that many students will need to work part-time in some capacity during their time in college to cover the costs of living within Dublin. The fact that students with disabilities are expected to cover all their costs, especially rent, with the same level of financial assistance is ridiculous.

Outside of the immediate issues of day-to-day living for students, the SUSI grant scheme presents several other headaches to students. Many have commented on the confusing nature of the application process and website, which can be particularly difficult for those with Autism and processing disorders to navigate. Without considerable assistance from parents and others, many students would have struggled.

The co\_op is aware that there are designated staff members within SUSI who are supposed to handle enquiries from students with disabilities, yet no direct contact details are available. Even something as simple as providing a direct link to these staff members would reduce the level of stress felt by students enormously.

When it comes to accommodating the needs and circumstances of students with disabilities, the SUSI system is inadequate. Students who have had to change course, repeat years, or split their courses across two academic years because of their disability are regularly let down by the current grant system. In most of these circumstances, the student risks having their entire grant withdrawn, followed by a lengthy appeals process that rarely results in a positive outcome for the student. Given the challenges faced by students with disabilities, it is deeply unfair and nonsensical to punish them further for decisions that are out of their control.

These barriers will only serve to reduce the number of students progressing through the university system. If the government and HEA are dedicated to ensuring that third level education is accessible to all students, then the funding mechanisms must also reflect that ethos. As things currently stand, this is far from being the case. SUSI's rigid categorisation methods for students will continue to punish those with disabilities, who often need financial support.

One staff member of the disability service summarised some of the issues with SUSI:

“Greater flexibility in the SUSI grant for students repeating a year of their course due to medical and disability reasons. Many students are offered the support of a SUSI grant for the duration of their studies on the understanding that those from socio-economic disadvantaged backgrounds face additional barriers in accessing Higher Education. However, if a student must take a year out of their studies due to a health or disability issue, SUSI really lets them down because they can't afford to continue in Higher Education without the continued support.”

### **Students engaging with disability supports later:**

For some students with disabilities, their circumstances mean that support and guidance from the disability service is not required immediately upon entry into the university system. While this can signify that the student has transitioned into the system without any issues, this can also be a source of complication further along in their degree. Within Trinity, it has been found that these students are far more likely to fail a year of their degree or other significant milestones such as a placement or thesis. There are several reasons for this, the primary one being that student, who up to this point have managed their disabilities, are overwhelmed by the stress and workload required at these critical points. This often exacerbates their disability further, leading to the situation spiralling out of control without the disability service to provide much-needed assistance. Unfortunately, by the time that students have reached out to the Disability Service or other supports such as counselling, there is extraordinarily little time in which to produce a solution, and limited option available as many of the supports have already been allocated well in advance of this point.

Considering this and the crucial role that 3rd/4th-year exams, placements and theses play in determining a student's overall grade for their degree, the co\_op believe that steps must be taken to address the current situation. More must be done to reach out to these students in advance of the most challenging years of their degree and ensure that the necessary support has been provided. A review of current guidelines around theses and placements should also be carried out to understand how the process can be modernised and made more accessible.

Within Trinity, there has been significant research carried out that illustrates the disparity between certain cohorts of students with disabilities regarding progression through the university system. For example, autistic students are, in some cases, 20% more likely to drop out of their degree than some of their disabled peers. If the next National Access Plan is intended to fit for purpose, it must seek to address these pitfalls within the system. Additional funding, improved structures and procedures must be prioritised, particularly as the higher education sector recalibrates once the Covid 19 pandemic has ended.

### **Covid 19:**

The sudden onset of the Covid 19 pandemic in March 2020 has provided a unique opportunity for the higher education sector. For many students with disabilities, it has completely changed their college experience for the better, while many others have suffered massively over the past fifteen months. However, this does not mean that a solution that satisfies the needs of both groups cannot be found. In fact, it must be prioritised from this point onwards.

The switch to online learning, which was previously considered impossible, has enabled many students to study at a pace aligned with their own medical needs. This has removed a massive source of stress and fatigue from the lives of numerous students with disabilities, yet the experience is not uniform. Many have reported difficulties such as lecturers not recording lectures, no captioning of lectures and a general sense of detachment from the entire learning process. From student testimonies gathered by the Disability Service and co\_op, it is evident that a blended learning approach is the only way in which the needs of both these student groups can be met.

If the blended learning model is to be implemented, then the necessary financial support must be provided to students; otherwise, the project is doomed to failure. During the pandemic, there has been an enormous increase in applications to both the ICT (Information and Communications Technologies) grant scheme and Fund for Students with Disabilities, which have been facilitated by an increase in funding to both these initiatives. Going forward, guarantees must be put in place to ensure that these supports for students are not withdrawn or reduced to their pre-pandemic levels.

Another respondent to the co\_op online learning and assessment survey offered their assessment of the situation:

“Online learning has made college far more accessible to me, but the health risks faced by chronically ill students are not prioritised in the decision-making process - aim to help the most marginalised, and you're more likely to catch all or most people.”

Remote education options need to continue to be the norm, not the exception with Covid. It should still be an option for students after the pandemic. Also, support for remote education (ergonomic seating, etc.) should be supported and provided.”

There has also been a significant strain placed on access and disability officers throughout the pandemic. Many have had to take on additional workloads, allocating grant funding and in many cases fulfilling a counselling role to students. This has had a knock-on effect on the various access and disability services and their ability to provide meaningful support to students. It has also severely complicated the traditional pre-entry support process for first-year students, which depended heavily on in-person interactions.

The experiences of students with disabilities must be central to all discussions regarding the accessibility of third-level education. For vulnerable students, re-integration into the wider network must be managed carefully and with consideration. Students must feel that the services and supports available have been designed with their needs in mind. Ideally, the co\_op would like to see similar initiatives become commonplace in every university as a model for student-led services within the higher education sector.

### Exams:

The sudden transition to online examination methods undertaken by universities has gone smoothly. However, there have also been some teething problems with the system, which have affected students with disabilities. These issues range from the level of communication around exam structure to the running of the exams themselves.



Students have reported numerous problems with the exam timetabling system and the arbitrary way in which exam lengths are decided upon. Exam lengths can range from three-quarters of an hour to two hundred and eighty-eight hours, with truly little guidance on how these were determined or how students should use that time. The issues of transparency around timetabling are a particular source of stress for many students with disabilities.

The co\_op has been made aware of cases where students have had several overlapping, 24-hour long exams, while other students have been presented with much shorter and straightforward examinations. Such a massive difference in the examination process is likely to be reflected in the academic performance of students with disabilities, particularly if they are required to complete several exams concurrently. There has also been an unfortunate lack of guidance for students when completing these online exams. Students are unsure how much of the allotted time should be spent on the exam questions themselves, particularly when they have been 24/48 hours to complete the exam.

The responses to the co\_op survey highlight worrying issues with the current system:

“It has happened where I wasn't given my time for an exam, and I was offered to resit the exam, which I found quite stressful and trying to organise the time to do that was more effort than seems worth it at this point.

More flexibility when an error is made with the students' accommodations that do not feel like a punishment on the student (this was referring to when I said. I wasn't given my correct time for an exam and had to stress about repeating it).”

This uncertainty is a significant stressor for those with Autism and similar conditions, which must be addressed going forward. Something as simple as an email containing guidelines laid out by the relevant schools and departments would give students far more clarity about what is required of them when they sit down to complete the exams.

Those students with physical disabilities and impairments have also voiced their concerns about the current online examination setup. Those who rely on scribes have often worried that they will be unable to complete their exams in time due to the added complication of communicating over the internet during the exams.

Others have spoken of how their conditions, such as arthritis, are aggravated by the extended periods of time spent writing, often non-stop, coupled with sitting hunched over a laptop. There is also a common issue of exam fatigue amongst students with disabilities, which has been made worse by timetabling issues. These difficulties are further compounded by the fact that the online timetables available for students with disabilities rarely include the additional time allocated to them, leading many to believe that they have not been granted it.

One example of the challenges faced by students is offered below: "I have arthritis in my hands. Undertaking a 3-hour continuous exam caused difficulties. I had an extension of 1/2 hour to compensate; however, due to the continuous writing requirement to answer questions fully; my hands suffered during and on completion of same. I feel an option should be available for continuous assessment without undertaking an exam at year-end. This would be most beneficial to all students, not alone those with disabilities."

Another area of concern for the co\_op is direct support for students with disabilities who encounter difficulties during their exam. Under the normal circumstances, students would have been able to get the attention of invigilators or professors within the exam hall, who would assist them. With the switch to online examinations, this has all been removed, without any clear plan regarding how students with disabilities will be supported going forward. Procedures must be in place to ensure that students can be assisted if they run into any difficulties, tech or otherwise, which would normally have fallen under the remit of an invigilator.

Several universities have successfully implemented systems to support students during their online exams. St Andrews University in Scotland has introduced a rest break system into their online exams, which allow students to avail of a set number of breaks within the duration of their exam. Several other universities have also introduced personalised study timetables, which inform students how much time they must complete their exams and how much time they should dedicate to various sections of the paper.

Based on students' experiences and the initiatives undertaken by universities in the UK, the Trinity Disability Service and Trinity Ability co\_op recommend implementing an innovative approach to online exams. Exams should be run within a 24-hour "exam window", where once a student has started, they must complete the paper within 3-4 hours. Students with disabilities can then request extra time to be added onto this "exam window" within the initial 24 hours. This should reduce the strain placed on students with disabilities by simplifying their exam timetable and allowing them some degree of freedom as to when they choose to sit the exam itself.

## Entry into the jobs market:

Progression through the third level education system can be a difficult and frustrating experience for many students with disabilities for various reasons. These difficulties can become even more pronounced once students have left the university system and attempt to enter the workforce. Given the government and university sector's concerted efforts over the past 5 years in pursuit of "graduate employability" initiatives, the lack of interest in the fortunes of students with disabilities is of significant concern to the Trinity Ability co\_op.

According to a study by the European Commission in 2019, Ireland lags significantly behind its regional counterparts in terms of the employment rate for people with disabilities (26.2% vs 48.1% in mainland Europe). There are currently no statistics available for the rate of employment for disabled graduates in Ireland. Still, it would be safe to assume that they are in line with the wider disabled population.

Without meaningful financial investment and reform, these disparities between the disabled community and their peers will remain unacceptably high (45.1%). Fortunately, there are meaningful and tangible ways in which the current situation can be improved. Collaboration between the disability and careers services within the third level system would allow students with additional needs to be flagged before they exit the system.

In terms of the assistance these students receive, the co\_op believes that several different avenues could be pursued. Establishing work experience and placement programmes explicitly for students with disabilities would be one such option. Given the ever-increasing importance of prior experience for a graduate's job prospects, this would be a straightforward solution to implement. It would also serve as an excellent opportunity for disabled graduates to build a network of contacts that will serve them throughout their careers. As most students with disabilities would have trouble building these connections normally due to the lack of accessible events on campus, this would be yet another tangible way in which their employment prospects could be improved.

Another crucial element of any programme to help students with disabilities should be a mentor programme designed to help them to navigate the final years of their degree. These mentors would ideally be graduates with disabilities or potentially individuals from large employers. This would ensure that students are well informed when making decisions about their future careers and are more confident in their ability to secure employment. A programme such as this would become self-sustaining over time, as undergraduates who have benefited from the mentoring become mentors themselves and serve as points of contact for the next group of undergraduates.

The Trinity Centre for Intellectual Disabilities within the School of Education has already run successful programmes similar to the recommendations made above.

These have been small-scale in nature, limited to less than 20 students. Still, they provide a valuable framework to build upon, to address the barriers facing thousands of students across the country. Similar transition and foundation programmes should be developed in partnerships with FE colleges for those who will find transition in and out of university difficult. The issue of employment for disabled students is not purely economic; it is critical to ensuring an excellent quality of life for many.

Without access to the jobs market, students with disabilities are dependent on state allowances and their parents, robbing them of the opportunity to reach their full potential and achieve the same milestones as their peers. The success of any efforts to make the higher education sector more accessible should be measured in the employment prospects of students with disabilities. If these issues are not addressed, then all the positive change in culture and support services will have been in vain.

### **Accessibility of services and building:**

Trinity is a historic campus site with many beautiful buildings that are listed and difficult to make accessible. Over the past 20 years, Trinity has made significant improvements within their campuses for students regarding accessibility. But lots more must be achieved to make the full education experience accessible and inclusive to all. Estates staff and national guidelines need to be developed to ensure the retrofit of buildings and accessibility of new buildings go beyond minimum guidelines known as Part M. These are not fit for purpose and offer a minimal experience for a truly diverse population. The new Access Plan along with outlining UDL (Universal Design for Learning) for learning needs to make Universities accountable for their

built environment. Ensure compliance with the Disability Act 2005 for all goods, services, information, and the built environment.

While the university campus presents several challenges with regards to physical accessibility, the online space suffers from many of the same issues. The co\_op understands that there is a national framework in place, which mandates that all online products purchased must be accessible, yet there appears to be little oversight as such.

At present, many students have encountered significant accessibility issues with their virtual learning environments (VLEs) provided by Trinity. When this issue was raised, the IT services within Trinity stated that they can only operate within the National Framework as currently outlined by the HEA.

Several students also voiced their frustration at the various hoops that they are forced to jump through to arrive at a solution to these problems. There is rarely a single, easily identifiable point of contact for students, particularly with IT issues. Long, unnecessary email chains across various accounts and apartments are commonplace, creating an extremely confusing environment for students.

Others have encountered difficulties with vital pieces of software, which often end up taking weeks to resolve, a delay that is detrimental to the student's wellbeing. If accessibility is presented as a priority, then these institutional bottlenecks must also be addressed and rectified promptly. Without the necessary guidance, assistance, and orientation towards resources that these issues require, the situation will never improve.

Under the Disability Act of 2005, accessibility must be a key consideration in any procurement process carried out by the HEA. Can the HEA confirm that there is an accessibility checklist in place for all procurement procedures going forward? If not, then the Trinity Ability co\_op believes that this must be addressed immediately before any steps are taken to implement any blended learning initiatives within the third level sector. Students with disabilities should not be promised and consequently plan for, a blended learning experience that totally fails to address their needs.

### **Concluding remarks:**

As the HEA considers what the future of third-level education will look like in a post-pandemic Ireland, the co\_op hopes that the issues raised in this submission will be central to these discussions. Through this document, we have attempted to outline the various financial, institutional, and procedural pitfalls which mar the third level landscape for so many students with disabilities.

Tracking the student journey, from their acceptance of a college place to their entry into the workforce, our review should leave those at a decision-making level with no illusions of the reality within the university sector. Some of these issues, such as insufficient SUSI funding and DARE quotas, are long-standing, whilst others have only become pressing in the last 18 months.



While the rapid onset of the Covid pandemic restricted the ability of the higher education sector to support students with disabilities, the situation has changed enormously since then. However, with this change comes the opportunity to reimagine our idea of third-level education, both physically and intellectually. Students with disabilities have often been made to feel excluded from both the college experience and decision-making processes that affect our time in university. Often, we are made to feel like a token at best and an afterthought at worst.

If the HEA is serious about the importance of accessibility within the third level sector, then the issues raised throughout this review cannot be ignored anymore. Increasing the number of students with disabilities entering the system every year should never be the sole focus of its efforts. Entry into the system is merely the first step in a much more complicated and unpredictable process. This distinction must be recognised, and steps are taken by the HEA to ensure that students are supported from the very earliest point to the very last.

**Kind Regards,**

**Scott Byrne and Courtney McGrath, Trinity Ability co\_op**