

Opening access to education

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Academic Secretary

The opportunity to lead a rewarding life, fulfil your potential and contribute to society starts with the opportunity to participate in higher education. Equality of access to higher education is a global issue and in the last two decades Trinity has taken a leading role in shaping national access policies that support access to and participation of groups underrepresented in higher education.

Alternative admissions routes are available for applicants from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, those with disabilities, and mature students, through the HEAR (Higher Education Access Route), DARE (Disability Access Route to Education), and Mature Student Dispensation schemes. A Widening Participation Group was established as a subcommittee of the Undergraduate Studies Committee (USC) in 2018/19 to support the creation of a diverse and inclusive undergraduate student body and college community.

Trinity developed key innovative initiatives to further test alternative admissions routes to its undergraduate programmes, namely:

— The Trinity Admissions' Feasibility Study (TAFS), established in 2014, explored an alternative approach to the CAO points system, using a combination of Leaving Certificate results and supplementary assessments. Three courses, Law, History, and Ancient and Medieval History and Culture, provide 25 places annually through TAFS, and to date progression rates of students on these courses are on par with their peers. The study has been extended until 2022/23 but scalability and mainstreaming require further consideration.

— The Northern Ireland Feasibility Study, launched in 2014, sets aside a number of places for students from Northern Ireland to access any course, except Medicine, with 3 A-Levels, instead of the 4 A-Levels formally required by the CAO. It contributed to a 60% rise in the number of applications from NI

RIGHT – Students chatting in the Arts Building foyer.



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from 2014/15 to 2017/18. The overall conversion of offers to acceptances increased to 57% in 2019/20 (54% in 2018/19). The Study has been extended to 2022/23.

— The expansion of FET (Further Education and Training) entry routes to over 100 places on undergraduate programmes addresses the national priority of enabling progression from further education to third level. FET entry routes to twelve undergraduate programmes are in place for entry in 2020/21.

— The Asylum Seekers Access Provision Scholarship was established in April 2019 to support the entry of four students from Direct Provision Centres to Trinity.

Entrance Exhibitions

First established in 1870, Entrance Exhibition awards go to first year students with the highest points among Trinity entrants from their secondary schools. Over the ten years to 2019/20, Entrance Exhibitionerships were awarded to 4,880 students, an average of 488 each year. A new model for the awards was launched in 2018/19, rewarding students who get the highest points in each individual school – provided the student has achieved 500 points or over in the Leaving Certificate, or its equivalent. Under the previous system, a small number of schools tended to shine – in 2017 for instance, 21 Entrance Exhibitioners came from just one school. The new model saw a 50 percent increase in the number of schools from which Exhibitioners come, and a much greater geographic diversity.

Trinity Access Programmes 2011–21

Trinity Access was set up in 1993 to widen access to under-represented socio-economic groups at the University. It partners

with schools, higher education institutions, NGOs, community groups and businesses to develop educational outreach and encourage new admissions. Over 3,000 students have entered Trinity via Trinity Access Programmes entry routes, and each year more than 10,000 students engage in a school- and university-based outreach programme.

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Growth in numbers

At the end of the last College Strategic Plan, 22% of incoming students to Trinity were from under-represented groups. The current target is 25%. Students who entered via Trinity Access routes have had an average 89% completion rate, 97% progression rate and a 99% retention (to the end of Junior Fresh) rate over the last decade.

The nationwide scaling of the Higher Education Access Route – Trinity played a leading role in the strategic development of HEAR, the nationwide admissions scheme for students from under-represented groups. The scheme grew from an eight-institution collaboration to a 24-institution online programme, integrated within the CAO. Through this key phase of national development, 2010–14, the scheme was based within Trinity. HEAR and DARE have enabled over 40,000 students nationwide to progress into participating institutions.

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LEFT – Students participating in the TAP Pathways to Law programme.

BELOW LEFT – Students enjoying Trinity Access Programme activities.

BELOW RIGHT – Chloe Pearson of St Mary's Secondary School, Tullamore, Co Offaly celebrates being an Entrance Exhibition Award Recipient with the Provost and her parents Shirley & Andrew.



Pathways to the Professions

With a growing group of legal and corporate partners, Trinity Access launched the Pathways to the Professions programmes in 2012, to expose students to Law, Engineering and Business in second level, further to making available career development opportunities in third level. The programmes also support students to develop key graduate attributes and enable them to focus more closely on their own development, by providing financial support.

College Awareness Week

In 2014, Trinity initiated a College Awareness Week in partnership with the National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals, the HEA and SOLAS, with sponsorship from AIB and Perrigo. This campaign has grown from 363 events involving 35,000 participants in 2014 to 1,373 events involving 125,000 participants in 2020. Organisations devise, implement and share their own ideas for encouraging greater college awareness.

Trinity Access 21 (TA21)

TA21 was established with support from Google Ireland as a collaboration between Trinity Access, Bridge21, the School of Computer Science and Trinity's School of Education in 2014.

It focuses on raising educational aspirations among students and teachers at Trinity's 20 linked DEIS schools in the greater Dublin area and its network of Schools of Distinction throughout Ireland. Backed by *Rethink Ireland: the Social Innovation Fund of Ireland*, since 2017, TA21 is on course to reach 30,000 students nationwide, helping to upskill over 2,000 teachers and delivering activities in over 100 schools by 2023.

Creating blueprints for educational equality in the UK

In 2015, the Provost met Alan Rusbridger, former editor of the *Guardian* and recently appointed Principal of the Oxford University college, Lady Margaret Hall (LMH), and apprised him of the Trinity Access Foundation Course, which has a 17-year evidence base of successful student progression. Oxford had long experienced difficulties in recruiting academically qualified applicants from diverse backgrounds. In 2016, LMH approved a pilot Foundation Year, adapted from the Trinity Access model. Dr Cliona Hannon, Director of TAP, joined LMH as a Visiting Fellow. By 2019, three student groups had successfully completed the programme and progressed to higher education, over 80% to Oxford. In 2020 both Oxford and Cambridge universities announced ambitious plans to develop university-wide Foundation Year programmes.

Internal and external support for Trinity Access

Trinity Access has continued to build new relationships for support and funding with individual philanthropists and businesses. This diverse portfolio of state funding from the HEA and Department of Education and Skills to maintain core programmes, and philanthropic investment to enable innovation, are essential to its success.

Academic and professional staff, students and external partners have been instrumental in the growth of the programmes over the last ten years and the institutional leadership of the Provost has made the crucial difference between stasis in an economic crisis, and the catalytic impact of Trinity Access, both in Trinity and beyond.