



Programme for college access for the disabled

AN INITIATIVE aimed at all school leavers with disabilities, the Disability Access Route to Education (DARE), has been launched by the seven universities and four other institutes.

This is a supplementary admissions scheme which recognises the impact of disability on "educational attainment and on progression to higher education".

Already this year almost 300 students have accepted places through DARE, however, the participating colleges aim to increase this number in 2010 by offering on average 5 per cent of first year places on a reduced points basis.

Rose Ryan, NUI Maynooth Disability Officer, explained: "Supporting students through widening access programmes is a key priority of the University. The Maynooth Access Programme, now in its tenth year, is acknowledged to be among the best in the Irish Higher Education sector, and this year over 25 per cent of our student population will be made up of students from non-traditional sources".

The idea behind the national launch is to make students, schools and organisations aware of the scheme and ultimately to "encourage a greater number of applications".

Maureen Dunne, spokesperson for the DARE scheme, said: "Students with disabilities experience constant and complex challenges throughout their educational experience which makes it difficult for them to reach their full education potential. As well as health issues many students have low expectations of their ability to progress to higher education."

Significant improvements have already been made to the DARE scheme through funding from the government's Strategic Innovation Fund (SIF).

The scheme is now based on more robust criteria, has a more streamlined application process through the CAO and is more student friendly.

For more information visit the dedicated website at www.accesscollege.ie, which contains full details of the scheme.