

HEAR – Higher Education Access Route

HEAR | HIGHER
EDUCATION
ACCESS
ROUTE



What is HEAR?

The Higher Education Access Route (HEAR) is a college admissions scheme for school leavers (under 23) who have experienced social or educational disadvantage during secondary school.



What does HEAR Offer?

- Compete for reduced CAO points on designated courses.
- Better access to student supports and services in higher education.

How does HEAR work?

HEAR uses a criteria scoring system to ensure that students facing the greatest challenges are given the most support.

HEAR Criteria	HEAR Score
1. Household Income in 2024 (Mandatory)	No score – Must qualify
2. Medical Card/GP Visit Card on December 31st 2025	Yes = 1 or No = 0
3. Means-Tested Social Welfare in 2024	Yes = 2 or No = 0
4. Area (Deprivation Index Score)	Extremely Disadvantaged = 2.5 Very Disadvantaged = 2.5 Applicants who experienced homelessness = 2.5 Disadvantaged = 1.5 Marginally Below Average or higher = 0
5. DEIS School Status	Yes = 1.5 or No = 0
Maximum Achievable Points	7

HEAR Eligibility Based on Score	HEAR Eligibility
5.5 – 7	HEAR Priority: Eligible for reduced points offers and prioritised for support
2.5 – 5	HEAR Eligible: May receive reduced points offers
2 or below	Not eligible for HEAR

Who Can Apply?

School Leavers who are resident in the Republic of Ireland are under 23 on January 1st 2026.

School Leavers who meet the criteria above.

Priority Groups include:

- Care-Experienced School Leavers
- Members of the Traveller or Roma communities
- Young parents
- DARE and HEAR Eligible Applicants

Please note all applicants to HEAR must be School Leavers who are resident in the Republic of Ireland and are under 23 on January 1st 2026. See www.accesscollege.ie for details on Priority Groups.

How to Apply

Applicants applying to HEAR must:

1. Be under the age of 23 as of **January 1st 2026**.
2. Apply online to CAO by 17:00 on **Sunday February 1st 2026**. CAO applications open on 5 November 2025 at 12 noon.
3. No later than 17:00 on **Sunday March 1st 2026**, indicate in your CAO application that you wish to apply for the HEAR scheme and fully and correctly complete all elements of the online HEAR application form. Once you have completed the HEAR application form you will get a checklist which tells you which documents you need to supply.
4. Post your supporting documents to arrive in CAO no later than **17:00 on Tuesday March 10th 2026**.

To complete your online HEAR application you must:

- Get assistance from your parent(s)/guardian(s).
- Use the **HEAR 2026 Handbook** to help you answer all relevant questions on your online HEAR application.

You can download the HEAR 2026 Handbook at www.accesscollege.ie.

For more information on HEAR please visit
www.accesscollege.ie

