

# The DARE Review

## Have Your Say.

**We are reviewing how disabled students access higher education in Ireland and we want to hear from you.**

This document explains what the DARE scheme is, why it is being reviewed, and how you can get involved. You do not need any specialist knowledge to take part, your experience and your voice are what matter.

This document is for:

<b>Students</b>	<b>Parents &amp; Guardians</b>	<b>Guidance Counsellors</b>	<b>Teachers &amp; Support Staff</b>	<b>Disability Organisations</b>
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**Managed by Irish Universities Association (IUA)**

On behalf of DARE participating Higher Education Institutes | 2025–2027

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## What is DARE?

DARE stands for the Disability Access Route to Education. It is a scheme that allows students with disabilities to apply for a college place on reduced points if their disability had a negative impact on their second-level education.

DARE is available through the CAO the same online system most students use to apply for college in Ireland. Students who qualify for DARE are not judged differently to other students; they are simply recognised as having faced a genuine extra challenge during school. All students can avail of disability supports in higher education, whether they applied to DARE or not.

Since DARE was established in 2009, it has helped tens of thousands of disabled students access higher education. In 2025 alone, almost 10,000 students applied for DARE as part of their CAO application.

### **DARE is not a back door into college.**

It is about levelling the playing field for students whose disability negatively impacted on their education and affected their ability to perform in exams. Students who have the potential to thrive in higher education, but whose results do not fully reflect that potential.

## Why is DARE being reviewed?

DARE was introduced in 2009. Since then, Ireland has changed a great deal. More students are now disclosing a disability, and schools are providing greater support to help students with disabilities stay engaged in education and progress to further education, higher education, apprenticeships and the world of work. This is a positive development.

At the same time, our understanding of disability has changed. There is now greater recognition that disability is not only about a person's medical condition, but also about the barriers created by systems, structures and environments.

When DARE was first introduced, it was based on the understanding that students with disabilities often did not achieve the same Leaving Certificate points as students without disabilities. DARE was designed to recognise the impact a disability could have on a student's education and to give those students a fairer chance of progressing to higher education through the points system.

Since 2009, DARE has grown steadily. In 2025, more than 9,700 applications were assessed. Last year, 78% of DARE applicants did not need to use reduced points to receive a higher education offer. This raises important questions about whether DARE is still targeting support in the best way for those whose disability has had an impact on their education.

This review is a positive and constructive step. It asks whether DARE is still working as well as it should for the students who need it most. It also asks whether some students who should benefit from DARE are being left out, and whether the application process is fair, clear and proportionate.

The review will produce evidence-based recommendations to shape a reformed DARE scheme for the 2029 CAO cycle, which opens via the CAO in November 2028.

**The review is NOT about removing DARE or reducing support for disabled students.**

DARE will continue. This review is about making it better.

## Who is running the review?

The review is managed by the Irish Universities Association (IUA) on behalf of all participating higher education institutions in Ireland. The review group also includes representatives from AHEAD, the Institute of Guidance Counsellors (IGC), the Central Application Office (CAO), and the Department of Education.

## What can and cannot be changed through this review?

It is important to be clear about what this review covers. Participants have a right to know so that their contributions are focused in the right place.

**Table 1: Scope of the DARE Review — what is and is not included**

The review CAN look at...	The review CANNOT...
<b>In Scope:</b> Who qualifies for DARE and how eligibility is decided	<b>Out of scope:</b> Make any decision about disability support allocations.
<b>In Scope:</b> The documentation and evidence students need to provide	<b>Out of scope:</b> Review individual student applications, decisions, or past outcomes
<b>In Scope:</b> Whether DARE reaches all the students who should benefit	<b>Out of scope:</b> Make any changes to the 2026 or 2027 CAO cycle
<b>In Scope:</b> How DARE interacts with the CAO process	<b>Out of scope:</b> Reduce or remove supports available to disabled students
<b>In Scope:</b> Whether DARE reflects modern understandings of disability	<b>Out of scope:</b> Review the HEAR scheme, that is a separate programme
<b>In Scope:</b> How information and guidance reach students and schools	<b>Out of scope:</b> Review college disability support services after students enrol

**If your concern falls outside this review's scope, you will not be dismissed.**

Facilitators will point you to the right place, whether that is the CAO, an individual college, or the Ombudsman.

## How can I get involved?

There are two ways to contribute to this review. You can do one or both.

### Option 1: Attend a Town Hall on Zoom

We are holding four online sessions in June 2026. Each session is 90 minutes and is designed for a specific audience. Sessions are held via Zoom.

**Table 2: Town Hall sessions — dates, audiences, and times and links to register)**

Session 1	Session 2	Session 3	Session 4
<p><b>Disability Persons Organisations</b></p> <p>Monday 8 June 2026 11:00 AM – 12:30 PM (REGISTER HERE)</p>	<p><b>Students</b></p> <p>Monday 8 June 2026 1:00 PM – 2:30 PM (REGISTER HERE)</p>	<p><b>Parents &amp; Guardians</b></p> <p>Tuesday 9 June 2026 11:00 AM – 12:30 PM (REGISTER HERE)</p>	<p><b>Guidance Counsellors, Teacher and Support staff</b></p> <p>Tuesday 9 June 2026 3:00 PM – 4:30 PM (REGISTER HERE)</p>

If you need any accessibility support, please let us know when registering and we will endeavour to arrange it.

### Option 2: Complete the Online Survey

A short online survey will be open to everyone throughout mid-June to mid-July 2026. It takes around 15 minutes. The survey is anonymous.

The survey will remain open for one month, going live from mid-June and closing by mid-July 2026.

Once it is live, you can find the survey online on the [accesscollege.ie](https://accesscollege.ie) website.

## What happens at a Town Hall session?

Each session lasts 90 minutes and follows the same structure. You do not need to prepare anything in advance, though some reflection prompts are sent to registered participants beforehand if you would like to think ahead.

**Table 3: Town Hall session structure**

Time	What happens
First 10 mins	Welcome and introduction — what the review is about and what the session will cover
Next 10 mins	Clear overview of scope — what the review can and cannot change
Next 45 mins	Small group discussions on Zoom (groups of up to 8 people). A trained note-taker supports each group and records feedback/key points. Three key questions guide the discussion.
Next 15 mins	Each group shares their main points with everyone in the room
Final 10 mins	Open questions, close, and reminder about the written survey

### **Your group discussion is confidential.**

Contributions are recorded as themes and key points — not attributed to individual people. You will never be quoted by name in any published output.

You can choose how much or how little to share. You are welcome to step away from the session at any time.

## **What will happen with what I share?**

Everything you share will be taken seriously. Your contribution will be combined with evidence from an academic literature review, CAO data analysis, and the online survey. Together, these four evidence streams will inform recommendations for how DARE should be reformed for the 2028 CAO cycle.

A public Consultation Report will be published in January 2027. It will explain what was heard across all sessions and how consultation input shaped the recommendations. Everyone who takes part will receive a copy.

### **We commit to closing the loop.**

You will not contribute and hear nothing back. The review team is committed to telling you what was heard and how it was used.

## **Is my information safe?**

Yes. This consultation aims to meet high standards of data protection and ethical research practice. Here is what that means for you:

**Table 4: Data protection commitments**

### **01 Participation is completely voluntary**

You can choose not to take part, and you can leave at any time. Your decision will have no impact on any college application or support.

### **02 Your contributions are anonymised**

Nothing you say will be attributed to you by name in any published output. Data is stored securely on IUA systems and not shared with third parties.

### **03 You will give informed consent**

Before taking part, you will be asked to confirm that you understand how your data will be used and that you are happy to proceed.

#### 04 Accessibility is built in

All materials meet WCAG 2.1 AA accessibility standards. Captioning and alternative formats are available on request.

#### 05 Sessions aim to be a Safe space

Facilitators are trained to create a safe, non-judgemental space. Mental health support information is provided at every session.

## What might be useful to think about beforehand?

You do not need to prepare for a Town Hall. However, some people find it helpful to reflect on their experience before attending. Below are the questions we will be asking at each session.

Table 5: Optional reflection prompts by audience group

<p><b>For Students</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DARE helps students whose disability has negatively affected their experience in school by providing access to college through reduced points entry.</li> <li>• <b>Question 1:</b> How effectively do you think the current DARE process does this, and is it fair to all students? Why?</li> <li>• <b>Question 2:</b> From your experience as a student, what are the strengths and weaknesses of the DARE scheme and how it is operated?</li> <li>• The reduced points offering in DARE is a significant support to students who are eligible, and we want to ensure that the students who qualify are those that need it most. We are also conscious of trying to make the scheme easier to navigate for students and reducing administration for students, parents, guidance counsellors and colleges.</li> <li>• <b>Question 3:</b> With that in mind, what changes would you propose to make the scheme fairer for all students and easier to navigate for the next generation of disabled students?</li> </ul>	<p><b>For Parents &amp; Guardians</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DARE helps students whose disability has negatively affected their experience in school by providing access to college through reduced points entry.</li> <li>• <b>Question 1:</b> How effectively do you think the current DARE process does this, and is it fair to all students? Why?</li> <li>• <b>Question 2:</b> From your experience as a parent, what are the strengths and weaknesses of the DARE scheme and how it is operated?</li> <li>• The reduced points offering in DARE is a significant support to students who are eligible, and we want to ensure that the students who qualify are those that need it most. We are also conscious of trying to make the scheme easier to navigate for students and reducing administration for students, parents, guidance counsellors, and colleges.</li> <li>• <b>Question 3:</b> With that in mind, what changes would you propose to make the scheme fairer for all students and easier to navigate for the next generation of disabled students and their parents?</li> </ul>
<p><b>For Guidance Counsellors, Teachers and Support Staff</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DARE helps students whose disability has negatively affected their experience in school by providing access to college through reduced points entry.</li> <li>• <b>Question 1:</b> How effectively do you think the current DARE process does this and is it fair to all students? Why?</li> <li>• <b>Question 2:</b> From your experience as a guidance counsellor, what are the strengths and</li> </ul>	<p><b>For Disability Organisations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DARE helps students whose disability has negatively affected their experience in school by providing access to college through reduced points entry.</li> <li>• <b>Question 1:</b> How effectively do you think the current DARE process does this and is it fair to all students? Why?</li> <li>• <b>Question 2:</b> From your experience as a disability organisation, what are the strengths and weaknesses of the DARE scheme and how it is operated?</li> </ul>

<p>weaknesses of the DARE scheme and how it is operated?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>The reduced points offering in DARE is a significant support to students who are eligible, and we want to ensure that the students who qualify are those that need it most. We are also conscious of trying to make the scheme easier to navigate for students, and reducing administration for students, parents, guidance counsellors and colleges.</b></li> <li>• <b>Question 3:</b> With that in mind, what changes would you make to the scheme to make it fairer for all students, and easier to navigate for the next generation of disabled students and the guidance counsellors supporting them?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>The reduced points offering in DARE is a significant support to students who are eligible, and we want to ensure that the students who qualify are those that need it most. We are also conscious of trying to make the scheme easier to navigate for students and reducing administration for students, parents, guidance counsellors and colleges.</b></li> <li>• <b>Question 3:</b> With that in mind, what changes would you propose to make the scheme fairer for all students and easier to navigate for the next generation of disabled students?</li> </ul>
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## Review timeline

The five stages below show how the review will unfold from now to 2028. Your participation in the Town Halls and online survey feeds directly into Stage 1 and shapes every stage that follows.

Table 6: The five stages of the DARE Review 2025–2028

Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4	Stage 5
Consult	Analyse	Recommend	Report	Reform
Now–Jul 2026 Town Halls and survey	Aug–Oct 2026 Synthesise all evidence	Oct–Dec 2026 Draft reform proposals	January 2027 Consultation Report published	2028 New DARE launches

## Conclusion

Thank you for taking the time to read this.

DARE has opened doors for tens of thousands of disabled students since 2009. This review exists because those students and those who come after them, deserve a scheme that is fair, transparent, and genuinely reaches those who need it most.

Your experience, your expertise, and your perspective matter. The review team cannot do this work well without hearing from you.

Whether you attend a Town Hall, complete the survey, or both your contribution will be read, taken seriously and used.

The deadline for survey responses is mid-July 2026. Town Hall registration is open now. Please see the DARE review page on the Access College website for further information.

### For more information

Please see the Access College website for information on the DARE review.

*This review is led by the principle that nothing about disabled students should be decided without disabled students.*

DARE Review 2025–2027 | Irish Universities Association | [accesscollege.ie](https://accesscollege.ie)