

# 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 live in the Republic of Ireland who have experienced social or educational disadvantage during secondary school.



## What does HEAR Offer?

- Compete for reduced points places on college courses.
- Access to student supports and services in college.

## How does HEAR work?

Applicants must meet the household income limit. The remaining HEAR criteria use a scoring system, and your total score determines whether you are eligible. However, if you are applying as a care-experienced applicant or as a member of the Traveller or Roma Communities, you do not need to meet Criterion 1 or Criterion 3.

| HEAR Criteria                                                                           | HEAR Score                                                                                                        |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Household Income                                                                     | Must meet income limit (no score awarded)                                                                         |
| 2. Medical Card/GP Visit Card (in date on 31 December 2026)                             | Yes = 1                                                                                                           |
| 3. Means-tested Department of Social Protection payment (for at least 26 weeks in 2025) | Yes = 2                                                                                                           |
| 4. Area (Deprivation Index Score)                                                       | Extremely Disadvantaged/Very Disadvantaged = 2.5<br>Disadvantaged = 1.5<br>Marginally Below Average or higher = 0 |
| 5. DEIS School Status                                                                   | Yes = 1.5                                                                                                         |

Maximum Achievable HEAR Score: 7

| HEAR Eligibility Based on Score | HEAR Eligibility                                                                                      |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 5.5 – 7<br>HEAR Priority        | You can compete for HEAR reduced points offers through the CAO and will be prioritised.               |
| 2.5 – 5<br>HEAR Eligible        | You can compete for HEAR reduced points offers through the CAO, although you will not be prioritised. |
| 2 or below<br>HEAR Ineligible   | You are not eligible for HEAR but you can still be considered for CAO offers.                         |

Applicants who experienced homelessness during their secondary school education between 1 January 2025 and 1 March 2027, and who are registered (or whose parent(s)/guardian(s) are registered) on the Pathway Accommodation and Support System (PASS), will receive a score of 2.5. See the HEAR Handbook for details.

## Who Can Apply?

School leavers who meet the HEAR criteria, are resident in the Republic of Ireland and are **under 23 on 1 January 2027**.

Some applicants are considered Priority Groups within HEAR including:

- Students who are or have been care-experienced
- Members of the Traveller or Roma communities
- Young parents

See [www.accesscollege.ie](http://www.accesscollege.ie) for details on Priority Groups and documentation that may be required.

## How to Apply

**Applicants applying to HEAR must:**

1. Be under the age of 23 as of **1 January 2027**.
2. Apply online to CAO by **Monday 1 February 2027 at 5pm**. CAO applications open on Thursday 5 November 2026.
3. No later than **Monday 1 March 2027 at 5pm**, indicate in your CAO application that you wish to apply for the HEAR scheme and fully complete all elements of the online HEAR application form.
4. Post your supporting documents (including income, Department of Social Protection documents and other forms for priority groups) to CAO so they arrive by **Wednesday 10 March 2027 at 5pm**. Get proof of postage, for example a free certificate of posting from the post office.

## HEAR income limit table by number of dependent children in your household

| Number of dependent children in your household                                              | HEAR income limit** |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|
| 1-3                                                                                         | €58,470             |
| 4-7                                                                                         | €64,080             |
| 8+                                                                                          | €69,465             |
| For <b>each</b> 'relevant person' (see below*), you can add €4,785 to your income threshold | €4,785              |

\* A relevant person is another member of your household who is attending a full-time course in further or higher education at the same time as you. The reckonable income thresholds can be adjusted to take account of relevant persons attending a full-time course of at least one year's duration or an approved part-time course in Ireland, the EU or the UK leading to a major award at levels 5 to 10 of the National Framework of Qualifications. For a HEAR applicant who is dependent on their parents, relevant persons may include your dependent siblings (brothers or sisters) in further or higher education, your parent (s)/ guardian (s) attending a full-time course in further or higher education.

\*\* Depending on the number of dependents in your family, your family income must be at or below these figures (€) for the year 2025.

**For 2027 entry, applicants must post supporting documents to CAO for their HEAR application, please see the HEAR 2027 handbook for the documents required.**

### Helpful tip

To complete your online HEAR application, you should:

Get assistance from your parent(s) or guardian(s), guidance counsellor or teacher at school.

Use the HEAR 2027 Handbook to help you answer all relevant questions on your online HEAR application.

You can download the HEAR 2027 Handbook at [www.accesscollege.ie](http://www.accesscollege.ie)

For more information on HEAR, please visit [www.accesscollege.ie](http://www.accesscollege.ie)

