



**PAVEE POINT**  
TRAVELLER AND ROMA CENTRE

# **Information on Applying to University/Higher Education**

**for Travellers, Roma, Traveller organisations  
and Groups working with Roma**



# Who is this information for, and how can it help?

This information is for Travellers and Roma who are considering applying to college or university in Ireland. It is also for Traveller organisations and groups working with Roma who are supporting people through the application process.

If you are a Traveller or Roma applicant, you may be eligible for additional supports and priority access routes, including reduced-points schemes and financial assistance.

The purpose of this information is to make the application process clearer and to signpost the main supports and access routes that may be available to you.

While every effort has been made to ensure the information is correct, it is a work in progress. Rules, deadlines, and supports can change, so you should always check official sources, such as the Central Applications Office (CAO), Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI), and individual colleges or universities, for the most up-to-date information.



Traveller graduates and community workers.

*Photograph by Tommy Clancy.*

# Key words and abbreviations

## **CAO – Central Applications Office**

The CAO is the central point for applying for most college or university places in Ireland.

## **Access routes**

Special admissions schemes are in place to help students who may face barriers to education gain access to college or university, including Travellers and Roma. These routes can offer reduced points and extra support.

## **HEAR – Higher Education Access Route**

An access scheme that supports students from underrepresented backgrounds.

Travellers and Roma are a priority group under HEAR.

## **DARE – Disability Access Route to Education**

An access scheme for students with a disability. Travellers and Roma with a disability can apply under this route.

## **SUSI – Student Universal Support Ireland**

The main student grant scheme, which can include a **maintenance grant** (help with living costs) and a **fee grant** (help with the student contribution charge).

## **BTEA – Back to Education Allowance**

A payment for people who are already receiving certain social welfare payments and want to return to full-time education.

## **SAA – Student Accommodation Assistance**

Financial support to help with the cost of rent while studying.

## **SAF – Student Assistance Fund**

Extra financial help for students who are already in college or university and are experiencing financial difficulty.

## **Access Office**

A support service in colleges and universities which helps students before and during their studies.

## **Mature Student**

A mature student is someone who starts college or university at 23 years of age or older. For entry in 2026, this means you must be born on or before January 1st 2003 to qualify.

# Key application dates and steps

Application	What to do	When
<b>CAO</b>	Apply early and pay a lower fee	By 5 pm on 20 January 2026 (€35)
<b>CAO</b>	Final date to apply	By 5 pm on 1 February 2026 (€50)
<b>HEAR / DARE</b>	Tick the HEAR and/or DARE boxes on the CAO form	When applying to the CAO
<b>HEAR / DARE</b>	Fill in the CAO Supplementary Form	By 5 pm on 1 February 2026
<b>Mature student</b>	Fill in the Mature Applicant Form	By 5 pm on 1 February 2026
<b>HEAR Priority (Traveller and Roma)</b>	If you are applying for HEAR priority as a Traveller or Roma student, you need to upload a short letter from your school or community organisation that confirms this	By 10 March 2026
<b>SUSI</b>	Apply online for the student grant	From April 2026

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## 01

# How to apply to Higher Education

This section gives an overview of how to apply to a college or university in Ireland through the CAO, including deadlines, and what to do if you are applying as a Mature student.

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## Applying through the CAO

The CAO is the central point for applying for most college or university places in Ireland.

### How do I apply?

Applications are made online through the [CAO website](#).

When applying through the CAO, you should:

- Complete the [online application form](#)
- Use the same name that appears on your birth certificate or passport (this is important)
- Check all details carefully before submitting your application

Some applicants may need to upload documents, for example, certificates or proof of English language ability.

*For more information, please refer to the [CAO Handbook](#).*

## When do I apply?

- The last date to apply is 5 pm on 1st February
- If you apply before 5 pm on 20th January, the application fee is €35
- After this date, the fee is €50

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## Applying through the CAO as a Mature Student

A mature student is someone who starts college or university at 23 years of age or older. For entry in 2026, this means you must be born on or before January 1st 2003.

Mature students apply through the same [CAO system](#).

## How do I apply?

If you are applying as a Mature student, you must:

- Apply through the [CAO](#) by 5 pm on 1st February
- Complete the [Mature Applicant Form](#) as part of your CAO application

Some colleges and universities may ask for extra information (for example, a personal statement or additional forms). These requirements can differ between colleges and universities.

*For more information, please refer to the [Mature Student Guide/CAO Handbook](#) and contact the [Mature Student Officer](#), or [Access Office](#) in the college or university you are applying to.*

## When do I apply?

- You must apply through the CAO before 5 pm on 1 February.

- The deadline for the Mature Applicant Form is 5 pm on 1 March.

**Important to know**

You must apply through the CAO by 5 pm on 1 February.

## 02

# Access Routes to Higher Education

This section gives an overview of access routes. Access routes are special schemes that help students who may face barriers to entering college or university, including Travellers and Roma.

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## Higher Education Access Route (HEAR)

The Higher Education Access Route (HEAR) is an access route for Leaving Certificate students (under 23 years of age) who come from disadvantaged backgrounds.

HEAR can help students by:

- Offering reduced points for some courses
- Reserving places for eligible applicants
- Providing extra supports once a student starts college or university

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## Traveller and Roma priority under HEAR

Travellers and Roma are now recognised as a priority group under HEAR.

If you identify as a Traveller or Roma:

- You are given the highest priority when colleges look at HEAR applications
- You do not need to complete a financial (means) test

## How do I apply?

To apply under the Traveller and Roma priority, you must:

- Apply through the CAO
- Agree to be considered for HEAR by ticking the box that asks this question (See [video](#) for instructions)
- Identify as a Traveller or Roma applicant

## Upload a School or Community Reference Letter

If you choose Traveller or Roma priority, you must upload one reference letter.

The letter can come from:

- your school, or
- a community organisation or group (For example, a Traveller organisation or group working with Roma)

The letter must:

- be on official headed paper
- be signed and stamped
- include:
  - Your full name (as used on your CAO application)
  - Your CAO number
  - a statement confirming that you are applying under Traveller or Roma priority

*For more information, please refer to the [HEAR Handbook](#).*

## When do I apply?

- Register for HEAR by ticking the HEAR box on the CAO application form.
- The deadline for CAO applications is 5 pm on February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2026
- The HEAR Document deadline is March 10, 2026.

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## Disability Access Route to Education (DARE)

The Disability Access Route to Education (DARE) is an access route for Leaving Certificate students (under 23 years of age) who have a disability that has affected their education.

### How do I apply?

To apply for DARE, you must:

- Apply through the [CAO](#)
- Agree to be considered for DARE by ticking the box that asks this question (See [video](#) for instructions)
- Provide documents that confirm:
  - Your disability, and
  - How the disability has affected your education

DARE covers a [wide range of disabilities](#), including physical, learning, mental health, and long-term conditions.

*For more information, please refer to the [DARE Handbook](#).*

### When do I apply?

- Register for DARE by ticking the DARE box on the CAO application form.
- The deadline for CAO applications is 5 pm on February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2026

- Complete [the CAO Supplementary Form](#) by 5 pm on February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2026

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## Applying for HEAR and DARE together

Some students may be eligible for both HEAR and DARE.

If you are a Traveller or Roma and you also have a disability, you can apply for both schemes.

Applying for both can:

- Increase your chance of receiving a reduced-points offer, and
- Allow you to access supports linked to both HEAR and DARE

### **Important to know**

Reduced points do not add together. You will receive a reduced-points offer under one scheme only, but you may still receive supports linked to both schemes.

### **Important to know**

The HEAR and DARE schemes are for school leavers under 23 years of age.

They do not apply to mature students.

You may still be able to access supports or alternative entry routes. For mature students, these are usually provided directly by colleges or universities.

## 03

# Funding for Higher Education

This section gives an overview of the main financial supports available to students, including Traveller and Roma. It focuses on the student grant (SUSI) and the Back to Education Allowance (BTEA)

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## Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI)

Most students in Ireland who receive financial support get it through SUSI.

SUSI is the student grant system.

It can help with:

- Living costs, such as food, travel, and accommodation. This is called a maintenance grant.
- Paying the student contribution charge, which is a yearly payment you make to your college for things like exams and student services. This is called a Fee grant

Not every student qualifies, but many students do. Travellers and Roma are encouraged to apply.

The SUSI website has an [Eligibility Indicator](#). It asks a few short questions to help you see if you might qualify.

## How do I apply?

- Applications are made online at: [www.susi.ie](http://www.susi.ie)

## When do I apply?

You can apply for SUSI:

- Before you get your Leaving Certificate results
- Before you are offered a college or university

You will only receive payments after:

- You accept a place, and
- You register with your college or university

SUSI applications open in April, and you should apply as soon as possible. Deadlines can vary.

*For more information, please refer to the [SUSI Guide](#).*

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## Back to Education Allowance (BTEA)

The Back to Education Allowance (BTEA) is a payment for people who are already getting certain social welfare payments and want to return to full-time education.

BTEA allows you to keep an income while you study.

You may be eligible for BTEA if:

- You are receiving a [qualifying social welfare payment](#)
- You are returning to education at a higher level than you studied before (for example, moving from a PLC course to a university course)
- You meet the [age and time rules](#) (these depend on the type of course)

*For more information, please refer to the [Citizens Information webpage](#).*

### **Important to know**

If you receive BTEA, you cannot receive the SUSI maintenance grant (which pays for things like food, travel, and accommodation) at the same time.

However, you should still apply to SUSI, as you may qualify for the fee grant (which pays for the student contribution charge)

## **How do I apply?**

- Applications are made through the [Department of Social Protection](#)
- You will need to complete a [Back to Education Allowance Application Form](#)
- You will need confirmation from your college that you are registered as a full-time student

## **When do I apply?**

- Apply before your course starts, or
- Within 30 days of starting your course

*For full details, contact [your Intreo Office](#) or visit the Department of [Social Protection website](#).*

## 04

# Bursaries and Scholarships

This section gives an overview of bursaries and scholarships that can offer additional financial support to students, including Travellers and Roma. These supports can help with costs such as rent, travel, food, and childcare.

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### Important to know

The bursaries and scholarships listed in this section are income disregarded.

This means they do not affect:

- Your SUSI grant,
- or
- Means-tested social welfare payments, such as the Back to Education Allowance (BTEA).

## The 1916 Bursary

[The 1916 Bursary](#) is a financial support for students in higher education who are from under-represented groups, including Travellers and Roma.

It is designed to support students who may face financial barriers to starting or continuing college or university.

If you are successful, the bursary provides €2,000 or €5,000 per year.

You can use this money for study-related costs such as rent, travel, food, or childcare.

Both **Leaving Certificate** students and **Mature students** can apply.

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## Priority for Traveller and Roma students

If you are a Traveller or Roma and you meet the basic eligibility rules, you are treated as a priority applicant for the 1916 Bursary.

This means you have a better chance of receiving the bursary.

### How do I apply?

- Applications are made online through the [1916 Bursary portal](#)
- Your college or university [Access Office](#) can help you with the application
- You will be asked to confirm financial and personal details as part of the process

*For more information, please refer to the [1916 Bursary website](#).*

### When do I apply?

- Applications usually open in September and close in early October
- Dates can change each year, so it is important to check the [1916 Bursary website](#) for the most up-to-date information

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## Student Assistance Fund (SAF)

The Student Assistance Fund (SAF) offers additional financial support to students currently enrolled in college or university who are facing financial difficulties.

It is available in [most colleges and universities](#) in Ireland and is designed to help you stay in education.

The SAF can help with day-to-day costs, such as:

- rent or heating
- food and essential travel
- books, equipment, or study materials
- childcare costs

#### **Important to know**

The SAF cannot be used to pay tuition or contribution charges.

### **How do I apply?**

- Applications are made through your college
- Contact the [Access Office](#), Student Services, or Student Welfare Office

### **When do I apply?**

- If you are experiencing financial difficulty, contact your college as soon as possible for advice and support.

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## **Uversity Scholarship for Adult Learners**

Uversity is a charity that offers scholarships for Mature students (aged 23 or over) who are returning to education, including Travellers and Roma.

You may be able to apply if:

- You are a Mature student (aged 23 or over)

- You are studying for your first undergraduate degree
- You meet Uversity's [eligibility criteria](#)

## How do I apply?

- Applications are made directly to Uversity
- You apply online [through the Uversity website](#)

*For more information, please refer to the [Uversity website](#).*

## When do I apply?

- Applications for scholarships open on the 1st of February 2026
- They close on the 31st of March 2026

## 05

# Additional Supports

This section gives an overview of additional supports that may help you while you are studying, including help with accommodation, childcare, and local supports within colleges and universities.

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## Student Accommodation Assistance (SAA)

The Student Accommodation Assistance (SAA) is a financial support to help with the cost of rent while studying.

It is for Traveller and Roma students, and for students with care experience, who need to live away from home to attend college or university.

SAA can cover rental costs up to €6,000

You may be eligible for SAA if:

- You are a Traveller or Roma student
- You are studying full-time or part-time at college or university  
*(mature and repeat students may also apply)*
- You need to live away from home to attend college
- You are not already getting another rent support, such as HAP or Rent Supplement

For more information, please visit the [Department of Education's website](#).

## How do I apply?

- Applications are made through your college
- Contact the [Access Office](#) or Student Support Office
- You will need to provide proof of where you live, such as a tenancy or licence agreement.

## When do I apply?

- The closing date for the second round of applications is the 6th of February 2026.

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## National Childcare Scheme

The National Childcare Scheme (NCS) helps parents with the cost of childcare.

If you are a parent and a student, you may be able to get help with childcare while you are studying

The NCS can provide:

- Help with childcare costs
- Up to 45 hours per week of subsidised childcare if you are studying or training

There are different types of [subsidies, depending on your income](#).

More details about eligibility and subsidies can be found in the [NCS Application Guide](#)

## How do I apply?

- Apply online on the [NCS website](#)
- You will need details about:

- your child
- your childcare provider
- your income

## **When do I apply?**

- You can apply at any time
- It is best to apply as soon as you know you will need childcare

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## **Supports available in college or university**

Most colleges and universities in Ireland have local supports to help students, including Traveller and Roma students. These supports are usually provided through the Access Office or Student Services Office.

Support may include:

- Help with applications and paperwork
- Advice about funding and accommodation
- Academic and personal support during your studies

## **Access Offices and who to contact**

The Access Office is often the first place to go if you need support.

You can:

- Contact the [Access Office](#) at the college or university you are interested in
- Ask about supports for Traveller and Roma students.

A list of Access Office contact details, and Traveller and Roma education workers (where available), can be found on the [Pavee Point website](#).