**Ahead survey - Learning from Home During Covid-19: A Report of Irish FET and HE Students with Disabilities**

 AHEAD is delighted to release 'Learning from Home During Covid-19: A Survey of Irish FET and HE Students with Disabilities' - a report gathering the findings of an AHEAD survey of learners with disabilities.

Overnight, our further education and training (FET) centres and higher education (HE) institutions were pushed into remotely delivering the programmes that are so vital to the lives of our learners, without the chance to fully plan and prepare. Yet they showed remarkable commitment and innovation in moving quickly and nimbly to support learners through this difficult time to try to ensure they remained engaged with their learning in an equitable way.

The report hopes to authentically gather the experiences of learners with disabilities and bring their voice to the decision-making process about our response as a sector and a nation. It seeks to use the use the voice of learners to highlight key challenges and issues which we can collectively address together – government bodies, institutions, ETBs, teaching staff and independent bodies like AHEAD all have a role to play in responding effectively.

We hope that this research, alongside the many other valuable pieces of work being conducted by others in the sector, can contribute to informing the response of the sector and help to create better outcomes for learners with disabilities on the ground.

**Report Summary:**

601 responses to 34 questions.

April 9th to 27th 2020.

25 of 26 counties represented.

66% HE and 34% FE.

Spld 34%

Mental Health 22%

Other 18%

ASD 14%

DCD 13%

ADD 10%

SOI 7%

Neuro 7%

Physical 7

Speech 5%

Blind VI 4%

Dearf HoH 4%

(total 145 –  at least 45% with multiple disabilities)

Findings under Key Headings:

* How students are coping
* Accessibility
* Assistive Technologies
* Home Setup and Technology
* Biggest Challenges – Learning and assessment
* Information from College/Centre
* Financial Concerns
* Recommendations

KEY STATISTICS

Ø  More than half of the respondents either disagreed (35%) or strongly disagreed (17%) with the statement ‘I am coping well with learning from home’. One quarter of respondents either agreed (22%) or strongly agreed (3%) with the statement, while 23% said they neither agreed nor disagreed.

Ø  Students with disabilities in FET programmes were significantly more likely to agree or strongly agree (37%) that they were coping well with learning from home than students in higher education undergraduate (18%) or postgraduate (20%) programmes.

Ø  Students who have the highest percentage of negative reaction (disagree or strongly disagree) to the statement ‘I am coping well with learning from home’ are those with a Mental Health Condition (67%), ADD/ADHD (62%) or a Specific Learning Difficulty (58%).

Ø  42% of responding students said they agreed (39%) or strongly agreed (7%) with the statement ‘My lecturers/teachers have considered accessibility in the online learning materials they are providing me with’ while 27% said they disagreed (20%) or strongly disagreed (7%) with the statement.

Ø  Just over one quarter of the respondents (26%) said that they used Assistive Technologies (AT). Of the students who said they did use AT, 72% said they had no difficulty accessing or using their AT in their learning from home, while 28% said they had experienced some issues in this regard.

Ø  The five biggest challenges or concerns reported by the respondents about taking their upcoming assessments from home were ‘worries concerning new type of assessment’ (53%), ‘distractions/other demands at home’ (49%), a ‘lack of clarity around whether/how accommodations for exams/assessments will be provided’ (30%), the ‘reliability of my internet/internet shared with other members of household’ (29%) and a ‘lack of clarity about how we will be assessed’ (28%).

Ø  Of those who said they had access to a laptop, 24% said it was a shared laptop used also by other family members or housemates while 76% said it was solely for their own use. The percentage of students who are learning with a laptop/pc that is shared with another family member/housemate was notably higher in FET programmes (31%) than in HE undergrad (21%) or postgrad (13%) programmes.

Recommendations:

When the Covid-19 restrictions are reduced, prioritise campus face to face access to counselling services for learners with Mental Health Difficulties, particularly those with diagnosed illnesses. In the meantime, ensure counselling services reach out to contact learners most at risk and provide online counselling where possible.»Provide learners with a choice of assessment/access to alternative assessment to mitigate against the numerous barriers which may prevent them from being able to participate effectively in exams on any given day (personal, technological, accessibility, assessment overload etc). When designing assessments, consider how learners with poor internet access, badly performing technologies and family demands/distractions have an equal opportunity to complete their programme.»

Ensure maximum flexibility is provided to learners regarding deadlines. Call on departments to coordinate deadlines of newly introduced continuous assessments and exams so that they are spaced out and give learners ample time to complete with due consideration given to the potential difficult personal circumstances/home set up which may impact on learners’ ability to engage.

[Click here to access the Full Covid-19 Learning from Home Report>>](https://www.ahead.ie/userfiles/files/shop/free/Learning%20from%20Home%20During%20Covid-19%20-%20A%20Survey%20of%20Irish%20FET%20and%20HE%20Students%20with%20Disabilities.pdf)

If you would like any further information about this report please email [ahead@ahead.ie](mailto:ahead@ahead.ie).