



DARE HEAR Access Project Officer: 13-Month Fixed Term Contract (November 2026 – December 2027)

The Irish Universities Association (IUA), the representative body for Ireland's leading universities, invites applications for the role of DARE HEAR Access Project Officer for a 13-month fixed term contract, commencing November 2026.

About the IUA

The IUA represents Ireland's research-intensive universities: Dublin City University (DCU), Maynooth University (MU), Trinity College Dublin (TCD), University of Galway, University College Dublin (UCD), University College Cork (UCC), and University of Limerick (UL).

The IUA acts as the sectoral voice for its university members and is committed to:

- Articulating the importance and value of university education
- Advocating for the university system at national and international levels
- Engaging in effective liaison with the State and its agencies
- Supporting universities to prepare for future challenges
- Developing sectoral strategies and policies
- Maximising higher education's contribution to society and the economy

About IUA Access

IUA Access works in close partnership with all participating higher education institutions (HEIs) to promote inclusive access and disability policies, including the management and ongoing development of the [Disability Access Route to Education \(DARE\)](#) and the [Higher Education Access Route \(HEAR\)](#) schemes. These are delivered in collaboration with the Central Applications Office (CAO), which oversees applications, assessment, and eligibility outcomes each year. IUA Access reports to the IUA Registrars group, which sets and endorses the strategic direction of access affairs. Since their national adoption in 2009, the DARE and HEAR schemes have become the principal vehicles for widening participation in Irish higher education, with all public HEIs now participating. Today, over 20% of all CAO applicants apply through DARE or HEAR.

Given the national impact of the DARE and HEAR schemes, ongoing review and refinement take place on a regular basis. This includes the DARE Review (2025–2027), now underway, and the continued embedding of recently revised HEAR eligibility criteria and verification methods. To support the delivery of both schemes, HEI Registrars have approved an associated timeline and budget for this work.

Arising from a vacancy, IUA is now seeking to recruit a DARE HEAR Access Project Officer for a 13-month period (November 2026 – December 2027). This role will support the annual operations of both schemes, enabling the IUA Head of Access to focus on the strategic delivery of the DARE Review project.

Role Overview

The Access Project Officer will play a critical role in leading the annual delivery of the DARE and HEAR schemes, with a specific focus on

- Embedding the revised HEAR scheme criteria
- Strengthening operational consistency and sector-wide collaboration

Reporting to the IUA Head of Access, the successful candidate will engage extensively with HEIs, the CAO, and key external stakeholders.

Key Responsibilities

- Provide administrative support for relevant groups such as the DARE HEAR Practitioners Group and DARE HEAR Communication Group
- Coordinate all assessment structures such as the recruitment of HEI supervisors, external representative for Advisory Boards, training for DARE HEAR outcomes and Review and Appeals panel members
- Work with the CAO Coordinator to draft and refine operational instructions for applicants, schools, and HEIs
- Collaborate with the CAO to support implementation of these instructions and ensure consistent application across institutions
- Monitor outcomes of application and assessment processes to verify intended results
- Analyse and monitor DARE HEAR data to support policy development, identify emerging risks and ensure impact, oversight and coherence in line with the schemes' overall strategic objectives
- Produce ongoing and annual reports for steering groups and working groups to inform policy and risk mitigation
- Support HEIs in building their capacity to participate in and contribute to DARE HEAR processes
- Manage relationships with key external stakeholders (e.g., IGC, NEPS, Department of Social Protection) to ensure alignment with broader educational and social policy
- Serve as a central point of contact for CAO, HEIs, and other stakeholders on DARE/HEAR criteria and policy queries (e.g. disputed applications, Ombudsman cases)
- Lead the creation and dissemination of communications materials (e.g., handbooks, flyers, video explainers, online guides)
- Develop and maintain collaborative digital workspaces (e.g., MS Teams, shared drives) for standing groups such as DARE HEAR Practitioners
- Oversee the maintenance and development of AccessCollege.ie website, ensuring content accuracy and user accessibility
- Contribute to national social media outreach campaigns, engaging second-level students, families, and guidance counsellors

Candidate Profile

This is a project and stakeholder management role with significant operational responsibilities. It requires a candidate who is confident, strategic, and highly collaborative, with the ability to support a national programme of high policy relevance.

Essential Requirements

- Minimum 3 years' experience in access, disability, education outreach, or community development roles
- Practical understanding of access, disability, and inclusion policies and work environments across the post-primary and higher education sectors in Ireland
- NFQ Level 8 Honours Bachelor degree or equivalent
- Excellent communication, negotiation, presentation and stakeholder engagement skills
- Proven ability to work with diplomacy and manage competing priorities in complex environments
- Strong leadership, emotional intelligence, and personal resilience
- Socio-cultural awareness of the lived experience of target group applicants to both DARE and HEAR
- Demonstrated experience in project and people management, with a collaborative and solutions-focused approach
- Excellent planning, organisation, IT, and writing skills
- Awareness of the role of social media in access and education outreach (e.g., Instagram, X/Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn)

Desirable

- Research, evaluation, and critical analysis skills relevant to education or access policy
- Experience delivering large-scale or multi-institutional projects
- Familiarity with Canva, website CMS tools, and collaborative platforms (e.g., SharePoint, MS Teams)
- Experience managing communications for underrepresented communities
- Practical understanding of universal design of learning (UDL) and the applications of AI based tools for project management

Contract Details

- Duration: Fixed-term contract (November 2026 – December 2027), subject to probation and performance reviews
- Location: Flexible/hybrid working model – an expectation of 3 days per week in IUA's Merrion Square office (Dublin 2) and 2 days from home, with some additional in-person attendance required at key times of the year
- Salary: €55,000–€60,000 per annum (commensurate with experience)
- Annual Leave: 25 days (excluding bank holidays)
- Travel: Occasional domestic travel required

- Working Hours: May involve occasional evening or weekend hours
- Secondment: May be considered for existing public-sector employees, subject to agreement

Application Details

Please submit a concise CV and a one-page cover letter outlining your interest in the role and demonstrating how your experience aligns with the required competencies. Applications should be sent by email to Majella.burns@iua.ie no later than 12:59pm on Sunday 4th October 2026.

Queries may be addressed to Daniel McFarlane, IUA Head of Access at daniel.mcfarlane@iua.ie

Interviews are scheduled to take place in person, at IUA offices, on 16th October 2026.