Mary Immaculate College

HEADSTART
(Mature Student 'Prep for College' Programme)

Overview of Initiative

The HEADSTART programme is targeted at incoming UG mature students. HEADSTART was developed to encourage prospective students to sustain their motivation to start their chosen course and allay any fears around commencing a HE programme. The programme supports student progression, retention and completion through fostering a sense of belonging within participants from the outset, encouraging peer support amongst the mature student cohort, and promoting early engagement with key support services that will assist them to progress and succeed in HE.

The programme has run for two years, over one day, during the summer period. Activities include information sessions from college administration and support services, and workshops focused on building confidence, addressing imposter syndrome, and IT skills. The programme is co-delivered by current mature students, who provide a campus tour and ice-breaker activities and share their own experiences. Opportunities for informal relationship building with other students and staff are facilitated. Participation has grown from 11 in year 1 to 15 in year 2. The programme will be extended to the College's Thurles campus in 2026.

Key Features

- First-year students
- Student wellbeing, experience, & success focus
- Early intervention initiative
- Targeted initiative

Aims & Objectives

Aim: To enhance student transition to and progression within Higher Education amongst the mature student cohort, through a proactive and inclusive programme, addressing belonging, confidence and skills for college. It also aims to provide information and guidance from, and early engagement with, key services, and initiate peer support systems.

Objective 1: To support mature students in their transition into Higher Education, particularly those from SED backgrounds.

Objective 2: To support student progression and retention through fostering a sense of belonging, encouraging peer support amongst the mature student cohort, and promoting early engagement with key support services.

Institutional/National Context

- National Access Plan
- MIC Strategic Plan
- MIC Student Success Framework
- MIC Performance Agreement

Monitoring & Oversight

The programme is evaluated annually, and reports are submitted to the HEA, as part of the PATH 1 reporting requirements, and to MIC's Director of Student Life, who feeds into the Equality Committee and President's Report. Although the requirement to report to the HEA no longer exists, the evaluations will continue and the results will be reported on internally, and actioned as required, within MIC.

Data & Evidence of Impact

Surveys/psychometric tools will be used to evaluate how the programme contributes to participants' sense of belonging and ability to seek help, including tools to measure mature students' general sense of belonging before and after transitioning into higher education (e.g. University Belonging Questionnaire (UBQ) or Yorke Sense of Belonging Scale). Surveys conducted with participants to date show that participants' confidence in starting their programme increased by 31% in Year 1 and 35% in Year 2 post completion of the HEADSTART programme.
Enrolment, progression and completion rates will continue to be tracked.