



DKIT STUDENT SERVICES ANNUAL REPORT

2018-2019

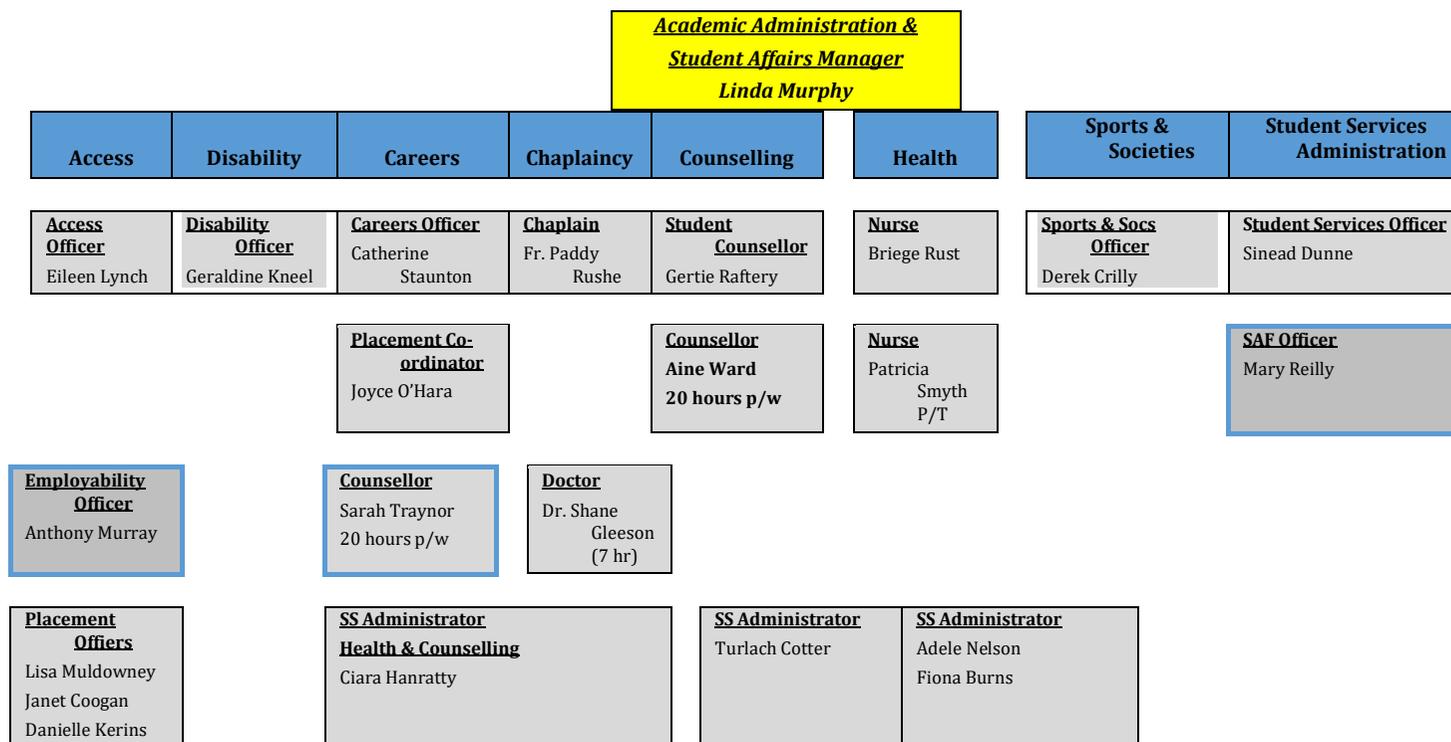


1.1 Background

Student Services which operates under the office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs and Registrar are a team of professional service providers who support students in actively engaging in their third level experience. The Services are currently aimed at full-time undergraduate, postgraduate, Springboard and Apprentice Students. The Institute Faulkner Building brings together all of the Services (with the exception of the Access & Disability Offices which are located in the Carroll's Building). These Services are detailed as follows:

- Access
- Disability
- Careers & Employability
- Chaplaincy
- Student Counselling
- Health
- Sports & Societies
- Student Services Centre

1.2 Student Services – Organisation Chart



1.3 Developments

- In partnership with access colleagues in the MEND region (Athlone IT, Maynooth University and DCU) we received funding from the HEA of €2.167 million under PATH 3 for a College Connect project over the next three years. Recruitment is underway for a Community Connector, to be based in DkIT and funded by the project.
- The MEND cluster also received funding under PATH 2 in the form of 1916 Bursaries with DkIT received 10 1916 bursaries to award each year. The application process opened at the end of January and following a detailed assessment process, bursary allocations were made to ten DkIT students in March.
- In co-operation with Louth Leader Partnership, the 'PATHWAYS' access course operated from three locations in County Louth: Dundalk, Ardee and Drogheda. Thirty-eight participants received certificates of attendance at a ceremony on campus in January.
- The Careers and Employability Centre successfully co-ordinated the National Graduate Outcomes Survey for 2017 with a 56% response rate. The Service also contributed an insight piece entitled, *Regional Employability, SME's and Graduate Outcomes Survey* to a HEA report on the 2017 Graduate Outcomes Survey.
- The Placement Office were proud finalists in the category for Career Impact Strategy Award in the recent Irish Times Education Awards 2019 with the paper "Work Placement Model, Embedding Employability in Dundalk Institute of Technology".
- The Careers & Employability Centre in conjunction with the Registrar's Office have designed a 30 Credit Placement Module for applicability across all disciplines. This module has been externally validated and will be approved by DkIT Academic Council.
- The Careers & Employability Centre is a partner on a project funded by the Teaching & Learning Enhancement Fund 2018, Partners in Employability: A student-staff collaboration to develop an award to recognise the skills developed by active student engagement.
- The Careers & Employability Centre have developed a Moodle Page with dedicated Careers resources, accessible by all student and staff. The Service are also extending the use of the CRM Careers Connect, increasing student engagement and providing staff with access to the portal.
- Over 65 exhibitors attended the Annual DkIT Careers & Industry Fair in November 2018 and the Placement Office presented on their work placement model and the value of partnership and sustainable relationships.
- The Counselling Services nationally attracted funding of €1.5m under the HEA Innovation and Transformation fund to standardise statistical gathering of data so the sector can benchmark more accurately, pool resources and best practice around suicide prevention, critical incident response and interagency collaborations, and development of best practice models on student to student mentoring.
- The Counselling Service prepared a proposal around Social Prescription with an aim of accessing Strategic Initiative Funding.

- The Health Unit implemented a practice management system.
- The Health Unit co-ordinated and managed a Health Promotion Fair in the second semester.
- Student Sport Ireland have introduced a grading system for college competitions: 'Student Sport Ireland Sports College of the Year' awarding points for participation and performance at third level sporting competitions. We finished 9th overall and 3rd for Institutes of Technology which is a huge achievement for a college of our size
- All sporting teams performed extremely well in their respective competitions. Some of the most notable achievements were the Ladies GAA team winning the Donaghy Cup and the Freshers FAA team winning the All Ireland Division 2 championship. The Dundalk 10K run was again a huge success with over 900 participants taking part. Over €30K has been raised for charity since 2014.

1.4 Community Collaborations

- The Access Officer is the DkIT representative on the board of Louth Leader Partnership and is also on the board of Ogra Dun Dealgan (Magnet Community Training Centre).
- The Careers & Employability Centre hosted the Cross Border Careers Fair in conjunction with EURES Cross Border Partnership and have delivered CV seminar/clinics at events organised by the Department of Employment Affairs & Social Protection and GradIreland.
- The Careers & Employability Centre presented and promoted their service at Dundalk Chamber of Commerce, The Mill Enterprise Centre, Drogheda and at the Creative Spark Industry Day.
- The Careers & Employability Service organised and facilitated "The Future of Employability" with guest speakers from PayCheck Plus, Prometric and Tekenable with current placements students and graduates the DkIT Open Day. The Service also organised and facilitated the session "Building the Region Together" with guest speakers from pharma and engineering industry, CombiLift and WuXi Biologics and final year and post grad students from Engineering, Science, Youthwork and Event Management.
- The Counselling Service facilitated Toastmasters to conduct two courses with students who have difficulty with presentations. These courses were well attended.
- The Disability Service liaise with Employability Louth to assist in the work placement of students during their programme and after graduation.
- AsIAM training was facilitated by the Disability Service and attended by 45 DkIT staff members.

- The Health Unit continues to collaborate with the dedicated service providers in both the Ladywell Psychiatric Daycentre in Dundalk and the Crosslanes Psychiatric Centre in Drogheda and with the HSE Young Person at Risk Nurse for this area.
- The Sports and Societies Office hosted the following events: Lennon cup All Starts (U18 GAA Schools), the Rugby Future Stars (U18 Rugby all star team in conjunction with Leinster Rugby), Brendan Carthy (U16 GAA Schools), Dundalk 10K run, Leinster Rugby youth training summer camps.
- The Sports and Societies Office have strong links with the following organisations in the region: Louth Volunteer Centre, working with Leinster Rugby to become one of its five regional centres, Manage and co-ordinate sports scholarships in collaboration with Louth GAA, Dundalk FC and Dundalk Rugby Club

1.5 Collaborations with other Higher Education Institutions nationally and internationally

- The Access Officer is the THEA representative for MS (Mature Students Ireland) and AMA (national body of access officers).
- The Careers and Employability Centre are members of the Association for Higher Education Careers Services (AHECS) and members of the AHECS Work Placement Task Group. They have attended GTi CareersConnect User Group Training in University of Limerick and are members of gradIreland Career Services Committee.
- The Counselling Service was part of the executive for the national counselling body PCHEI and was involved in the preparation for the successful bid for funding to the HEA Innovation and Transformation Fund. The DkIT Student Counsellor has been elected as chair of the organisation from May 2019.
- The Counselling Service participated on the advisory board of ESHTe (Ending Sexual Harassment at Third Level) and has consulted with the Minister on Drug use in Third Level.
- The Counselling Service has liaised with external agencies regarding Consent and Bystander Training
- The Sports and Societies Officer is a member of the Student Sport Ireland 'Physical Activity and Health' committee

2. STUDENT SERVICES IMPACT

2.1 Data Gathering

Data from users is gathered on an ongoing basis by Service Providers and service satisfaction and usage, where practical, is recorded. Each Service reports annually on activities which forms part of this report. Student Services conduct an annual survey of all students regarding the services however this year participation in the survey was extremely low. Participation in the Survey needs to be reviewed. This year an on-line survey was developed to measure staff awareness of Services and their view on the impact of the services in relation to student retention.

2.2 Service Usage

Service	Activity	Student No's 2016/17	Student No's 2017/18	Student No's 2018/19
Careers	Appointments	363	395	479
	Placements			732
	Employers & Job Vacancy Activity	351	499	203 Jobs advertised
Health	Visits to Unit	2,805	2,773	2,660
Counselling	No. of clients	320	345	407
Disability	No's registered	274	290	291
Sports & Societies	Members	2,875	3,000	
Student Assistance Fund	No of applicants	344	385	408

Numbers of students availing of the Counselling Service has again increased for the 2018/19 academic year by 15% meaning this was their busiest year since the service started 16 years ago. This increase meant the Service had to operate a waiting list during the first semester. The DNA rate at 6% and cancellation figures of 11% remain very similar to last year and low for the sector. The numbers of males accessing the service has increased by 8% on the previous year. Average number of sessions per client is 3.8 which compares favourably with the national average of 3.5. The numbers with a psychological disability have reduced this year but this is as a result of the Service applying the disability office definition which is a diagnosis by a psychiatrist of a condition that is enduring for over six months. Even given the application of this stringent criterion the numbers are still quite shocking and account for 7% of clients. Anxiety is by far the most common presenting issue. The national figures indicate an increase in Suicide and Self harm up to 10% which mirrors exactly the figures in the Institute. There were 7 clients who reported rape, 5 who reported sexual assault and 5 who have been sexually abused all of which bears out the reported increase in this type of crime. At assessment 35 clients were assessed as at risk. Risk criteria include suicidal thoughts, evidence of a suicide plan, previous suicide attempt, history of self-harming, isolation and lack of social support network. Of these 35, five were assessed as moderate risk and one as severe. The numbers attending the Health Unit remain high. The Service provides acute medical care to students and refers more long term medical care back to their GP's. The Service continues to observe an increasing number of international students presenting with pre-existing medical conditions and in particular psychiatric illness. Ideally all international students should provide correspondence from their medical health personnel to assist in the planning for their care.

The Disability Service has once again seen an increase in numbers registered with the Service from the previous year. Not all students registered with the Service qualify for support from the Fund for Students with Disability (FSD). The greatest numbers of students are presenting with Specific Learning Difficulties followed by significant on-going illness, mental health issues, Autism Spectrum Disorder and Dyspraxia. The numbers of students seeking financial support continues to rise. The funding provided to the Institute was down by over €13K on the previous year resulting in a decrease of 8 students being supported by the fund. The numbers availing of one to one Career guidance support have increased by almost 18% on the previous year.

2.3 Feedback from Service Users

Most of the Services conduct surveys with users on an on-going basis. The majority of those surveyed have expressed satisfaction with the impact of the Service.

- Feedback from incoming mature students is very positive in relation to services provided by the Access Office. Pre entry and post entry engagement was surveyed, as well as their experience of the mature induction event.
- The Counselling Service use a standardised measure of counselling impact on academic outcomes used across colleges in the UK to measure user satisfaction. In DkIT 87.5% of service users said that counselling helped them to stay in college with 70% stating it was an important or most significant actor in helping them stay and 93% stating it helped them do better in their academic work and 96% saying it improved their overall experience of college.
- At assessment 76 students were often or most of the time thinking of dropping out of their course. This dropped to just 17 following Counselling which means that Counselling contributed to the retention for 56 students at an average cost saving to the Institute of approximately €377k based on €6.5k per student coming to college.
- Students registered with the Disability Service continue to highlight issues with Learning Agreements being communicated to academic staff. ☒ A number of students expressed dissatisfaction with accessing the Doctor with the hours provided and that the Health Service was not as comprehensive as their expectations of a general practice. The Service provides acute medical service and not a general medical service in line with budget.
- Sports and Societies surveyed users of their service with 84% of respondents stating that being a member was either somewhat important or extremely important in helping them settle in to college life as a first year and 59% of those surveyed stating that Sports and Societies was an important factor in them staying in third level with 21% stating it was the most significant factor. 84% of those surveyed stating it enhanced their college experience either greatly. 65% of students surveyed felt engaging with Sports and Societies has helped them develop skills that will be beneficial when seeking employment.

2.4 Feedback from Staff

Awareness of the Services was high amongst staff with 100% of respondents being aware of the Counselling Service with 90% awareness of most other Services. 99% of staff surveyed said they would refer students to the services if they thought they needed support however less than 50% were aware of the pathways for referral with a number of respondents requesting annual updates on contact information. Not all respondents appeared to be aware of the various workshops provided by the Services so more work on marketing with staff is required.

3. FINDINGS

Access

- There were a number of issues with the administration of the mature entry route. Files downloaded from the CAO were incomplete and this will necessitate a review of the system.
- The minimum quota of 20% of places reserved for mature students on each programme continues to be taken as a maximum quota on a number of programmes by academic staff where there may be no pressure on places.
- Mature student applications are down for the coming academic year which reflects the situation at national level. It is imperative that the Access Service is adequately financed and resourced when targeting potential mature applicants.
- An ever increasing number of mature students are entering third level straight from FETAC programmes and as a result they are more prepared for third level than mature students in the past who were not coming straight from study. This factor, as well as the fact that mature numbers are declining on a national basis, meant that attendance at the Mature Student welcome event was down on previous years.
- Availability and stability of timetables continues to be raised as a concern by mature students and other Service Providers. Students report that timetables change frequently, that lectures are cancelled at short or no notice, and that lectures tend to be 'squeezed' into the first half of the week. This has a negative impact on the students' learning experience.

Careers & Employability

- Resourcing for the Placement Office and a sustainable approach to this with increasing placement programmes following programmatic review is a cause for concern.
- Building on the connection between Careers & Placement is ongoing.
- The Service is working on developing Summer Internships opportunities for students without formal placement on their programmes.
- The Institute needs to develop a plan for Alumni engagement.

Disability Service

- Communication of Learning Agreements continues to be raised as a concern for students. The Disability Service will continue to liaise with Academic Schools to highlight the importance of communicating the LA's to staff in each School.

- Managing the budget allocation from the Fund for Students with Disabilities is challenging for the Service with not all students registered having an entitlement to the fund.
- Most other HEI's have an Assistive Technology Officer who specialises in training and advising student in the use of AT. This is fast becoming an essential requirement for the Service.

Health Unit

- ☒ The introduction of the practice management system in the Health Unit was late commencing due to unforeseen difficulties resulting in a delay in the completion of the digitalisation of our student records over the summer period. This work is to be completed over the next academic year.

Sports & Societies

- ☒ Although the Institute has excellent sporting facilities, we can improve on a number of important areas. There is an urgent requirement for the installation of floodlights on another of the outdoor sport pitches and the installation of a multipurpose floor in DkIT Sport. Lack of access to classes in DkIT Sport for students is a concern. Studies show that females in particular are more inclined to take part in physical activity in a gym setting in comparison to a team sport setting. This is an area which we need to target.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

- Events to be organised for incoming mature students post registration.
- Institute Employability Statement/Graduate Attributes to be developed.
- All Services to increase engagement with students on related supports and to develop a more robust structure for measuring type and impact of activity.
- An operational plan to be developed for Alumni engagement
- Health Unit to continue to liaise with the International Office regarding disclosure and support for international students with pre-existing medical conditions
- The Institute to resource hours for Assistive Technology Support.
- The Sports and Societies Office working to increase participation in sport by under-represented groups.
- The Institute to work with DkIT Sport to improve facilities and services for students.