



Ollscoil Chathair  
Bhaile Átha Cliath  
Dublin City University



# Access to the Workplace 2019



Pilot Impact Review





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# 440

weeks of placements  
completed by students

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# 39

companies  
took part

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# 50

students placed

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# 94%

of students would have  
been unable to achieve  
an equivalent placement  
through their own networks



# 100%

of companies plan to  
host a placement again  
next year

# €180k



earned by Access to the  
Workplace students



# €395k

additional funds pledged to  
support DCU Access Programme

# 100%

of students would  
recommend the  
programme to others

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## Access to the Workplace Origins

In 2019, DCU Educational Trust and DCU's Access Service launched the Access to the Workplace Programme to enable DCU Access students to find high-quality summer employment in established workplaces and to generate a modest income during their summer break.

In its introductory year, over 39 leading Irish companies supported 50 DCU Access students by providing them with a high quality work placement in the summer of 2019, whilst also making a philanthropic contribution to support Access scholarships at DCU.

With many DCU Access students relying on summer employment to save for the upcoming academic year, the commitment of our Access to the Workplace partners was critical in enabling students to save, while also preparing for work in a professional environment and gaining experience in their chosen field.



# DCU Access Programme

DCU believes that talented young people should have the opportunity to fulfil their potential in life - no matter who they are, or where they come from. For this reason, we established Ireland's first university Access Programme 29 years ago to make education attainable to students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. Today, it is the largest programme of its kind in Ireland with 1,258 Access students enrolled at DCU in 2018/19.



## Outreach

With just 8% of the population in some north Dublin neighbourhoods close to DCU holding a third level degree, the work of DCU's Access Programme begins early through a targeted outreach programme working with 62 linked primary and post-primary DEIS (disadvantaged) schools in North Dublin. Outreach activities are designed to raise awareness and encourage young people in these areas to consider third level education as a viable option.

## Entry routes

DCU reserves 10% of places on all undergraduate programmes to offer reduced points entry for students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. To be eligible for entry through the Higher Education Access Route (HEAR) or DCU Access Entry route, students must meet a range of financial, social and cultural indicators defined by the national HEAR scheme.

## Post-entry supports

Once enrolled in DCU, Access students receive a range of financial, academic, personal and professional supports to enable them to thrive and excel in their studies. Thanks to DCU's supporters, all Access students receive an annual scholarship, which is vital to enable students to cope with the additional financial burden which entering university presents.





**1,258** Access students in 2018/19

**320** New first year Access students in 2018

**252** Access students graduated in 2018

**97%** Access graduates achieved a higher honours degree in 2018

**3,907** Access students supported since 1990



# Levelling the Playing Field

The Access to the Workplace Programme was an innovative intervention to address an issue identified by DCU's Access Service in relation to the quality of summer work placements secured by Access students.



Whilst internships and work placements are a common component of many third level degrees today, the service identified an additional need for Access students who, due to financial pressure to save for the upcoming academic year, were unable to undertake unpaid summer internships to gain valuable professional experience. Similarly, due to more limited professional networks, they were less likely to secure paid, high quality summer work placements of relevance to their degree.

By engaging in well-paid summer work in the manufacturing, retail or service industries, Access students were able to achieve their goal of saving for the upcoming academic year. However, they would later find themselves at a disadvantage when competing for the best INTRA work

placements during their degrees or for competitive graduate programmes against more advantaged peers who had completed summer work placements in professional settings. A report released by the Higher Education Authority in 2019 has shown that this pattern continues in employment, with students from disadvantaged areas earning less than students from affluent areas after graduation.

Through Access to the Workplace, companies who had made a financial commitment to support Access scholarships, through DCU Educational Trust, were asked to extend their support to include the provision of a high-quality, paid summer work placement for Access students.







“I wanted to take part in Access to the Workplace because it’s very important for me to work when I have free time. So over Christmas and summer holidays I’d usually work in retail so I can contribute financially to the household and when I heard about this programme, it was an invaluable opportunity that I had to take.”

Lauren Heffernan, Mechatronic Engineering student and Vodafone Intern 2019.



# How it Worked

## Students

- DCU's Access Service advertised the opportunity to participate in the Access to the Workplace Programme to Access students in their second year of study at DCU
- 50 Access students participated in a series of Work Readiness modules on CV writing, interview skills and workplace etiquette

## Companies

- DCU Educational Trust advertised the opportunity to host an Access to the Workplace student placement to its networks
- All companies participating in the Access to the Workplace programme, also support the provision of Access scholarships at DCU
- Participating companies agreed to provide a quality work placement of 4 - 12 weeks duration. Students were to work 30 - 40 hours per week at a minimum rate of €10 per hour

## Matching and Placement

- Companies completed an Employer Requirements questionnaire, providing details of the proposed role and skills needed
- An Access to the Workplace Coordinator oversaw a process to deliver the best student-company match
- Students completed their work placements between June and September 2019



# Access to the Workplace 2019 Partners



39 leading Irish companies collaborated with DCU Educational Trust and DCU's Access Service to develop and deliver this pilot programme. The company partners varied in size and sector and included:

- 8 Small and medium enterprises (SMEs)
- 8 Large indigenous companies (LICs)
- 20 Multi-national companies (MNCs)
- 2 Statutory bodies
- 1 Philanthropic fund

Of these, 19 were existing supporters of DCU Educational Trust's Access Scholarship Programme and 20 made a new commitment to support Access scholarships at DCU as part of their decision to become an Access to the Workplace partner in 2019.



# Our Partners in 2019 Included:



- AIB
- AIG
- Allergan
- Alltech
- AON
- Britvic
- CAE Parc Aviation
- Citrix
- CityJet
- Codex
- Colgate Palmolive
- Collen Construction
- County Monaghan Fund
- CRH Group
- daa
- EirGrid
- Fenergo
- Highfield Healthcare
- Irish Aviation Authority

- Irish Distillers
- Marks and Spencer Ireland
- Mastercard
- Matheson
- Matthews Coach Hire
- McGarrell Reilly
- McGettigan Hotel Group
- McKeon Group
- Mondelez
- National Recruitment Federation
- National Treasury Management Agency
- Neogen
- Oracle
- Pigsback.com
- PwC
- Siemens
- Verizon
- Vodafone
- William Fry
- Willis Towers Watson





# Access to the Workplace: Evaluation and Impact

DCU Educational Trust and DCU's Access Service were keen to monitor project outcomes and to evaluate the impact of the pilot programme for both students and companies. In order to do this:

- Students completed a pre-placement survey and a post-placement reflective log
- DCU's Access Service commissioned an independent evaluation by S3 Solutions to gather additional qualitative data through 25 student and 22 company interviews to assess impact and improve programme operation





# Impact on Students



## Work readiness and quality placements:

- Pre-placement work readiness modules assisted 50 students with CV writing, interview preparation and workplace etiquette
- 50 placements provided through the Access to the Workplace 2019 pilot programme
- 440 weeks of placements were completed by participating students
- Participating students collectively earned approximately €180,000
- The quality of placements distinguished the experience, with 94% of students surveyed stating they would have been unable to secure a placement of similar quality through their own networks

## Building skills and ambition:

- 72% of students interviewed through the independent evaluation felt the programme had increased their motivation in relation to their degree and career
- 100% of students interviewed noted that the programme had helped to build their confidence and capacity in at least one of the following areas:
  - Working in an office environment
  - How to act and present yourself
  - Delivering presentations and public speaking
  - Using software and programmes
  - How to work on their own against a work plan

## A supportive experience:

- 100% of students interviewed felt that the support they received from DCU was either good or very good
- 100% of students would recommend the programme to other students



**“The reason that I wanted to take part in the Access to the Workplace Programme is because I wanted the opportunity to apply my college learning in a professional environment.”**

Emmanuella Oko, Accounting and Finance student and PwC Intern 2019.



**“Had I not gotten into this scheme, I most likely would have ended up working in a local factory. I think that this experience will benefit me greatly, I’ve learned loads of transferrable skills that will be useful for me in my future career.”**

Maitiú MacUaid, Irish and History student and Matthews Coach Hire Intern 2019.

# Impact on Companies



Partner companies provided positive feedback on their experience of taking part in Access to the Workplace, which was captured through 22 interviews as part of an independent evaluation of the pilot by S3 Solutions.

## Motivation to take part:

- It was viewed as an opportunity to build on the company's Corporate Social Responsibility strategy
- Potential to add to diversity and inclusion in the workplace
- Value in developing or deepening relationships with DCU

## Benefits for employers:

- Students helped with the immediate company workload and the company's investment in the programme was seen as "value for money"
- Students brought new thinking and perspectives into their office / workplace and helped to "freshen things up"
- Provided an opportunity for staff development by giving team members a new line management or mentoring responsibility
- Good from a sales or marketing perspective to have new thinking, particularly for companies marketing or providing products to students

## A positive experience:

- 91% of companies felt their experience of the pilot had either met or exceeded their expectations
- 100% of partner companies plan to continue the relationship and offer an Access to the Workplace placement next year
- Partners reported promoting the programme within their own networks and referring other companies to participate next year





“PwC were delighted to support the Access Programme and we have a fantastic experience of Access students working with us. It really supports our strategy of more inclusive recruitment strategies, giving us an opportunity to see key talent who may not have had the same opportunities as other candidates but are the type of people that we’re looking for.”

Emma Scott, People Partner, PwC.

“Vodafone has benefitted massively from Lauren being here over the summer, Lauren has been a pleasure to work with and so enthusiastic and just her love of tech really shines through. We wish her all the best of luck with her degree and we hope to welcome her back here in the future.”

Aidan McCarthy,  
Internship Programme Manager,  
Vodafone Ireland.



## Case Study: Student A

Student A was a second year law student who was keen to secure a summer internship or work placement to build their CV and level of experience. Prior to Access to the Workplace, they had made applications to three law firms for a summer internship and had been unsuccessful with each. Through the programme, Student A secured a work placement in one of Ireland's leading law firms, a company with 700 employees and offices in Ireland, the UK and USA.



### Expectations:

Student A was very clear that they wanted to gain experience in an office setting within the field of economics, law and politics, with a focus on building their CV and career options.

### Programme experience:

Student A commented that they really liked the office environment, enjoyed the work and also working alongside the other staff members. They felt that the experience really helped them to get an insight into the legal profession and helped to shape their module choices for the third year of their degree. Student A also felt that the work readiness workshops were good practical sessions in advance of starting the placement and commented that they found the programme team "great to deal with."

They acknowledged the opportunity that Access to the Workplace offered them and how they could not have secured the experience without the programme. Student A would "definitely" recommend the programme to other DCU Access students.





### Benefits:

Student A felt that they experienced the following key benefits from the programme:

- Connections made within the company and now feels in a much better position to secure an INTRA placement as a result of their Access to the Workplace experience
- Experience working in an office environment
- Learnt the importance of contributing to the office and communicating with others
- Improved their ability to communicate with others and proficiency with Microsoft software packages



### Reflections:

Student A feels more motivated in terms of both completing their degree and future career pathway as a result of their experience. They had a really positive experience and feel well placed to secure a good quality INTRA placement in their final year of study.

**“Definitely recommend this programme, my experience was everything I wanted and more.”**

# Case Study: Company X



Company X is a local arm of one of the largest multinational technology and design companies in the world, this specific part of the business has a workforce of 40 employees. The company representative liked the way the programme was presented by the DCUET contact they dealt with and in terms of timing, it aligned with some thoughts they are having internally around succession planning and long term development of the workforce. The current workforce is maturing, and they are exploring ways to develop their staff team in the next ten years.

### Initial motivation for getting involved:

Their initial thought process behind participating in the programme centred around:

- Getting someone with new perspectives into the company
- Supporting the student to get a good experience and a good sense of the company
- Wanted someone new to experience the culture of the company
- Part of a longer term approach to develop advocates for working in the company

### Programme experience:

Really positive experience for the company, from day one of the placement they were impressed with the student noting that they were bright and worked quickly through the initial tasks they were given. This developed into a specific data project that the company had identified, and the student completed the task to a very good standard. The rest of the staff team were very impressed with the student's work and approach and requested that the student's time with the company be extended.

The company representative noted that the student's degree was not the best fit for their company profile and work, but that the placement went really well regardless. As a result, in the future they would be putting a greater emphasis on personal qualities as opposed to student's degree course.





### Benefits:

The key benefits that they experienced through participation in the programme were:

- The student made a good contribution to their overall company workload
- It was a positive experience to have someone in their workplace that was in a different age profile from the rest of the staff team
- Staff were challenged to adapt to someone new in their working environment and the student brought new perspectives in terms of ways of working and new technology

### Reflections:

“When initially approached to get involved in the programme, we wanted to look at ways of developing advocates for our company (in terms of attracting people to work for the company in the future). What I have found is that I am now an advocate for the programme! I have already referred two other companies to encourage their participation in the programme and have also agreed to take an INTRA placement next year.”



# Find Out More

For further information, please visit:  
[dcu.ie/accesstotheworkplace](https://dcu.ie/accesstotheworkplace)

Companies interested in becoming an Access to the Workplace partner should contact DCU Educational Trust at the details below:

E: [edtrust@dcu.ie](mailto:edtrust@dcu.ie)  
T: +353 1 700 5467

Students interested in taking part in Access to the Workplace should contact the Access to the Workplace Coordinator at the details below:

E: [accesstotheworkplace@dcu.ie](mailto:accesstotheworkplace@dcu.ie)  
T: +353 1 700 8052









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