

Starting university guide for students with disabilities.

Bridging the Transition to TUS



Lisa Hanlon (TUS Athlone Disability Officer)

Table Of Contents

Welcome,	2
1. You have accepted a place in TUS - what next?	3
2. Registering with the TUS Athlone Disability Support Service.	4
3. How does university differ to school?	7
3. Other student supports & services	10
4. Financial matters:	12
5. Transition to college and mental health	13
6. Making friends and socialising	14
7. What to expect – The First 6 weeks	16
The rest of the academic year...	17
8. Useful Study skills	18
9. Organisation and time management:	20
10. Role of the Student Supporter:	21

Welcome,

You have made it, you have received your offer for a place on a course in TUS, congratulations! We hope this guide will be useful to all students, especially those with disabilities who are exploring the steps and skills needed to begin their time in University.

Transitioning to university is an exciting journey filled with new opportunities and challenges. This guide is designed to provide you with essential information, resources, and tips to help you navigate your new academic environment with confidence.

We wish to provide a clear, flexible roadmap to bridge the transition to TUS. The transition to 3rd level can be intimidating. However, it is important to remember that you are not alone. There are many resources available to help you succeed. When you accept your place in TUS, please link in with the Disability Support Service to register for supports and get to know the various supports on offer because we want to see you succeed academically, socially and personally.

Welcome to your new chapter—let's make it a great one!

Lisa Hanlon,

(TUS Athlone Disability Officer)

1. You have accepted a place in TUS – what next?

- After you have accepted your place you will receive emails providing you with lots of useful information about starting college.
- Finalise any remaining administrative tasks, such as submitting required documents or paying tuition fees. You will receive emails about this information.
- You will receive an email inviting you to student induction. Your onsite induction activities usually takes place the week before classes start. Induction has been designed to get you off to a flying start and get to know your fellow classmates
- Check out [Autism&UniToolkit](#) for TUS Athlone. This is a great transition resource designed by and for Autistic students.
- Familiarise yourself with the campus environment. You are welcome to visit the campus before you start your course. You can contact the Disability Support Service (disability.midlands@tus.ie) to arrange a 1:1 campus tour.



Top tip: Once you have received a college place offer – keep checking the email address you supplied and reply to emails/take actions where necessary.

2. Registering with the TUS Athlone Disability Support Service.

The **Disability Support Service (DSS)** supports students with disabilities. It is best to contact us about registering for supports as soon as you accept your place in TUS. Even if you have come in through DARE, you must separately register with the DSS.

The DSS is located on the D corridor next to the canteen in the main campus building. Our Assistive Technology room is also on the D corridor.

For more information please visit our page on the website [here](#).

For queries please email disability.midlands@tus.ie

Types of disabilities considered:

- Specific Learning Difficulty (including Dyslexia & Dyscalculia).
- ADD/ADHD.
- Autism.
- Blind/Vision Impaired.
- Deaf/Hard of Hearing.
- Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD) – Dyspraxia /Dysgraphia.
- Neurological Conditions (including Epilepsy & Brain Injury)
- Mental Health Conditions.
- Significant Ongoing Illness.
- Speech and Language Communication Disorder.
- Physical Disability.

How to register for supports

You can email disability.midlands@tus.ie to express your interest in registering for supports or if you have access to your TUS Student email account you can complete the online registration form [here](#). Please have a copy of your diagnosing paperwork ready to upload to our registration portal.

Needs Assessment

Part of registering with the DSS involves coming in for a Needs Assessment meeting. In this meeting you meet a member of the DSS team to have a chat and discuss your educational support requirements.

Please be patient at the beginning of the semester as we make time to meet all incoming students who wish to register for supports.

Do I need to disclose my disability to my lecturers?

While disclosure is not mandatory, it is usually beneficial to disclose your disability to your lecturers. By doing so, it helps them understand any potential challenges you may face and fosters a supportive learning environment. You can do this through a confidential conversation or email.



Top Tip: Students must provide diagnosing documentation/reports to register for supports.

Typical supports available: there are many supports and they are recommended based on the needs of the individual student:

- Assistive Technology.
- Exam accommodations: Common ones including extra time, alternate venue, marking guidelines, reader, scribe, PC to type.
- Learning Support: facilitating students to develop independent learning skills and strategies to complete their course work e.g. study skills, research skills, essay writing skills, time management, exam preparation. It can also be used for non-academic reasons like having a general check-in chat.
- Access to Assistive Technology room.
- Alternate Formatting.
- Liaising with academic staff.
- Lecture recording/notetakers.
- Personal Assistants.

3. How does university differ to school?

The transition from school to university marks a significant change in a student's academic and personal life. Unlike the structured environment of school, where schedules are closely managed and support is readily available, university offers greater independence and responsibility. Students encounter more diverse class settings, a stronger emphasis on self-directed learning, and the freedom to choose courses that align with their interests. With this autonomy comes the need for effective time management and personal accountability.

- **Lecturer** instead of teacher: You can call your lecturers by their first names. You will see their names on your timetable.
- **Lectures** or classes are usually an hour long, it is common to also have double classes and practical classes can be longer.
- Lecturers mostly use powerpoint and demonstration to deliver material. Students are expected to listen and take their own notes.
- Students are often expected to work on their own and for longer periods without someone guiding them. This type of **self-directed learning** can take some getting used to.
- **Assignments** instead of homework - this can feel less structured than school. Students are expected to know what assignments are due and hand them in on time.

- **Assessments:** there can be continuous assessments which are the assessments that happen during the semester e.g. mid-term exams, essays, presentations etc. There can also be end of semester exams which are more formal and will be included in the university exam timetable and usually happen after teaching ends.
- **Email:** Email is the main form of communication. It is really important that you keep a regular check on your student email account. Students must use student email rather than personal email when dealing with anything college related. If you need support with email communication skills contact the Disability Support Service.
- **Semesters:** Like school terms, the academic year runs over two semesters. Semester 1 is September until December and Semester 2 is January until May/June. You will have a different timetable with different modules and lecturers in semester 1 and semester 2.
- **Moodle:** Moodle is your Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) where lecturers post notes, information on assignments and other resources. There will be a Moodle page for every module you study. You need to check these pages regularly for updates.
- **Tutorials:** Some lecturers offer tutorials, they are usually delivered in small groups or 1:1. they are used to provide feedback and/or facilitate discussion of topics covered in lectures. Tutorials are usually 1 hour long and can be weekly or a couple of times a semester.

- **Contacting academic staff:** There can be different rules and individual preferences when contacting academic staff. Some lecturers will speak with students after class, others will only meet by appointment during their office hours. Students must use student email rather than personal email to contact staff. Please be patient when waiting on a response, staff won't see emails over the weekend/outside office hours and it can take a day or two for staff to respond and some only reply on certain days.
- **Contacting Student Service's staff:** Some support services have appointment only services, some offer drop-in hours and others you can visit at your convenience. Students must use student email rather than personal email to contact staff. It is important to know what individual staff, or services offer. Please be patient when waiting on a response, staff won't see emails over the weekend/outside office hours and it can take a day or two for staff to get back to you.
- **We may not know if you are struggling** so please use the supports available. If you are struggling or falling behind, ask for help. Talk to your lecturers, classmates, go to a tutor, talk to the Disability team. If you aren't sure who to go to or which support to use, you can access any of the student support services and we can signpost you to the best supports.

3. Other student supports & services

University life brings new challenges, but students are not alone in navigating them. A wide range of student services and supports is available to help with academic success & personal wellbeing. Student services are designed to ensure that every student has the resources and support needed to thrive both academically and personally throughout their university journey.

- **Access Office:** [The Access Office](#) supports students from groups within society who are underrepresented in 3rd level education, such as mature students, migrants, Travellers and grant-assisted students and more. The Access Office provide support & info on financial assistance available like bursaries and other funding. There is also a one year Access Course available which gives students an understanding of computing, basic technology, science, engineering, business and humanities. They are located on the D corridor near the main canteen.
- **Tutors:** If students experience difficulty with course work, a tutor can provide practical help on a one-to-one or group basis. There are tutors for business, maths, science, more info [here](#).
- **Academic writing centre:** [The Academic Writing Centre](#) is dedicated to improving students' performance and confidence in all areas of academic writing. It is located on the D corridor near the main canteen.

- **Clubs & Societies:** Clubs & Societies are set up by students for the benefit of students and are a fantastic way of making friends, gaining new skills and enjoying your time in college. See more information on their page on the website [here](#).
- **Library:** [The library](#) can be your greatest academic resource in college. They have countless books, e-books, online resources, study spaces, computer and printing facilities and a huge amount of help, advice and support available. The library is located beside the canteen in the main building.
- **Student Counselling :** Students can avail of free student counselling available for registered students. Students attend for many reasons. There is more information on their page on their page on the website [here](#). Their offices are located above the Students Union.
- **Student health:** The [Student Health Centre](#) provides medical care to registered students with nurse and doctor services available. There is also a [Student Sexual Health Service](#) that offers free and comprehensive sexual health services and resources to students. Their offices are located above the Students Union.
- **Chaplaincy and pastoral care** is available to students of all religious denominations and of none. More information [here](#).
- **Students Union:** Your [Students Union](#) supports students with issues such as welfare, accommodation and education. There is a Student Union Hub where students can access their supports or just socialise.



Top Tip:

See information on the TUS Athlone Student Resource Centre Team [here](#).

See information on the TUS Athlone Student Support Services [here](#).

4. Financial matters:

Managing finances is a critical skill for university students, as it helps ensure they can focus on their studies without being overwhelmed by money-related stress. Here's some key financial information that every student should be aware of:

- [SUSI](#) is Student Universal Support Ireland which is the main education grant available in Ireland. SUSI offers funding to eligible students in approved full time courses.
- The Access office can offer support and advice on other possible financial supports. You can contact TUS Athlone Access office [here](#). Their offices are located on the D corridor next to the main canteen.
- Visit the Financial assistance page on the TUS Athlone website [here](#) to find out about a number of initiatives within TUS to assist students with college costs including: KickStart Scholarship Fund, Student Assistance Fund, 1916 Bursary, Laptop on Loan Scheme and University Scholarships for Adult learners.



Top Tip: Check out [Access college site](#) – to see if you qualify for HEAR and/or 1916 Bursary

5. Transition to college and mental health

Starting college can be a very anxious time for some students. It might be useful to talk things through with someone other than friends or family.

TUS Student Counselling Service allow students time and space in a confidential setting to explore any issues of concern to them. All registered students of TUS Athlone can access the Student Counselling service for free. They are a professional, confidential service and all of the Counsellors are accredited and bound by a code of practice & ethics. As a rule, Counsellors will not divulge any information about you outside of the student Counselling Service without your express permission.

[TUS Student Counselling page](#) has information on:

- Registering for counselling support.
- TogetherAll a safe online community where people support each other anonymously to improve mental health and wellbeing.
- Text TUS to 50808: 50808 is a free, anonymous, 24/7 message service.
- Meditation with Olivia
- Newsletters: View past newsletters from TUS Counselling.



Top tip: Develop healthy habits such as maintaining a balanced diet, exercise regularly, and get enough sleep. Practice stress management techniques such as mindfulness, meditation, or yoga.

6. Making friends and socialising

As well as making time for classes and study sessions, it is important to make time for fun and relaxation. College can be a great time to make friends. Some students might know people from their old school and some people don't know anyone.

At the beginning college can be a lonely time. A certain amount of time alone is healthy, it's different for everyone. If you are experiencing loneliness over an extended period of time, try to change your daily patterns to connect with more people. Reach out to people you trust or [Student Support Services](#) and let them know how you feel.

Being socially accepted and making friends is key to feeling connected to your college life. TUS counselling service have great advice on things such as loneliness and making conversation, click [here](#) for more information.

Look for opportunities to get involved in activities that are of interest to you. Your involvement can lead to meeting others with similar interests. It's a good idea to engage with the [Students Union \(SU\)](#), follow SU and TUS social media pages to keep up with events and also check out [Clubs & Societies](#).

In university you will be exposed to new people, cultures, values and beliefs. These may be different to what you have been exposed to in your home town, family or old school. One of the most exciting parts of university is being exposed to ideas different to your own. At times this can be uncomfortable but try to be open minded and interested in others. This will help you have great life experiences and relationships.

Clubs and societies are set up by students for the benefit of students and are a fantastic way of making friends, gaining new skills and enjoying your time in college.

Clubs include Hurling, Camogie, Gaelic Football, Rugby, Soccer, Golf, Outdoor Pursuits, Boxing, Weightlifting, Judo and Basketball.....to name but a few. For more information on our sports clubs please contact our Sports Office [here](#).

The diversity of TUS societies means many interests are catered for. Get involved in the Drama, Animation or the International & Nutrition Society to name a few. Get to know more people with similar interests and expand your network across courses by getting involved in your Academic Society.

More information [here](#).

7. What to expect – The First 6 weeks

The first six weeks is crucial for getting familiar with the campus, meeting new people, and starting classes. Induction programs and welcome events help ease the transition, providing essential information and connecting students with resources and peers.

- **Attend induction/orientation events:** Incoming students are invited to 1st Yr Induction , check out the TUS webpage [here](#). Some parts might be self-directed online and some parts in-person on campus. Induction usually happens the week before classes starts. It's a great way to find out more about starting in TUS, meet some of your class and lecturers and see where your classes will be.
- **Prepare for the start of classes by familiarising yourself with the campus** and the location of student resources such as the canteen, library, students union and the various student services offices. Check out the [locations section](#) on the Autism & Uni Toolkit for maps and more information.
- **Keep up to date with social media:** Follow TUS social media accounts, student leaders, students union, TUS official pages.
- **Connect & engage:** This is programme of events to help new students get settled into college and learn about all the services available. There is more information available on the TUS Athlone college induction site [here](#).

- **Looks out for campus days/events**, especially those aimed at incoming students e.g. sign up for clubs and societies, Student's Union activities, Freshers week etc.
- **Keep checking your live timetable** for any timetable changes, especially in the first few weeks of each semester as room locations and class times can sometimes take a while to settle down.

The rest of the academic year...

- **Stay linked in with services:** If you have registered for support then keep up regular check-ins with those services e.g. Disability Support Service and/or Access Service. Link in with Student counselling Service if needed. There are academic supports to address any challenges with course work, e.g. tutors. Overall it's important to utilise available supports and seek assistance when needed.
- It is very important to keep regularly **checking your Moodle pages and your student email**. It's a good habit to check these every day.
- **Keep organised**, keeping on top of your notes with binders and dividers and/or good file management on your laptop. Remember to save your work to your Microsoft account so you have backups if anything happens to your laptop.
- Practice good **time management** in terms of good attendance at classes and keeping on top of assignments and submitting them on time.



Top Tip: Seek help if needed! there are many services and supports available.

8. Useful Study skills

Developing effective study skills is essential for success at university, where academic demands are higher and learning is more self-directed.

- **Workload:** You may have approximately 15-25 hours of class a week and also several additional hours of reading/study/assignment work a week. It is best to keep on top of your workload and assignments so you can avoid cramming in work at the end of semesters which are close to exam time.
- **Establish a regular study routine that works for you**, incorporating breaks to avoid burnout. Try timed Sessions: Work for 25 minutes, then take a 5-minute break. After four sessions, take a longer break. This can help maintain focus and productivity. Find the routine that suits you.
- It helps to find a **quiet, comfortable place to study** where you can focus without distractions. Some people like to study in the library, others at home, some people like to study alone and some do better with a study buddy.
- **Demonstrate critical thinking:** This involves the ability to analyse information, question assumptions, and evaluate arguments with an open mind. At university it is expected that students will evaluate arguments and evidence critically rather than accepting them at face value. This skill needs to be learned and practised and there are lots of [resources available online](#) to support this.

- **Active Reading:** Engage with your reading materials by taking notes, highlighting key points, and summarising information. Many people find the [SQ3R method](#) useful for academic reading, which stands for Survey, Question, Read, Recite, and Review. It's a comprehensive approach combining note-taking with active reading strategies.
- **Effective Note-Taking:** Use techniques like the [Cornell Method](#), or other methods ([see here](#)) such as outline method or the boxing method.
- **Citation:** Understand how to properly cite sources to avoid plagiarism and give credit to original authors. [The TUS library has great guides and supports for this.](#)
- **Exam Preparation:** Develop strategies for reviewing material, such as creating summaries or mind maps of key concepts to make revision easier. Review [past exam papers](#) on the Collections Tab on the TUS library website. Do practice questions under timed conditions to simulate the exam environment.
- **Seek help when needed:** [The Academic Writing Centre](#) can help with effective note taking, critical reading, essay planning, structuring your arguments, citation and editing skills.
- [TUS library](#) can help with library skills and training.
- Students registered with the [Disability Support Service](#) can contact us for support with study skills.
- Visit the [TUS Learner Success Toolkit](#) which has a variety of resources to support your academic success.

9. Organisation and time management:

Useful study skills include time management, which helps you prioritise tasks and avoid last-minute cramming. Additionally, practicing good organisational skills—like keeping track of assignments and deadlines—ensures you stay on top of your work.

- **It is important students stick to deadlines.** They exist to train students in time management and task completion. In some circumstances extensions may be made by the lecturer, e.g. due to illness or bereavement. Due to the impact of some disabilities, a student may request an extension from their lecturer but this can lead to accumulation of assignments and cannot always be facilitated.
- **Use apps and tools** to help you stay organised, manage your schedule, and set reminders for important deadlines.
- **Use a planner or digital calendar** with alerts to keep track of assignments, deadlines, and important dates.
- **Dealing with procrastination:** Break tasks into smaller, manageable steps to stay on track. Tackle one task at a time to avoid feeling overwhelmed.
- **Folders and Binders:** Use physical or digital folders to organise notes, handouts, and assignments by subject. Create a clear folder structure on your computer for different courses, and regularly back up your files.
- **Avoid multitasking:** Focus on one task at a time to improve the quality of your work and increase efficiency.

- **Seek help when needed:** If you are registered with the Disability Support Service contact us for support with organisation and time management.
- **Include regular breaks** in your schedule to relax and recharge. Make time for hobbies, socialising, and physical activity to maintain a healthy balance.

10. Role of the Student Supporter:

Parents/guardians/other student supporters play an important role in supporting students through the college application process and transition to Uni life.

As students step into a new phase of independence, the role of parents shifts from daily oversight to providing support and guidance from a distance.

While it's important for students to develop self-reliance, parents continue to play a crucial role in offering emotional encouragement, helping them navigate challenges, and providing a sense of stability during this period of change. (We use the term 'parents' here but sometimes this supportive role is a grandparent, other family member, partner, spouse, friend etc).

Bridging the Transition to TUS

- Let your student know that you are there for them offering a listening ear and support. Although it's tempting to want to solve their problems or try to fix their unhappiness, the best thing parents and caregivers can do is listen.
- Follow your student's lead on how much they want to phone and text you, or respond to you attempting to connect with them. Sometimes too much contact from home can interfere with their adjustment, but too little contact may not be helpful either. Let them set the pace.
- Please visit the [TUS Supporting Your Student](#) page on the TUS website which includes a fantastic [Supporting Your Student Guide](#) and more.



Congratulations on getting a place in TUS

We hope your time here is everything you hoped for.

Please remember that although the transition to college might be a challenging time, your time here as a student should not be, so if you are struggling please reach out to one of the many supports available.

We want to see you thrive not just survive in college and have the best possible experience here in TUS.