

AONTAS MAC LÉINN
CHOLÁISTE NA TRÍONÓIDE



TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN
STUDENTS' UNION

TCDSU Report on Supports for Student Parents and Carers at Trinity College Dublin

TCDSU Welfare and Equality Officer Aoife Bennett and TCDSU
Student Parent Officer Sheila Keegan

2023/2024

Table of Contents

TCDSU Report on Supports for Student Parents and Carers at Trinity College Dublin	1
Table of Contents	2
Introduction	2
Survey Results	3
Student Feedback	4
Recommendations	6
Allow Student Parents/Carers to Register as Student Parents/Carers	6
Run Subsidised Mid-Term Break Camps for Children of Student Parents and Investigate Aligning Mid-Term Breaks with Reading Week Where Possible	7
Lecture Recordings and Accommodations	7
Expansion of creche facilities	7
Conclusion	8

Introduction

Student parents and carers are an extremely underrepresented group in College and the Students' Union. However, last year the Undergraduate Support Officer, Cristina Boccardo and the previous Welfare Officer Chloe Staunton worked to organise coffee mornings, and a lunch with the Provost to identify student parents and carers, build community and listen to their concerns. Additionally in June 2023, Version 2.0 of the Policy on Supports for Student Parents, Student Carers and Students Experiencing Pregnancy was published which was very welcomed¹.

Building on the work from last year, the SU elected the first TCDSU Student Parent Officer since before Covid-19. Our Student Parent Officer, Sheila Keegan, created a survey to identify the unique problems student parents and carers face in college and what supports would enhance their College experience. The

¹ <https://www.tcd.ie/about/policies/assets/pdf/student-parent-carer-and-pregnancy-policy.pdf>

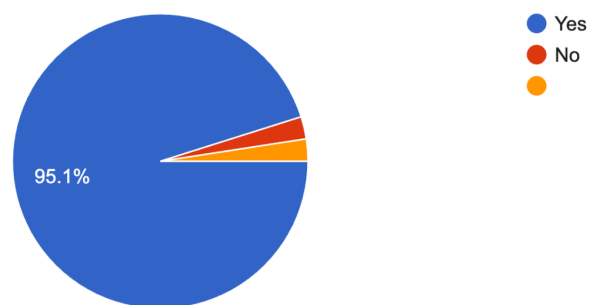
survey was widely advertised on social media and through the student mailing list and received a range of responses from different courses and faculties (n=41).

Survey Results

The survey got 41 responses. Of these 41 responses, 39 said it would be helpful if they could identify themselves as student parents and carers when they enrolled in College, similar to how people can register as a mature student.

Would it be helpful for you if you were identified as a student parent similar to how international students, students with disabilities and mature students etc are recognised?

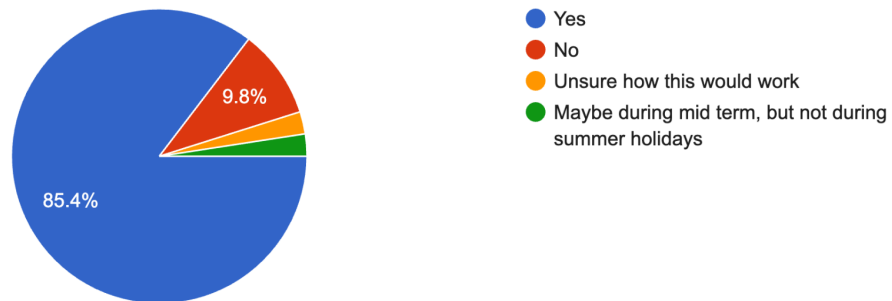
41 responses



From the 41 responses, 36 students felt there was a need for financial support for student parents and carers during school holidays or during the mid-term break.

Do you feel there is a need for financial support for student parents with dependents during school holidays?

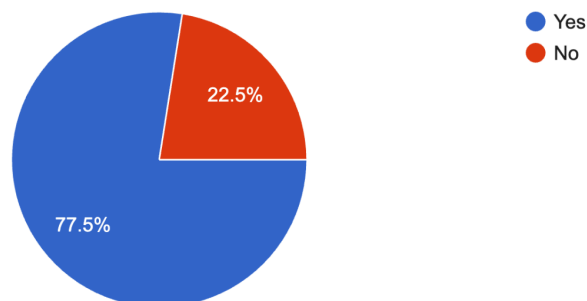
41 responses



From the 40 students who replied to the question “Would you be interested in meeting up with other student parents on campus?” 31 students said they would, highlighting the need for a community.

Would you be interested in meeting up with other student parents on campus?

40 responses



Student Feedback

Students were then asked “As a student parent, what supports do you feel are lacking on campus / in your course? Feel free to provide suggestions or examples from your own experience.” The open-ended questions in the survey were opportunities for students to submit additional commentary on the issue which proved very insightful.

In this section, 14 students identified child care support within College as a support that was lacking on campus. While the current creche is a great service there is very high demand from students and staff making it often hard for individuals to enrol their children. Additionally, while a great service there is no childcare for school-aged children which proved particularly difficult for students during midterms. School mid-term breaks have in the past few years not aligned with College reading weeks. This was repeatedly highlighted as a struggle for parents with school-aged kids who had to sort additional childcare for these weeks.

Additionally, 10 students cited better access to lecture recordings as a tool that would provide more flexibility with attendance and cater for their childcare responsibilities. The issue of lecture recordings to aid family commitments came up again in TCDSU's Lecture Recording Survey Report where 327 respondents cited family commitments as a reason they would engage with and benefit from lecture recordings².

Also to note, 7 students cited financial assistance for parents in full-time education as a support they would benefit from in College. This included financial support during midterm breaks in the form of subsidised camps for school children to a special route to access the Hardship Fund.

Another point that came up consistently in the student feedback was that students felt ignored by and invisible in College. This feeling of a lack of understanding for student parents' and carers' unique responsibilities makes it difficult for them to reach out for help and isolates them from the College community. It is important that College continues to build their support and understanding towards their unique challenges and make College more accessible to them.

2

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1U9L0laKKsl8GT8r6BAbTUuOpySKGEDSMAt8zlxJcs4c/edit?usp=sharing>

Run Subsidised Mid-Term Break Camps for Children of Student Parents and Investigate Aligning Mid-Term Breaks with Reading Week Where Possible

85.4% of students felt there was a need for financial support during midterms as they do not align with our reading weeks. In the additional feedback students repeatedly cited the midterms not aligning as frustrating as it meant sourcing and financing extra childcare. This year the Michaelmas term reading week began on the 23rd October with school half term commencing the following week, 30th October. Just a week out of each other it is understandably very frustrating for parents and is hopefully something that could be taken into consideration in future planning.

While this remains the case we urge the college to look into subsidised midterm camps for the children of student parents and carers to help relieve some of the pressure of finding and financing this additional childcare. It would also enhance the sense of community and help students to feel understood and supported by their College.

We are happy to announce that from the next academic year the SU will be using money from our HEA fund to give out bursaries worth €20,000 for student parents and carers to help with childcare over the two mid term breaks³. College camps would be a great addition to this scheme and a great example of student-staff partnership.

Lecture Recordings and Accommodations

Lecture recordings were cited as a great resource for providing flexibility to student parents and carers who might have to miss lectures because of caring responsibilities, such as school drop offs or a child taking sick. Lecture

3

<https://trinitynews.ie/2024/02/tcdsu-council-votes-to-introduce-sports-and-student-parent-bursaries/>

recordings should be made available to this cohort of students as a bridge to equality of access.

When it came to other issues that student parents and carers face, attendance, compulsory internships/years abroad, and unpaid placement all came up as barriers to accessing education. We urge College to work with those affected directly to address these barriers and assess how accommodations and alternative arrangements can be made for them in order for them to progress in College and fulfil their academic potential.

Expansion of Creche Facilities

In our open ended feedback question, 14 students mentioned child care support from college as something they would like to see more of. Several students suggested expansion of creche facilities to include a drop of facility for school aged children where kids could sit for an hour or two. This would mean that on a day where a parent only had one lecture for example, they could drop their child at the creche for an hour rather than having to sort childcare for the full day. TCDSU recommends College to look into the feasibility of a service like this, as well as the possibility of extending the creche opening hours to aid students on placement/travelling from an off campus location e.g. St James's.

Conclusion

There has been great work done in the past two years to increase the visibility of student parents and carers on campus which TCDSU is confident will continue. Increasing the visibility of student parents and carers on campus through community events has allowed us to gather this feedback and identify the problems. Now, the problems need to be addressed so student parents and carers have the same opportunity to thrive at College as any other student. As one of our respondents noted, *"Equity is harder to implement than equality but far more beneficial."*