



**National Student
Engagement Programme**

Clár Rannpháirtíochta Náisiúnta
na Mac Léinn

Census Project Report

2023 – 2024



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Census Project Report 2023–24

Introduction

The Class Rep Census Project was established by the National Student Engagement Programme (NStEP) in 2022, with the aim of directly ask students to share more information about themselves to provide us with a snapshot of the diversity of student representation in Irish Higher Education.

The Census Project is run annually, and this is the second year (2023/24) that the project has been carried out.

This data collection is carried out via a survey that is embedded within the *'Introductory Class Rep Training'* Feedback form that is circulated to all participants of the ICRT training sessions.

Students are informed prior to taking the survey of the following:

- Their responses are anonymous
- Their responses will not be shared with their higher education institution
- Not all questions may apply to them, and they may not know the answer to every question, and
- They don't have to answer these questions if they don't want to.

This year the survey had 279 respondents across 21 higher education institutions that are partnered with the National Student Engagement Programme.

Census Project

The Questions

The Census Project is composed of 12 questions. Due to the changing nature of higher education and issues that students are facing, the questions have been amended slightly from the previous year.

The questions are as follows:

1. Please describe your gender identity.
2. Is your gender identity the same as the gender you were assigned at birth?
3. What is your ethnicity? *We understand that ethnicity cannot be easily quantified, so please select all that apply to you.*
4. Are you a member of the LGBTQ+ community?
5. Do you have a disability or condition that impacts on your learning, working, or learning activities?
6. If 'Yes', please indicate the nature of the disability or condition. *Select any that apply to you.*
7. Do any of these other conditions which may impact your learning, working, or learning activities apply to you? *Select any statements that apply to you.*
8. If you commute to college, please specify here. *Select as many as apply to your commute.*
9. How long on average does your commute take?
10. If you selected multiple modes of commuting, please go into detail here. *(e.g., if you have to take multiple buses, bus and train, travelling cross-counties, etc.)*
11. How has the cost of living crisis and/or the housing crisis affected you, if at all? *(e.g., sourcing accommodation, impact on college work, impact on social life, etc.)*
12. Do you have any feedback or suggestions for these questions?

Cont.

Census Project

The Questions

As you can see, questions 3, 6, 7, 8 and 9 had multiple choice options to collect the richest data possible. Please find the options below:

Q3. What is your ethnicity?

Arab	Asian or Asian Irish	Asian—Chinese
Asian—Indian	Any other Asian background	Black or Black Irish
Black—African	Black—Caribbean	Any other Black background
Irish Traveller	Roma	White or White Irish
Any other White background	Other	Prefer not to say

Q6. If 'Yes', please indicate the nature of the disability or condition.

Autism Spectrum	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD/ADD)	Mental Health Conditions (e.g., anxiety, depression)
Neurological Conditions (e.g., multiple sclerosis, cerebral palsy, etc.)	Physical Disability (e.g., spina bifida, cerebral palsy, amputations, etc.)	Sensory Disability (e.g. blind, deaf, etc.)
Speech & Language Communication Disorder	Significant Ongoing Illness (e.g., Crohn's Disease, fibromyalgia, etc.)	Specific Learning Difficulty (e.g., dyslexia, dyscalculia, etc.)
Other	Prefer not to say	-

Q7. Do any of these other conditions which may impact your learning, working, or learning activities apply to you?

I work full-time	I work part-time
I commute to college	I have caring responsibilities (e.g. child care, elder care, other)
I do not have a permanent residence	I am in Direct Provision
I am a refugee	I am the first in my family to go to Higher Education
I am financially dependent on a grant (e.g. SUSI)	I have experience of the criminal justice system

Census Project

The Questions

Q8. If you commute to college, please specify here.

Bicycle	Bus
Car	DART/Train
Luas	Motorbike
Walking	-

Q9. How long on average does your commute take?

Less than 30 minutes
30 minutes – 1 hour
1 – 2 hours
2 – 3 hours
3+ hours

Questions 10, 11 and 12 asked participants to give long-form answers. Please find them listed below:

Q10. If you selected multiple modes of transport, please go into detail here.
(e.g., if you have to take multiple buses, bus and train, travelling cross-counties etc.)

Q11. How has the cost of living and/or the housing crisis affected you, if at all?
(e.g., sourcing accommodation, impact on college work, impact on social life, etc.)

Q12. Do you have any feedback or suggestions for these questions.

Census Project

The Data

Q1. Please describe your gender identity.

● Man	110
● Woman	157
● Non-binary/Genderfluid	7
● Prefer not to say	5
● Other	0



Man — 39%
Woman — 56%
Non-binary/Genderfluid — 3%
Prefer not to say — 2%
Other — 0%

Similar to last year's results and following anecdotal evidence that there is usually a higher percentage of female class representatives.

There is a slight decrease in representation for female class reps and a slight increase for male class reps (Woman 60% and Man 36% in 2022/23). This could be accounted for with the drop in respondents to the census: 499 versus 279 respondents.

Census Project

The Data

Q2. Is your gender identity the same as the gender you were assigned at birth?

● Yes	268
● No	5
● Prefer not to say	5



Yes – 96%

No – 2%

Prefer not to say – 2%

An expected result, statistically speaking – 96% of class representatives surveyed identified as the gender identity they were assigned at birth AKA cisgender.

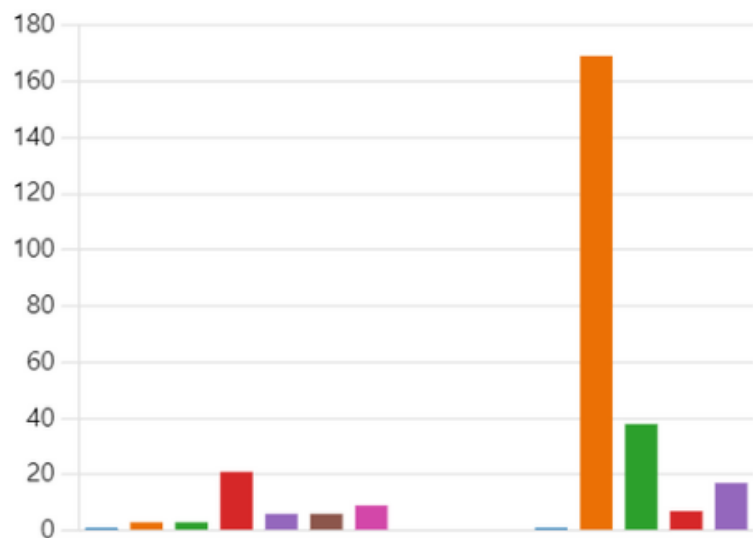
This is in line with last year's results where 96% of class reps surveyed identified as cisgender. 2% of students representatives surveyed did not identify with the gender they were assigned at birth and again, 2% preferred not to say.

Census Project

The Data

Q3. What is your ethnicity?

Arab	1
Asian or Asian Irish	3
Asian - Chinese	3
Asian - Indian	21
Any other Asian background	6
Black or Black Irish	6
Black - African	9
Black Caribbean	0
Any other Black background	0
Irish Traveller	0
Roma	1
White or White Irish	169
Any other White background	38
Prefer not to say	7
Other	17



As ethnicity is not something that can be easily quantified to limited survey checkboxes, participants were asked to select all options that applied to them. 61% identified as 'White or White Irish', which was an expected result and approximately the same as last year's cohort.

All other options selected were below 10% (excluding 'any other White background' at 13%), which raises an interesting question that class representatives may not be reflective of the actual diversity of students in Irish higher education institutions and more work may need to be carried out to empower students from all backgrounds and lived experiences to be involved in student engagement and decision-making.

Census Project

The Data

Q4. Are you a member of the LGBTQ+ community?

Yes	64
No	195
Questioning	12
Prefer not to say	7



Yes — 23%

No — 70%

Questioning — 4%

Prefer not to say — 3%

23% of student representatives identified as members of the LGBTQ+ community. This is in-line with last year's results where 21% of student representatives identified as members of the LGBTQ+ community.

These results are quite a high percentage considering that the estimated national average LGBTQ+ population is between 1.2—3.8%. (OECD, 2019 and CSO, 2016).

One theory for this high percentage, is that members of the LGBTQ+ community may be drawn to student representation roles, as this community has historically been under-represented and has a history of activism.

Census Project

The Data

Q5. Do you have a disability or condition that impacts on your learning, working, or learning activities?

Yes	77
No	179
I don't know	18
Prefer not to say	2



Yes – 28%

No – 65%

I don't know – 7%

Prefer not to say – 1%

28% of student representatives identified that they had a disability or condition that impacted their learning.

As of 2021/2022, there are 18,097 students with disabilities registered for support services in higher education in Ireland, representing almost 6.9% of the student population, (AHEAD, 2022).

Similar to the previous question, this is quite a high percentage with the context of the national average of students with disabilities as noted above.

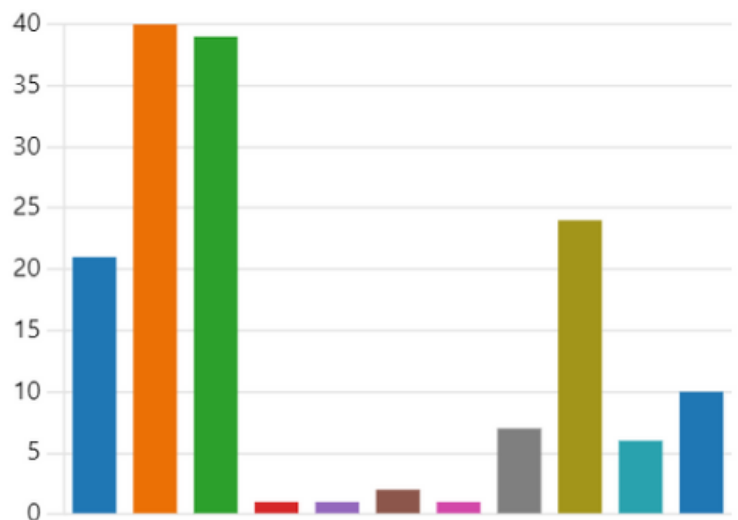
Cont.

Census Project

The Data

Q6. If 'Yes', please indicate the nature of the disability or condition.

Autism Spectrum	21
Attention Deficit Hyperactivity D...	40
Mental Health Condition (e.g., a...	39
Neurological Condition (e.g., m...	1
Physical Disability (e.g., spina bif...	1
Sensory Disability (e.g. blind, de...	2
Speech & Language Communic...	1
Significant Ongoing Illness (e.g.,...	7
Specific Learning Difficulty (e.g., ...	24
Prefer not to say	6
Other	10



There were 152 respondents to Question 6, which is a continuance of Question 5.

Unsurprisingly, the second highest category is 'mental health conditions' with 25.7% of class representatives surveyed identifying that they experience a mental health condition. This is a slight decrease from last year's survey (30%) where it was the highest category.

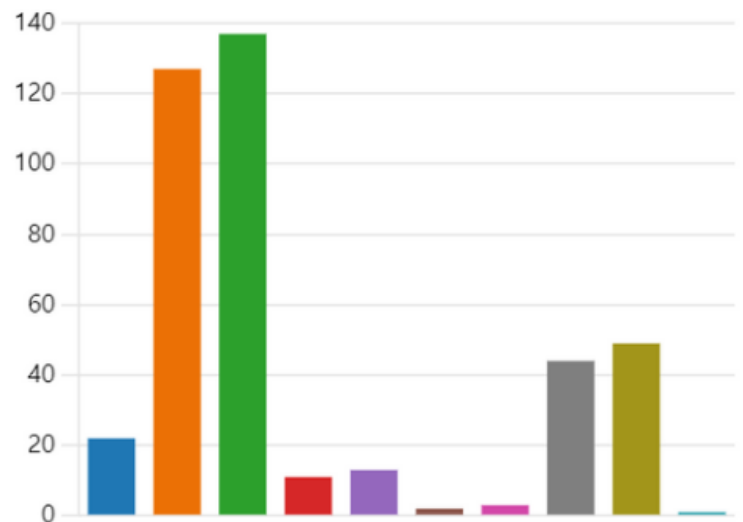
With an increase from last year (26% vs. 14%), the highest category was ADHD/ADD. The next highest categories that students indicated impacted their learning and learning activities were specific learning difficulties and autism.

Census Project

The Data

Q7. Do any of these other conditions which may impact your learning, working, or learning activities apply to you?

● I work full-time	22
● I work part-time	127
● I commute to college	137
● I have caring responsibilities (e....	11
● I do not have a permanent resid...	13
● I am in Direct Provision	2
● I am a refugee	3
● I am the first in my family to go ...	44
● I am financially dependent on a ...	49
● I have experience of the crimina...	1



Unsurprisingly 59% of student representatives surveyed commute to college by various means (explored in the following question). 63% of students have to work to support themselves (either full or part-time), and 21% are financially dependent on a grant (e.g., SUSI), which is in line with what we're seeing nationally with the student accommodation crisis and increasing cost of living.

18% were the first in their family to go to Higher Education. 13 student reps indicated that they do not have a permanent residence. As none of the students surveyed indicated they are part of the Irish Traveller community, we can assume that these students are unfortunately homeless.

Cont.

Census Project

The Data

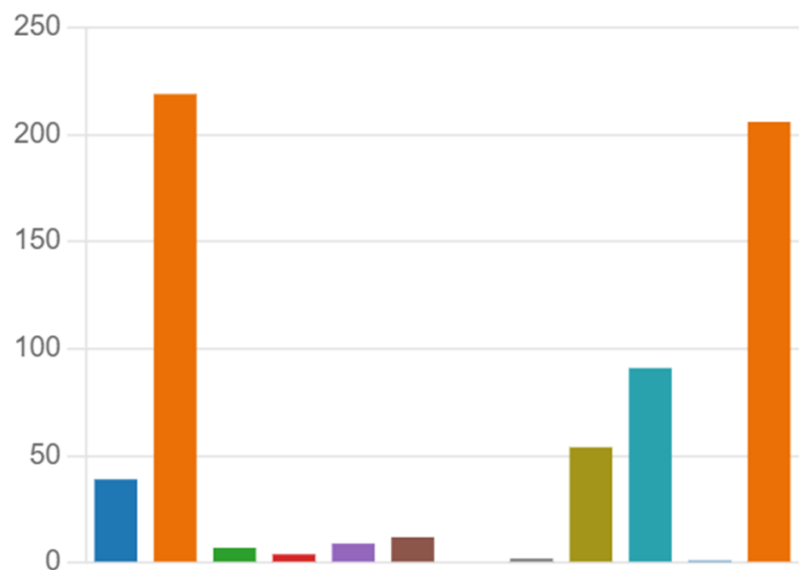
These results are similar to last year's survey, although all have experienced an increase in 2023/24.

In 2022/23 over 55% of student representatives we surveyed had to support themselves through working either full or part-time. 45% of students commuted to college and 19% were financially dependent on a grant (e.g. SUSI).

In 2022/23, 12% of class reps were the first in their family to go onto to Higher Education which has increased by 6% this academic year.

Last year, 12 student representatives surveyed did not have a permanent residence. However we do not know if they are members of the Travelling or Roma communities who may not have a permanent residence, or if they were indeed students experiencing homelessness.

I work full-time	43
I work part-time	234
I have caring responsibilities (ch...	10
I have caring responsibilities (el...	4
I have caring responsibilities (ot...	11
I do not have a permanent resid...	12
I am in Direct Provision	0
I am a refugee	2
I am the first in my family to go ...	58
I am financially dependent on a ...	94
I have experience of the crimina...	1
I commute to college	222

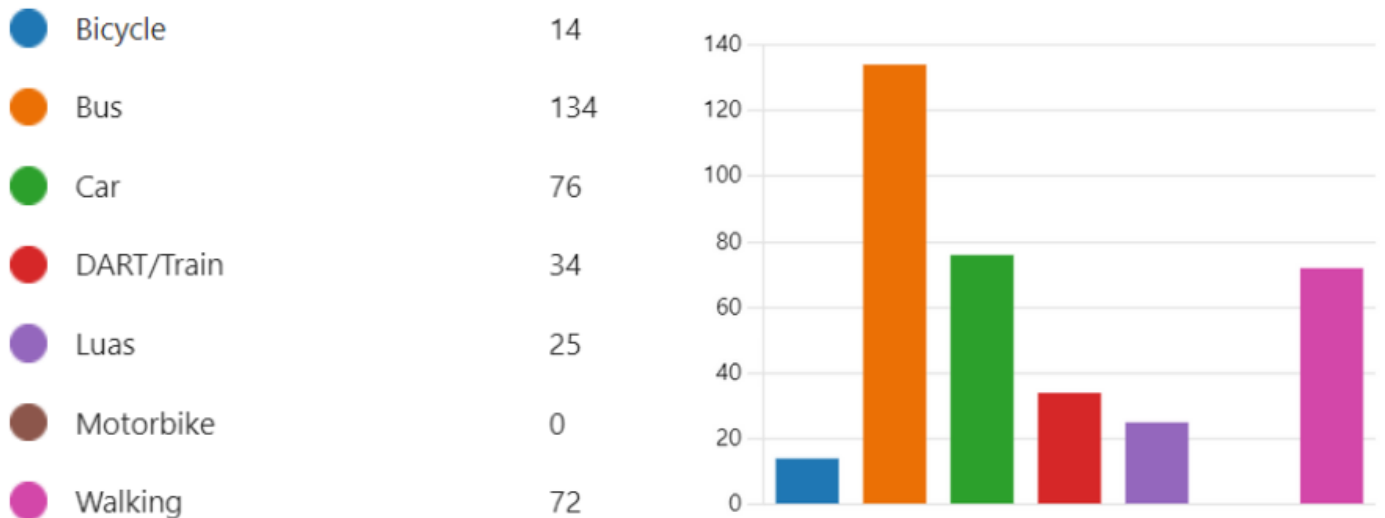


Figures from Census Project 2022/23

Census Project

The Data

Q8. If you commute to college, please specify here.



(Out of 234 respondents)

- 57% commute by bus
- 32% commute by car
- 30% commute by walking
- 14% commute by DART/Train
- 10% commute by Luas, and
- 6% commute by cycling to their institution

However, most students commute using various combinations of the above methods, (e.g. bus/train/walking, DART/bicycle etc.)

Cont.

Census Project

The Data

Q9. How long on average does your commute take?

● Less than 30 minutes	90
● 30 minutes - 1 hour	88
● 1 - 2 hours	58
● 2 - 3 hours	7
● 3 hours +	3



(Out of 246 respondents)

- 37% of respondents stated their commute takes less than 30 minutes
- 36% of respondents stated their commute takes between 30 minutes—1 hour
- 24% of respondents stated their commute takes between 1—2 hours
- 3% of respondents stated their commute takes between 2—3 hours
- 1% of respondents stated their commute takes over 3 hours.

In the following question, we asked respondents to expand on the details of their commute. We have included some quotes from various respondents.

Cont.

Census Project

The Data

Q10. If you selected multiple modes of commuting, please go into detail here.

We have included some quotes from various respondents below.

- “I spend 2 hours on a bus and walk about 10 minutes to the college”.
- “I drive to town, pay for parking to then get a bus to travel for 3 hours, and then I have to take the Luas when I get to Dublin.”
- “Mainly bus, but I live rurally so I have to get a lift to the bus stop, otherwise I have to walk 40-50 minutes on unsafe roads without any paths to reach the bus stop. Sometimes I do get a lift into college which takes significantly less time than the bus (20 mins instead of over an hour), but that is only on occasion. If I get the train to college then I have to get a bus from the station to the college.”
- “I am from Kerry, I either drive the full distance or drive to the train station, get a train to Dublin Heuston and a combination of bus/car to the college.”
- “I have to take 2 buses. There used to be a direct bus from my town but now it only runs twice a day and can be unreliable.”
- “I take an hour train from Tullamore (Co. Offaly) to Heuston Station, I then take a 20 minute luas to college from there.”
- “I get a lift to the train station that’s around 20 minutes, then I have to get the train to Connolly Station that takes around 35-40 minutes. I then walk to the Luas stop in Bus Áras, to get it to Abbey Street then i have to get the bus from O’Connell Street to my college.”
- “I travel to and from college every day and my timetable is difficult with the bus timetable as every bus on my direction home leaves only 1, 3 or 6pm.”
- “I have to walk 30 minutes, then take a 45 minute bus and then finally walk 10 minutes to get to campus.”

Census Project

The Data

Q11. How has the cost of living crisis and/or the housing crisis affected you, if at all?

We have included some quotes from various respondents below.

- “Having to settle with accommodation that does not meet my expectations of how students should live, (i.e., mould, missing insulation, etc.)”
- “It has a major impact in every aspect of my life. I would support financially a lot in my home situation as well as supporting myself. During my years in college I’ve had no other choice but to take on 2 jobs to ensure that I have enough funds to support me, and balance my college life.”
- “It’s hard to earn enough money in part time job as a student, can’t earn enough to pay my weekly rent.”
- “Student accommodation has increased pricing for rooms that don’t live up to expectation.”
- “I have to monitor my expenses and make sure that I have enough money to last the month.”
- “No accommodation available in my budget (working/saving throughout summer and SUSI, other grants). Additional hours needed to take on at work leaving less time for studies, causing additional stress and anxiety. Financial anxiety as I’m also supporting family at home. Little to no social life, limiting my social interaction and often feeling isolated from my peers.”
- “It has been hard to find accommodation that’s not an extortionate price. Acquiring the sufficient money to pay rent and bills etc , doesn’t leave much money for socialising with friends so I find myself trying to adhere to a strict budget every week.”
- “Raise in bus price, food, heating, electricity, internet and phone.”

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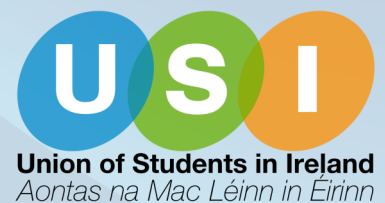
Conclusion

The National Student Engagement Programme (NStEP) would like to thank all who participated in this year's Class Rep Census Project.

The data collected is invaluable and will assist us in developing future resources and events to benefit students across Ireland, as well as lobbying for future supports and initiatives.

If you have any questions about the Census Project or other NStEP projects, please contact our Development Coordinator, Rachael Sarsfield Ryan, at nstepdevelopment@usi.ie.

The National Student Engagement Programme (NStEP) is a partnership programme of



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Census Project

References

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