

# The First Year Studies Experience

## Overview of Initiative

The First Year Studies Experience is a series of targeted measures introduced to enhance the first-year student experience and support student success. In 2016/17, the number of students requiring a second assessment opportunity at January Exam Boards was 19%. To reduce the number of resits and repeats, the following measures were piloted and then mainstreamed:

- The scheduling of teaching and assessment was coordinated across modules to distribute the assessment workload.
- Students grouped in Class groups (“Bays”) established in the first six weeks continued to work together in weekly visual culture seminars throughout the year, to prevent disruption to students’ sense of belonging and social stability.
- Induction and orientation were improved by introducing:
  - department tours, focused guest lectures and multi-discipline panel discussions to support student decision-making in their choice of specialism.
  - comprehensive library induction, with a dedicated small group tour, as part of the precourse induction.
  - “Safe to Fail”: a mandatory and accredited Library Quiz whose primary purpose is the early identification of students struggling to engage.

Further enhancements continue to be made. The team overseeing induction and orientation will be expanded to include NCAD’s recently appointed EDI Officer, supporting continued development of the initiative.

## Monitoring & Oversight

The key mechanisms through which the initiative is monitored are the First Year Studies Board and the Pre-Exam Board meetings. The former is a sub-committee of the Academic Council and includes student representatives. The latter involves senior academic staff and ensures close monitoring and discussion of programme-related trends and individual student issues in respect of assessment. NCAD’s Induction and Orientation programme is reviewed annually by a cross-functional team led by NCAD’s Student Experience Manager and the Head of First Year Studies.

The effectiveness of the initiative is reported by the First Year Studies Board to the Academic Council.

## Key Features

- Transition focus
- First-year experience
- Institution-wide initiative

## Aims & Objectives

**Aim:** To identify any systems or structures impacting the number of fail grades and resits at the First Year Studies Examination Board and to pilot a series of interventions to improve the first-year student experience and support retention and progression.

**Objective 1:** To improve student success by managing student workload.

**Objective 2:** To foster a culture of belonging and connectedness and build student resilience by improving induction and orientation.

## Data & Evidence of Impact

Following the implementation of the First Year Studies Experience interventions, the rate of student resit, as reported at NCAD’s January Exam Board, fell from 19% in 2016/17 to 7% in 2017/18, and remains low at 5% in 2024/25. Improved attendance in seminars was observed, indicating that students were better able to manage their coursework. Library user records, student surveys and feedback indicate increased engagement with the library.

Setting aside 2020/21 and 2021/22, wherein a Covid impact is evident across the HE sector as a whole, there is an improvement in progression rates of between 1 and 2 percent: from 89% progression in 2016/17 to 91% thereafter (90% in 2018/19).

