

UCD and Zurich Ireland roll-out new national programme to address education inequality across Ireland

- **New intervention-led programme to support 700 students across 21 DEIS schools**
- **Programme to provide actionable solutions to educational inequality in Ireland**

DUBLIN, 21 October 2021; University College Dublin (UCD), in collaboration with Zurich Ireland (Zurich) and with support from the Z Zurich Foundation, has commenced a groundbreaking new two-year programme, entitled Power 2 Progress (“P2P”), aimed at addressing education inequality in Ireland through a sophisticated intervention-led approach to support senior cycle students of DEIS schools in reaching their full academic potential and, ultimately, achieve greater success.

The P2P programme will also fund PhD research to examine the effectiveness of different intervention techniques with a view to providing actionable solutions that will be used to inform future policy around addressing socio-economic disadvantage in the Irish educational system.

DEIS schools across Dublin, Wicklow, Kildare, and Wexford have signed up to the programme, with an additional funding from Rethink Ireland helping to expand the initiative to five schools in counties Laois and Offaly. Currently, 21 DEIS schools are participating with 700 students signed up to the programme in total. The initiative commenced last month with weekly tuition being provided by UCD student teachers. Two blocks of tuition will run, from September to December, and again from January to April, starting in 5th year of senior cycle and continuing into 6th year.

In addition to the tuition provided by UCD, as part of the programme Zurich will provide complementary mentoring and career guidance support. Through this, schools will have access to multidisciplinary experts that will provide interactive and motivational talks, as well as career planning sessions. Another key objective of this initiative will be to highlight the transformative potential of higher education so that they experience a greater sense of belonging in both higher education and the corporate work environment.

DEIS schools have been selected as the focus for the programme as these schools are located in communities where the socio-economic status of pupils is below the national average. DEIS post-primary schools make up just over 27 percent of all post-primary schools in Ireland and account for just under 76,000 post-primary students. DEIS schools typically have lower levels of literacy, poorer attendance and lower attainment rates. Generally, these inequalities can persist into adulthood and impact health and career options affecting entire communities.

As part of the programme, and through a collaboration between the Z Zurich Foundation and Dell Ireland, students participating in Power 2 Progress will have access to a new laptop to facilitate remote based learning and engagement. In some of the schools participating in the programme, 40 per cent of pupils did not have access to a laptop.

Minister for Further and Higher Education, Simon Harris TD, said: “I’m delighted to be here today to help launch this incredibly important initiative which offers practical solutions to improve equality in education.

“Fostering inclusion and tackling inequalities in our education system are key pillars of my department’s mission, and it’s heartening to see UCD and Zurich come together to drive home that message.

“There are really exciting third-level education opportunities available to anyone who wants to pursue them, and many varied routes to preferred careers. I genuinely believe Power 2 Progress can help

students understand all the options available to them and, ultimately, help them reach their undoubted potential.”

Commenting on the launch of the programme, **UCD President, Professor Andrew J. Deeks** said: "The high number of DEIS schools and their pupils that have joined the Power 2 Progress programme shows the true need for this kind of intervention initiative in Ireland.

“With the support and funding received from Zurich and the Z Zurich Foundation, Professor Harford and her colleagues can harness the transformative power of education to make a real difference to the lives of the students involved.”

Commenting on the launch of the programme, **CEO of Zurich Ireland, Anthony Brennan**, said: “We’re hugely excited to be collaborating with UCD on a programme as meaningful as Power 2 Progress because we believe it has the potential to positively transform the way in which we approach the challenge of education inequality in Ireland. While we are heavily committed to contributing positively to the communities in which we work and live, we also know that thriving communities are critical to a well-functioning economy and we expect this programme to help influence future education policy in Ireland, ensuring an informed, lasting and sustained benefit for generations to come.”

Zurich's collaboration with UCD on the Power 2 Progress initiative follows the Z Zurich Foundation’s recent contribution to Rethink Ireland's Innovate Together Fund which supports social innovation in response to COVID-19. Zurich and the Z Zurich Foundation also collaborate with Rugby Players Ireland through the Tackle Your Feelings mental wellbeing campaign, which breaks down stigma and encourages people to become more proactive about looking after their mental well-being on a daily basis.

The Power 2 Progress programme will be run by Judith Harford, Professor of Education, Deputy Head of the School of Education UCD. To find out more about this programme, visit; www.zurich.ie/about-us/corporate-social/power-2-progress

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Notes to Editors:

Further Information

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About Zurich Ireland

Zurich is one of Ireland’s leading insurance companies providing a wide range of general insurance and life insurance products and services. Zurich employs over 1,000 people across its locations in Dublin and Wexford. Zurich prides itself on its commitment to making a difference in local communities by supporting various initiatives and causes across the country. These include the Tackle Your Feelings mental wellbeing campaign, run by Rugby Players Ireland in partnership with Zurich and funded by the Z Zurich Foundation, which aims to reduce the stigma around mental health and provide people with the tools and resources to be more proactive in looking after their emotional wellbeing.

Zurich has a long-standing commitment in supporting education in Ireland. In addition to an apprenticeship program, Zurich employees volunteer with DEIS primary schools through a number of initiatives such as the Business in the Community 'Time to Read' Programme or by sharing their work experience and hosting office visits.

About Z Zurich Foundation

The Z Zurich Foundation works alongside Zurich Insurance Group employees and other stakeholders as well as with governments and NGOs in pursuit of a future where people can thrive in the face of increasing climate hazards, where those of us feeling the stresses of life are empowered to speak up, and where the marginalized in our society can reach their full potential.

The Z Zurich Foundation is a Swiss-based charitable foundation established by members of the Zurich Insurance Group. It is the main vehicle by which Zurich Insurance Group delivers on its global community investment strategy.

Visit the Z Zurich Foundation's website to learn more about its work: <https://zurich.foundation>. Follow Z Zurich Foundation on [LinkedIn](#), [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [YouTube](#).

About University College Dublin

As Ireland's largest and most globally engaged university, with its great strength and diversity of disciplines, University College Dublin embraces its role to contribute to the flourishing of Ireland through the study of people, society, business, economy, culture, languages and the creative arts, as well as through research and innovation.

The University's Strategy 2020-2024 Rising to the Future outlines the objectives and major strategic initiatives set in place in order to accomplish its vision for this era. The central themes of this strategy are: Creating a Sustainable Global Society; Transforming through Digital Technology; Building a Healthy World; and Empowering Humanity.

The university's Equality Diversity & Inclusion Policy and Equality Diversity and Inclusion Strategy & Action Plan reflect the enhanced inclusive culture that now exists within the University community, where diversity is valued and embraced, and equality of opportunity is promoted.

It sets out the EDI principles that UCD will abide by in the undertaking of all of its activities. It goes beyond legislative requirements and includes the adoption of socio-economic status as a tenth University equality ground.

Mainstreaming Equality, Diversity and Inclusion into all of its policies, practices and decision-making is one of the core objectives of the university. This is supported through the appointment of Vice-Principals for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in each of the UCD Colleges.

Professor Judith Harford who is leading the Power 2 Progress initiative is the Vice-Principal for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in the UCD College of Social Sciences and Law. Judith is a former secondary school teacher and has worked in education for over twenty years. She has played a leading role both nationally and internationally in research and policy in the area of equality. Her work focuses in particular on gender equality and social class inequality, and she has published widely on both topics.