

Is your child ready for the Gaeltacht?

Every year more than 1500 students pass through the gates of Coláiste UISCE. The vast majority of students thrive, for others it can be a daunting experience.

This may be their first time away from home. In this section we provide some tips to help parents and students prepare for their upcoming Gaeltacht trip.

Does everyone suffer from homesickness?

Some students will suffer a brief bout of homesickness during their stay with us. A small group of students will suffer from severe homesickness, especially if this is their first time away from home. For a small minority of students, homesickness can be so severe that they leave the course during the first 3 days. We want to avoid this and offer practical support and advice below on how we can work together to support your child.

Considering that it may occur is the first step in preparing your child for their stay with us. We know that by planning and preparing in advance, we can help your child cope with any feelings of homesickness, as it is always our hope to avoid an early departure from the course.

What is homesickness?

Homesickness is a form of distress that results from feeling disconnected from familiar people and places when faced with a different environment and routine. An otherwise happy confident outgoing child may find themselves homesick early in the course.

It manifests itself in many ways, both physically and psychologically. Most students will tell us or call the office or tell a friend. This is why we deliver the message 'Inis Dúinn' or 'Tell us' on arrival and early in the course. 'Inis Dúinn' provides students with the details of all the people they can talk to, where they can get support here and assures them that support is available. If a student cannot articulate how they are feeling signs are a want to call home, low mood, feeling unwell, withdrawing from or completely refusing to participate in some or all the activities.

What causes homesickness?

Homesickness of course is a perfectly normal response to a change of environment.

Some things which add to it are;

- if the student isn't prepared for being fully immersed in the Irish language,

- if the student is not prepared for restricted mobile phone time,

- if they are worried about their standard of Irish,

- if they attend alone

- if they come with a group they are not actually comfortable with

- if the group dynamic changes while here

if they fear the water

if the student isn't willing to try activities or doesn't want to attend the course

if the student feels they are missing out on other events

All of these should be considered and discussed with the student in advance

Does homesickness pass?

Generally, Yes! Most students settle into their new routine after day or two. For others there may be difficulty adjusting.

Our team have years of experience and there are various different ways we can work together to help the student get past homesickness.

Remember that as a parent/guardian this period may also be difficult for you.

What can help with homesickness?

There are many ways we can work together to get past homesickness including;

- Assurances from home and from our team that it's natural to feel homesick and that it does pass

- Positivity around the benefits of the course and opportunity it presents

- Daily goals to keep busy and to get through homesickness

- Mentoring, our team will assign an appropriate mentor

- Clarity around communication, eg. That you will communicate with the student via WhatsApp during mobile phone time between 6.45 & 7.15

- Positivity and focus around the aspects of the course the student is enjoying

- The space and support to make new friends, try new things and get past homesickness

- Focus on the personal development benefits of persevering

Should my child attend alone or with friends?

There are benefits to attending alone and attending with friends. In relation to coming with friends we often find that more issues arise when the dynamics of existing friendships change while here. Coming alone means that the student can be fully open to meeting new people and making new friends. Whether your child is coming with a friend or alone, be sure that they understand that they will be sharing their

accommodation, classes and watersport groups with other students whom they have never met before. Those attending alone will be placed in accommodation together.

Our staff will organise games and ice-breakers on the first night and first day. This will help students get to know one another. Our goal is to make sure everyone feels included and at ease from the very beginning of the course.

Do you suspect homesickness might become an issue?

You can discuss your concerns with us in advance, and this can be of benefit in terms of planning, if you suspect homesickness might become an issue.

This goes for any issue which has impacted your child socially, any diagnosed condition, any undiagnosed condition or condition you suspect. You should tell us about anything which impacts how they communicate, settle into groups, re-act to new environments or surroundings. We will work with you and the student discreetly and sensitively for the most positive experience.

Is your child prepared for total immersion and the Irish language rule?

Have you correctly indicated the students' level of Irish on the application form? Have you spoken with their Irish teacher? Some students are not prepared for total immersion in the Irish language, and this too should be discussed with them in advance.

We understand and allow for a transitional period while students adjust to an all Irish speaking environment. It is important that students understand that 100% of instruction will be through Irish, and that they must use the Irish that they have.

Our teachers are fully aware of the difficulties students face adjusting in the first few days and our lessons are prepared to facilitate this change.

Our syllabus, our behaviour policy and the Irish language rule are designed to ensure that a students' ability is considered and supports and systems are in place to reward effort which is expected. Repeated incidents of failing to make an effort may result in the issue becoming a breach of our behaviour policy.

You should assure the student that many of our students share the same concerns and that we are here to support them. They should also know that they are highly likely to surprise themselves!

Please note: If your child has received an exemption from Irish within the last year, or has been exempt for a number of years, our education manager must be made aware of this immediately.

Will students understand everything being said to them?

All information regarding our Behaviour Policy and Student Welfare Policies will be delivered in Irish and English to the students. The welcome and introduction on the first night will be in Irish and English. The principal and Bean an Tí will ensure students have heard and understood all important information. On the first day there is a further explanation of rules and policies of relevance in the classroom. All of our staff will then communicate in Irish only. We may facilitate calls in English but look to keep them to a minimum to maintain to Irish language environment. Where we have welfare concerns or where clarity is required English may be used.

Have you discussed the Behaviour Policy and Rules with the student?

In order to maintain a positive and safe learning environment for everyone attending our courses, we have developed a Behaviour Policy which sets the standard of Behaviour expected at Coláiste UISCE.

As part of our Behaviour Policy, we reward positive behaviour. We implement a red card system for repeated or one-off incidents that do not meet the standard of behaviour we expect. Mentoring support is available for students who find it difficult to meet the standard of behaviour we expect. Students who find themselves unable to meet the standard of behaviour we expect may have activities restricted, may be subject to temporary suspension or dismissal from the course.

Our Behaviour Policy is based on 'Meas' / 'Respect' and students who show respect for themselves, others and property generally have no issue. If your child has any difficulty in this regard, please let us know so that we can plan for any necessary mentoring. We favour restorative practice and outcomes and will work with you and the student.

Prohibited Items

To ensure the safety of all students, we have prohibited some items. These will be familiar to you any student and will not differ greatly from items prohibited at school. Prohibited items include any illegal substance, any items the sale or possession of which is illegal to a minor and similar items. The prohibited listed in our rules are not exhaustive and any item which can be deemed unsafe or unsuitable may be included in this list. In an ever-changing world and dependent on the needs of a particular course we may add items to those prohibited.

Students and Parents should be aware that there may be bag searches or investigations if prohibited items are suspected and this will be carried out in line with our Behaviour Policy.

Child Protection

Child protection is at the forefront of our policies and procedures in Coláiste UISCE.

While we place a huge emphasis on child protection and supervision in Coláiste UISCE, there will be some areas when supervision of every conversation or action is limited, for example in the changing rooms and bedrooms.

Therefore, it is important that you discuss with your child the importance of recognising and removing themselves from any conversation or behaviour which could be deemed inappropriate. They should report it at the earliest opportunity.

Anti-Bullying

Coláiste UISCE does not tolerate bullying of any kind. We acknowledge the difficulty for students in coming forward to say they have been bullied themselves or that they suspect bullying. We ask that you re-enforce the message which we will give to students, that stopping bullying is the right thing to do. Please assure your student that an anti-bullying policy is in place. Please assure them that concerns they have are treated in strictest confidence. Please encourage them to avail of the opportunities we present to them to 'Inis Dúinn' or 'Tell us' such as the anti-bullying surveys or through the Cinnire/Prefect

Does your child have any specific needs or requirements that we should know about?

It is important to inform us in advance of any specific requirements your child has, as this will help to settle them into the course routine with much more ease. Not informing us of illnesses or learning difficulties may cause unnecessary discomfort or embarrassment. Not informing us of relevant information in regard to your child's needs could potentially lead to them receiving unwarranted attention in line with our Behaviour Policy.

Below are some important questions for you and your child. If you answer yes to any of these questions, please contact us immediately for further assistance.

- Does your child have any specific educational, dietary or medical needs?
- Is your child taking prescription medication?
- Is your child a regular user of non-prescription medication e.g. for prevention of illness?
- Have they had a injury/sports injury in the last 6 months, for example; a break, serious ligament or sprain injury?
- Has your child been a victim of bullying in the past?
- Has your child been suspected of bullying?
- Have they had a tummy bug, contagious illness or the flu on the run up to the course start date?

This type of information is extremely important and relevant to us. All information shared is confidential and is handled with the utmost discretion.