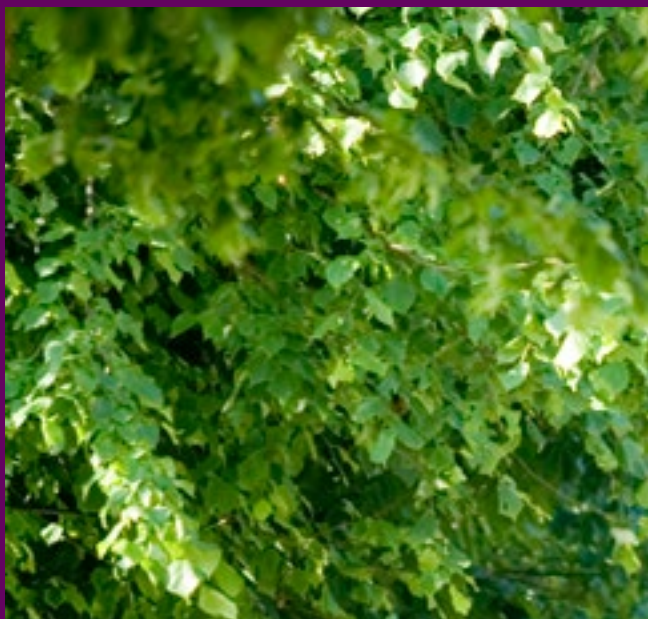




NUI Galway  
OÉ Gaillimh

Student Counselling Service

# Annual Report 2015–2016



# Introduction

The Counselling Service has as its mission the personal support and development of students in NUI Galway.

When students are distressed, anxious, depressed, or suffering from other mental health conditions they cannot flourish in college or realize their full potential either academically or personally.

The Student Counselling Service believes that the support of these students is closely intertwined with the academic mission of the college and that counselling plays a significant part in the retention and progression of many students.

In the course of their counselling experience, which primarily aims to reduce distressing symptoms and help students function better, students also gain skills for life that benefit them in their transition to the world of work.

Some of the skills that can be developed through counselling include: self-reflection, personal responsibility, social skills development, the ability to prioritise, stress management, assertiveness and self-confidence.

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It is our hope to continue to provide counselling services at the level provided in 2015-2016, although recent reductions in staffing levels could create serious challenges to that aspiration.

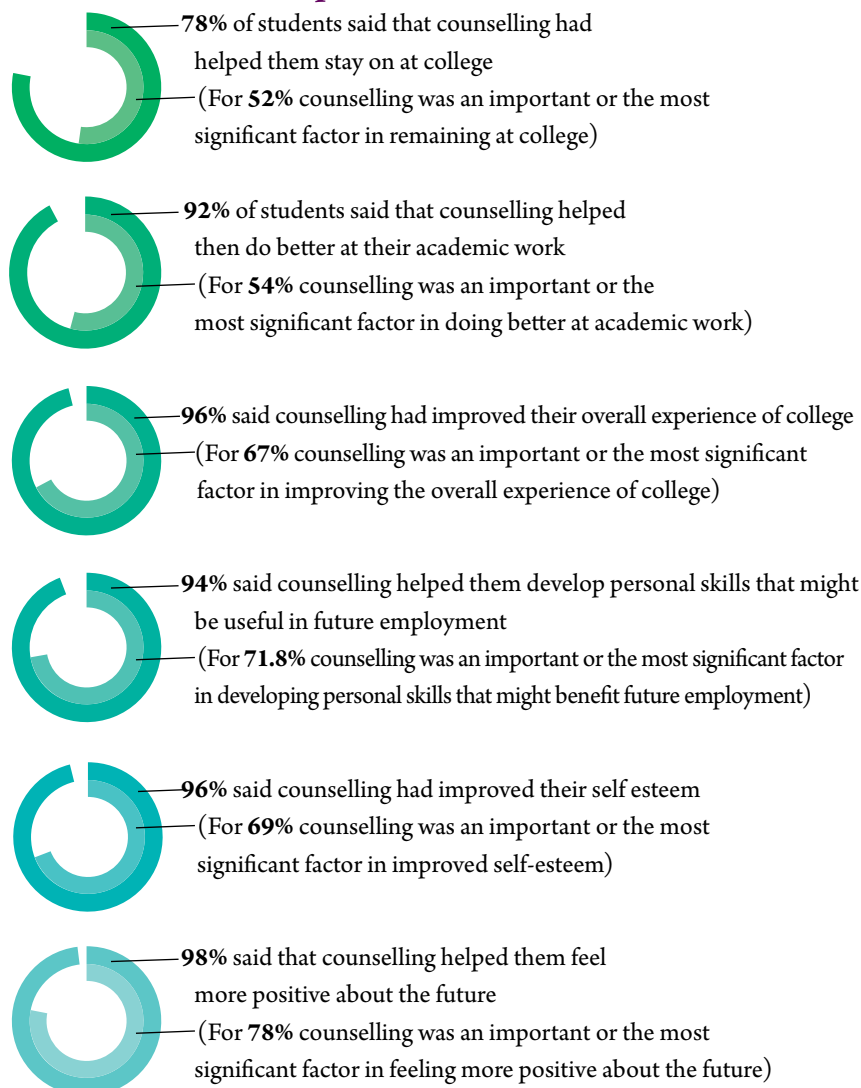
The retirement of the Head of Counselling, Bea Gavin in July this year, will be a significant loss to the service as her dedication and hard work was responsible for the development of the service to the current level and under her direction and management the work reported on here, was undertaken.

We are grateful to her and aspire to continue her good work.

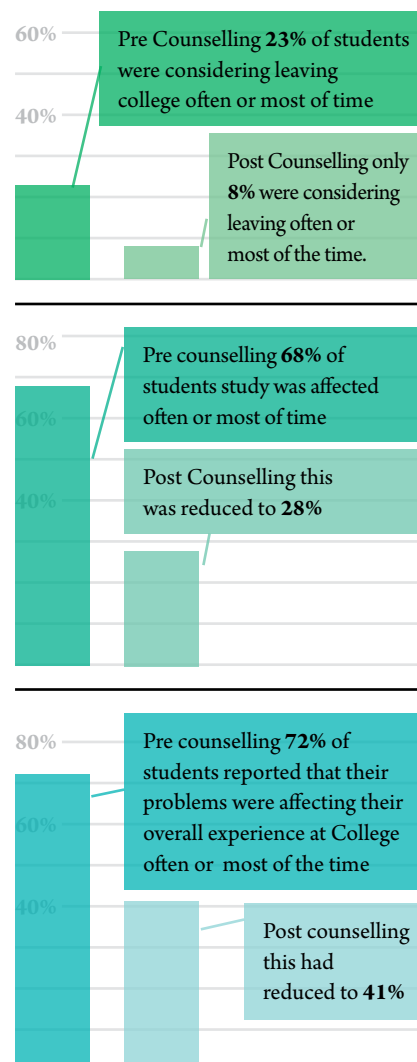
# Benefits of Counselling

## Counselling and the Academic mission of NUI Galway

### Student Retention, Academic Performance and Overall Student Experience 2015 to 2016



### Student Counselling and Retention and Progression



## Counselling and Students at Risk of Suicide

All students who attend the counselling service are assessed for risk based on the evaluation of the counsellor at assessment and a standard clinical test called Core.

Students who are placed on a Risk Register have met a number of risk criteria which deem them to be at active risk of suicide.

### Risk criteria include:

- the presence of suicidal thoughts,
- evidence of a suicide plan,
- a past suicide attempt,
- mental health issues,
- isolation and lack of support,
- misuse of drugs and/or alcohol, and
- recent trauma or crisis.

Based on these criteria in 2015-2016, 82 students were assessed as at risk of suicide.

- 7 students were assessed as severe suicide risk.
- Post- counselling no student was at severe risk and there was a decline of 37% of any level of suicide risk.

Although the counselling service is primarily a short term service in these cases we continue to support at risk students until the risk has passed and, if students are leaving college, we liaise with the students home GP to ensure that their ongoing safety is monitored.

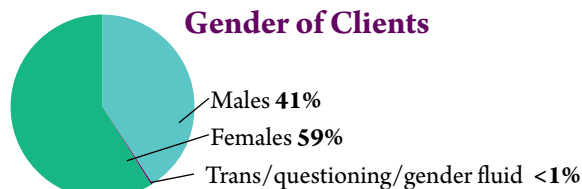
# Who are our clients?

**1,207** students attended the Student Counselling Service in 2015-2016

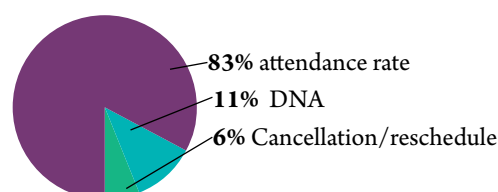
**5,487** counselling sessions, were delivered.

The average number of sessions attended was **4.5**

## Gender of Clients



## Attendance at Sessions

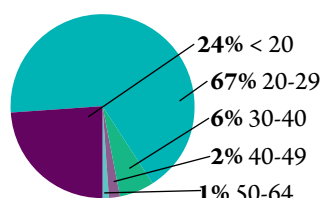


## Average waiting time 12.8 days

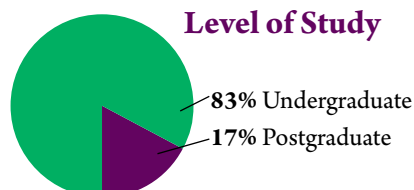
(As this figure includes weekends and holiday breaks between terms, it means that the Counselling Service KPI of an average of 10 working days for students on our waiting list was achieved.)

## Client Age:

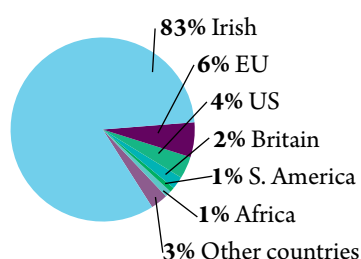
The majority of clients were in the age range of 20 to 29 years and the average age was 23.



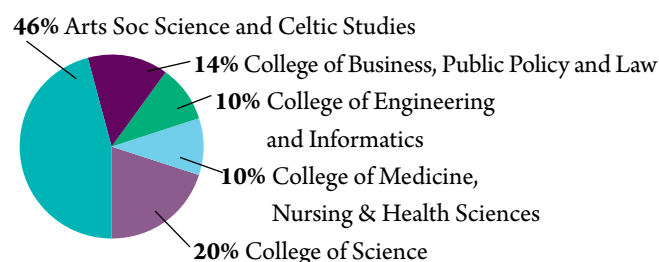
## Level of Study



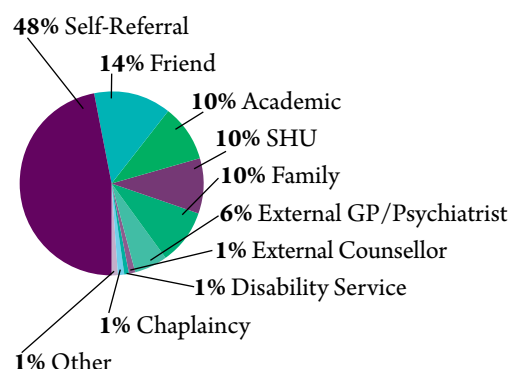
## Ethnicity of Students attending Counselling:



## Colleges attended by Counselling Clients:

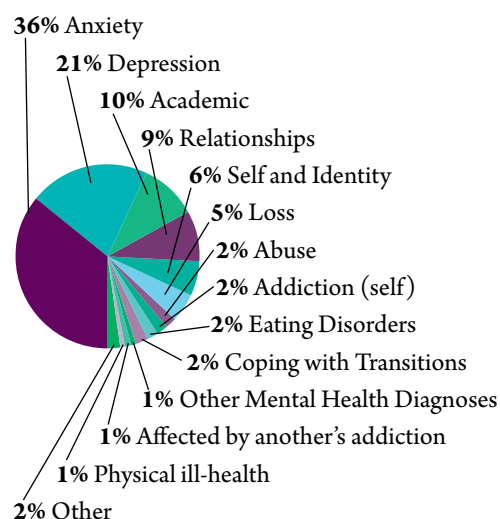


## Who Recommended Counselling to Student Clients:



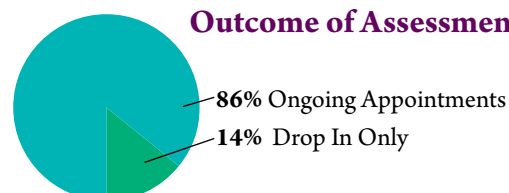
## Who are our clients?

### Primary Reasons for Counselling

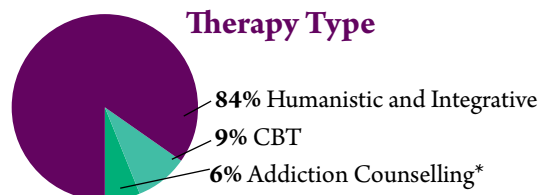


**Note:** Almost all students, whatever their presenting issue were also impacted academically by the problems they brought to counselling.

### Outcome of Assessment



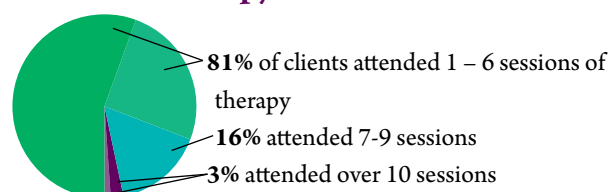
### Therapy Type



In addition 4% of client attended complementary therapy.

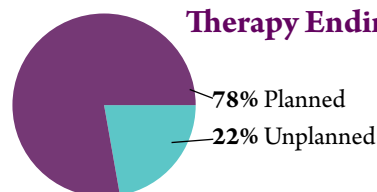
\* Although only 4% identified addiction as a primary presenting issue in their registration form, 28% of student answered yes to the question "Have you or any member of your family been affected by drug or alcohol issues?"

### Number of Therapy Sessions Attended



The average number of sessions attended was 4.5

### Therapy Ending:



## Clinical and Reliable Improvement

The Counselling Service benchmarks the level of improvement pre and post counselling against the anonymised data from the NHS Primary Care Psychological Service.

In 2015-2016 the NUIG Student Counselling Service achieved the same level of reliable clinical improvement, 70%, as the UK National range but this was in fact a decrease of 2% on the Counselling Service level the previous year and the maintenance and improvement of this level is a key target for the coming year.



# Online Programmes offered by the Student Counselling Service

## SilverCloud

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SilverCloud

SilverCloud offers secure immediate access to online supported CBT programmes that has demonstrated high improvement rates for depression, anxiety and stress. The programme was launched in NUIG in semester 1 offering online self-help to all students registered with the college. An all student email was sent and over 350 students registered their interest in the programme. In semester 2 the programme was extended following a successful application to the Special Projects Fund. This funding allowed us to offer the SilverCloud Supported Version which provides students with access to weekly online support from a counsellor whilst they work through the programme. Currently 50 students have registered for this support.

**It is intended to focus the supported version particularly for students on Erasmus and on placements who cannot avail of the face to face counselling service.**

## Participate

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participate

Participate is an online programme that helps with shyness and social anxiety, developed by Éamonn Ó Dochartaigh, one of the student counsellors in NUI Galway. It is estimated that **10%** of students or more facing significant problems in this way, with a wider group having some problems with public speaking or performance situations. These difficulties impact on students' academic retention and progression, and employability. Social anxiety can also lead to depression and alcohol/drug misuse.

The results of a randomised controlled trial, conducted over 2 years, are very encouraging. Average social anxiety scores dropped from 24.5 to 14 for students who completed half or more of the programme, and for those who finished the full programme, their social anxiety scores were more than halved.

134 NUIG students signed up to the programme in the last year, with another 136 students participating from DIT and the University of West Scotland.

**60%** of students completed at least half the programme (i.e. enough to benefit substantially). Enterprise Ireland has awarded €14980 to fund a feasibility study of Participate as a sustainable, economically viable service.

# NUI Galway Student Wellbeing Programme

Supported by



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## Student Project Fund

The Wellness Programme necessitated a very intensive administrative input to organise suitable rooms, select administrators and co-ordinate the programme as well as a concentrated focus on advertising and promotion.

This included the design of posters and leaflets as well as using the many other avenues available to the college such as an all student email, Blackboard, The Student Calendar, the screens around college, Flirt FM, “Sin” and the Students Union. All colleges and Student Support Services were also notified of the programme and asked to direct students to it as appropriate.

## Workshops

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This programme ran both semesters and offered 8 workshops in Semester one and 9 workshops in Semester 2.

The topics covered included:

- Time Management
- Study Skills
- Procrastination
- Exam Preparation
- Coping with Stress
- Managing Mood

**240 students attended workshops in Semester 1 and 269 in Semester 2**

**Evaluations sheets were extremely positive with satisfaction ratings averaging 8.7 for communication style of facilitators and content of workshops.**

## Groups delivered as part of the Wellness Programme

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Ongoing Groups for special issues were also offered as part of the Wellness Programme.

- Assertiveness and Confidence Building
- Anxiety Management
- Belonging & Overcoming Isolation
- Focusing on Study
- Managing Mood
- Mindfulness
- PhD Support Group
- Stress Management
- Resilience and Mental Fitness
- LGBTQ Support Group
- Bereavement and Loss Support Group

# NUI Galway Student Wellbeing Programme

In Semester 1 and again in Semester 2, despite increased attempts to promote them, the Bereavement and Loss and The LGBT Support Groups did not have enough bookings to run but in each semester an extra Mindfulness group was organised because of demand.

**In all over 100 students attended groups each semester: 103 in Semester 1 and 111 in Semester 2** and although the attendance dwindled over the course of the 4 or 6 week programme, certain groups held their attendance to the end. Among these were the PhD support Group the Mindful-ness group and the Resilience and Mental Fitness Group.

**Altogether a total of 723 students availed of Wellness Programme Workshops and Groups Pro-gramme sponsored by the Student Project Fund.**

## Sample comments from Wellness Programme Evaluation Forms:

*"Skills for coping were very helpful as they are simple yet practical"*

*"These types of workshops are needed for all students"*

*"Realized how deeply important the beauty of my home is"*

*"High quality with good attention paid to many aspects of the anxiety I have experienced."*

*"It was great but too short, looking forward to the next workshop"*

*"It was great to actively see people incorporate the techniques we had learned from the course in their lives."*

*"Very helpful and insightful"*

*"Very communicative approachable and understandable"*

*"Very well thought out and delivered in a stable friendly environment"*

*"Now I am more confident about making a presentation"*

*"Gave me strategies I can use to help me cope"*

*"The notetaking techniques were best for me as it was an issue I struggled with"*

*"I feel better about myself"*

*"Made me consider what is important"*

*"Best fun I've ever had!"*

*"Thorough and attentive"*

*"I enjoyed the interaction of the group getting us to think and share, listening to others"*

*"Learning from other people in the group was great!"*

*"Very Positive experience"*

*"I just wanted to let you know how much of a positive difference my mindfulness practice has made on my exams. Normally my anxiety would be so bad that I would not sleep the night before and my mind races under pressure, this would hinder me and I would end up so frustrated. This time things were different, every chance I got I took a moment to come back to my breathing and settled my mind. I actually slept last night (unheard of) and I feel my exam went really well this evening. I was able to focus and concentrate and the material just flowed ! I know the mindfulness practice is the reason for this. I cannot thank you enough."*



## Exam Success Programme

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## Student Project Fund

Funding was applied for and granted for a series of additional academic and personal supports immediately prior to and during the summer examination period to enhance the exam performance and personal wellbeing of NUI students.

This programme included:

- Relaxation/Mindfulness/Destressing Workshops morning and evening
- A physical activity programme including an organised run/jog/walk twice each week ,
- Free access to certain programmes in the gym as well as free access to the football cages twice daily.
- Additional one off counselling supports in the Counselling Drop in Service

Although the physical activity programme and the destressing sessions were poorly attended, the aspect of the programme that was most successful was the additional drop in capacity delivered by the Student Counselling Service, which allowed more students to be seen more quickly and to get longer drop in sessions than usual, at a time when students presenting for this service were hugely stressed and this additional drop in capacity allowed students to receive immediate time with a counsellor to reduce panic and anxiety and renew their focus on academic issues such as time-management and effective study skills.

Additional drop in staffing for this particular period worked so well that the service will attempt to include it as part of the core service offering each year prior to and during examinations.

## Support and Advice for Parents and Staff

A key role that the counselling service continually provides is telephone advice and support for staff dealing with students in distress.

The service also provides several training inputs on the subject of Dealing with Students in Distress and this year a training sessions was delivered for staff from a variety of colleges in December 2015 as well as customised training inputs for the School of Drama and Theatre studies and Shannon College of Hotel Management.

A training workshop was also organised by the counselling service for Student Support Services Staff on Awareness of the Needs of Transgender Students, which was delivered by a trainer from Transgender Network Ireland.

## Contribution to Orientation

In 2015-2016 the Counselling Service organised 11 personal development workshops as part of Orientation week for students. These were on themes such as stress management, mindfulness and successful accommodation sharing and time management.

An introduction to the work of the Counselling Service was also delivered during Orientation week including inputs to Mature Students, Dare and Hear students, a talk to the Masters in Business students and a 2 hour Master's in Social Work Orientation,

## Parent Talks for Orientation

3 talks for parents of one hour duration, were delivered to parents, by a member of the Counselling team, on the topic of: "The Emotional Journey of Students and Parents in Making the Transition to College"

## Mental Health Week October 2015

The Counselling Service organised and delivered the following wellness workshops for students during mental health week:

- Resilience
- Strategies for taking Study in your Stride
- Mindfulness
- Stress Busters
- Putting off Procrastination
- Laughter Yoga

## Promotional & Educational Video Clip on Post-Graduate Transitions

<https://youtu.be/VaeMPTCkySk>

A professional producer with specialist mental health experience was commissioned last year to create a 5 minute video clips focused on the issue of the transition to post-graduate studies, which is very common issue for students.

This is now one of 5 video clips commissioned by the student counselling service which are available on a  channel on our website.

The 4 video clips commissioned the previous year were formally launched in the Aula Maxima in November 2015 by the then Minister of State for Health, Kathleen Lynch, and the event was well attended by staff and students.

## Student Counselling New Look Website

[http://www.nuigalway.ie/student\\_services/counsellors/](http://www.nuigalway.ie/student_services/counsellors/)

Our website was successfully transferred to T4 and now sits very well within the broader Student Services pages. We have also successfully introduced a You Tube channel where we have upload-ed our recently commissioned videos as well as other appropriate, resource materials.

## Professional Training Attended by Student Counselling staff in 2015-2016

- 3 day Narrative Training Workshop
- Silver Cloud Supporters Training:
- Continuing PhD in online social anxiety programme (NUIG)
- CBT supervisor training (TCD) half-day 24/9/15
- Self-Practice and Self-Reflection in CBT (TCD) one-day 2/10/15
- Introduction to Compassion-Focussed Therapy (Prof Paul Gilbert) one-day 8/1/16
- Interventions for Health Behaviour Change (NUIG) one-day 11/4/16
- Latest Developments in CBT for Social Anxiety (Prof David Clark) one-day 23/6/16
- World Congress of Behavioural and Cognitive Therapies (4-day) 23-26/6/16
- Self-Care for Student Services Staff
- Continuous Professional Development for Student Services Staff
- Shine: Taking Control Workshop
- Psychological Society of Ireland Conference 2015
- Irish Association of University and College Counsellors Annual Conference 2016
- Managing College Response to Student Sudden Death TCD

**Regular Clinical Supervision is a core professional requirement fulfilled by all staff of the Counselling Service.**

## Student Counselling Service Staffing Levels:

In 2016 The Student Counselling Team comprises 2.5 core counsellors and a team of sessional counsellors, operating during term time only, who constitute approximately 3 additional FTE counsellors.

We also avail of the services of a number of counselling interns who are fully qualified and completing their supervised counselling hours for accreditation.

The counselling team is supported by one fulltime administrator and a part-time evening receptionist during term time.

## Permanent Staff Members and Contact Details

### Student Counselling Service

**Address:** 5 Distillery Road (near AIB bank, Newcastle Road)

**Telephone:** 091 492484

**E-mail:** [counelling@nuigalway.ie](mailto:counelling@nuigalway.ie)

**Website:** [http://www.nuigalway.ie/student\\_services/counsellors](http://www.nuigalway.ie/student_services/counsellors)



**Administrator**  
Mary Melia



**Acting Head of Counselling**  
Geraldine Connolly



**Counsellors**  
Emer Casey, Éamonn O'Dochartaigh

## Comments from 2016 Student Survey

Counselling allowed me to manage my feelings in a way that I could focus on my studies more and improve my social life - beforehand, my feelings limited me from doing many things in life, such as socialising with society members

Counselling helped me to be less critical of myself and flag and combat the unconscious thinking patterns and behaviours that were leading to my unhappiness

Grounded me. Took my attention away from self-harm/suicide thoughts and refocused on being proactive and how to care for myself.

It helped me to complete short term tasks as well as see the bigger picture. It showed me all the ways in which I could help myself and created some accountability for my actions week to week.

I could see things from a different perspective, and realised just how destructive my thoughts were. I genuinely trusted my counsellor. It was nice and somewhat liberating to be able to talk to someone about things that I haven't told anyone else

It helped me to understand what was going on in my head and helped me to gain control over it. It reminded me that anxious thoughts are only thoughts and put things into perspective for me. My counsellor was brilliant and helped me so much.

Taught me I wasn't the only one going through what I was going through so I didn't feel so alone. Also learned to have more patience and be more compassionate towards others

I was able to confide my thoughts and feelings to someone who I knew would never relay what I said to someone else, which was very important for me. I had someone to tell all of my doubts and worries to on a weekly basis, which was great for me as I tend to bottle emotions up and dislike discussing personal issues with friends.

We are incredibly lucky in NUIG to have such an outstanding counselling service, without it, I might not even be here.