
How far down the road are we? An update on the Inclusive Education Road Map

Over the last decade, as our third-level education system has moved away from the medical model of disability to a more social, human rights-based model, implementation of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles has become an increasingly important part of ensuring that the mainstream college experience is inclusive and accessible for all.

But while busily promoting UDL as a framework which can help to deliver a learning environment that works for all and minimise the need for add on supports, we and our partners never truly stopped to reflect and ask

how does UDL change the educational landscape and in particular, the roles of the key practitioners traditionally responsible for supporting students with disabilities?

So, in 2017, AHEAD and the Disability Advisors Working Network (DAWN) came together to try to address some of the issues arising from this question.

Over the course of the last three years, we undertook an extensive research and review of UDL and disability services in higher education, shared experiences and opinions, examined the research already available and ultimately, tried to better define how we work now and envisage where we are going in the future. The result is the Inclusive Education Road Map – a series of four outputs released over two years beginning December 2017. The four key outputs contained in the Road Map are:

- Inclusive Education - Position Paper: A road map for disability support in higher education in Ireland (released Dec 2017)
- The Role of the Disability Officer and the Disability Service in Higher Ed in Ireland (released March 2018)
- Inclusive Learning and the Provision of Reasonable Accommodations to Students with Disabilities in Higher Education in Ireland (released Nov 2018)
- An as yet to be named online course/resource, distilling the learning for staff and acting as a training resource

The aim was to get a 360-degree view of what an inclusive system should look like and examine where the Disability Officer fits in to this ever-changing landscape.

The Vision

In the first output released, AHEAD and DAWN sought to outline our shared vision for a more inclusive education system. This position paper describes how we can design an inclusive and more mainstream college experience

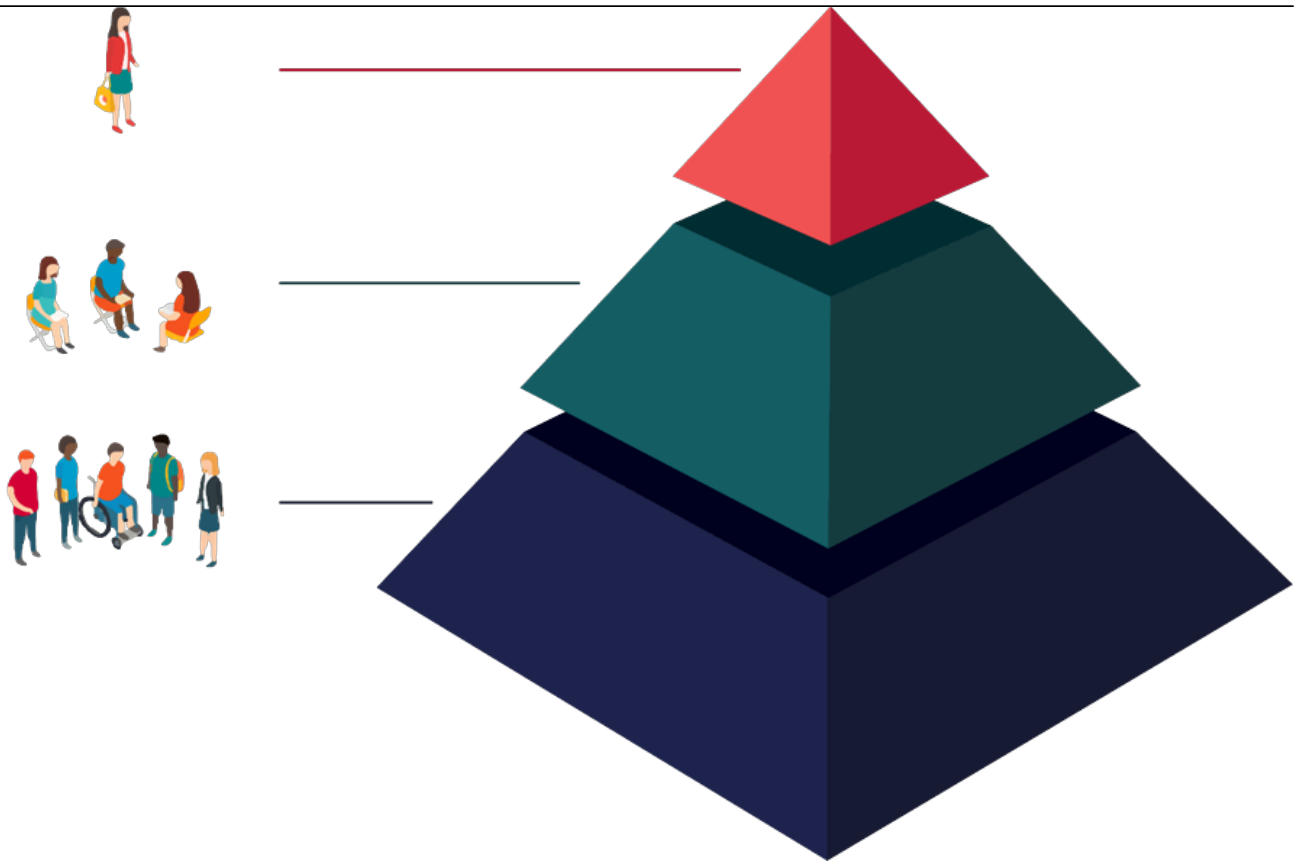
with UDL at its heart, while still ensuring that we don't lose sight of delivering the individual reasonable accommodations required by many students with disabilities to participate in college on a more level playing field. This document highlights the strategic responsibilities of key stakeholders to ensure this vision is implemented at a national, institutional, faculty and disability service level. It also lays out a value system to guide the provision of supports which promotes student independence and builds skills which students can use once they graduate. Much of this value system is encapsulated by the Inclusive Practice Pyramid model which we've described in this video:

Exploring the Role of the Disability Officer

The second output entitled 'The Role of the Disability Officer and the Disability Service in Higher Education in Ireland' essentially attempts to answer the following key question:

As we try to make the inclusion of students with disabilities in higher education everyone's responsibility, how can we ensure we continue to leverage the vast knowledge and expertise of the Disability Service staff in our institutions?

I have on a number of occasions in the past heard disability support staff asking the question 'if we move towards UDL, are we not doing ourselves out of a job?' This publication quashes that notion and places disability support staff at the centre of a universally designed campus, acting as experts for lecturers, student services and administrative staff to seek advice around UDL and inclusive practice. As evidenced in the video above, it's also important to dispel the notion that UDL somehow removes the need for reasonable accommodations. The Inclusive Practice Pyramid model highlights that UDL is just a part of the picture which primarily takes place in the mainstream at the bottom of the pyramid, while further up the pyramid, more individualised accommodations are delivered by more specialised staff.



The Inclusive Practice Pyramid

We aim to move supports further down the pyramid where appropriate and possible, because it increases student independence, benefits all students in the institution and reduces the resource burden on already stretched disability support staff. As numbers of students with disabilities continue to rise, this move is simply a necessity for disability services if they are to continue to provide a high level of support and lower the risk of burnout of staff. Additionally, the increased independence and sense of belonging that a universally designed mainstream college experience can give to students with disabilities makes this a win-win for both students and staff.

The Guidelines and Tools

The third output in the roadmap series gives guidelines on appropriate reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. This publication takes note of the nature of our evolving approach to inclusion by providing the sector with guidelines on supporting students with disabilities facing different barriers on both an individual and a college-wide/mainstream basis.

This means that practitioners in different sized institutions, with different cultures and on different stages of their journey towards mainstreamed inclusion, can get both appropriate, best practice solutions for where they are at right now, and can see a path towards a future where some of these supports are delivered in the mainstream.

Additionally, the publication uniquely hosts its appendices – a set of template tools, forms and policies relating to the provision of support – on individual online webpages with downloadable, editable resources. Contained within the appendices are:

- a template Code of Practice

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- Lecture Recording Agreement
 - Disclosure of Disability form
 - Erasmus Student Checklist
 - Educational Support Worker Pack

and many more useful templates. Each one is designed to be downloaded, edited and used as the basis for colleges implementing their own systems and will provide an enormous resource to institutions in both the further and higher education sector.

Looking Ahead - The Training

With the updated funding model emerging for disability supports in higher education – the Fund for Students with Disabilities (ESF funded) - there is a need for more focused training to equip staff to provide the best and most relevant disability supports, which will lead to better outcomes and more successful transitioning to employment for students with disabilities.

The final output of the Road Map series will be an online training course, which seeks to take much of the learning garnered from producing the series and distill it in to a training programme. The aim of this programme will be to act as a recognised certification for those working in the sector to demonstrate that they have the knowledge and skills to provide a high level of support that aligns with best practice.

This course is currently in the early stages of development and new information will be posted on our website and in this Journal as it progresses.

AHEAD and DAWN are laying out the Road Map. It's almost time for staff in the sector to begin their journey. Are you ready?

Find out [more about the Inclusive Education Road Map here](#) and learn about the [AHEAD conference 2019 which is focussed on the journey towards inclusive education here](#).



Dara Ryder

AHEAD

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Dara Ryder is Chief Executive Officer of AHEAD, having previously managed AHEAD's digital presence and developed a suite of online CPD programmes relating to inclusive practice in his role as Digital Media and eLearning Manager there.

After graduating from Queens University in 2005, Dara joined Dun Laoghaire College of Further Education as a lecturer, where he became interested in inclusive education when working first-hand with students with disabilities in his classroom. When the opportunity arose in 2008, he joined AHEAD where he has been working ever since on creating inclusive environments in education and employment for people with disabilities.



Declan Treanor

Director Disability Service, Trinity College Dublin; Chair of DAWN

Declan has been working in Trinity since the Disability Service was set up in June 2000. He has responsibility for ensuring that the College embeds disability related issues into the core of all thinking and delivery to ensure that the College environment is as accessible to people with disabilities as possible. Declan has an extensive educational history which includes a B Sc. in Science for NUI Galway, a Master's in Social Policy and Administration from the London School of Economics and Political Science and a Post Graduate Diploma in Education, Trinity College Dublin. Declan is the Disability Officer for staff in College and for students who are D/deaf and Students with Autism Spectrum and Asperger's Syndrome. Declan completed the Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule Generic (ADOS-G), a direct observational assessment used to assist in the diagnosis of autism, and the Advanced Postgraduate Certificate in Autistic Spectrum Disorder at Queen's University Belfast.



Julie Tonge

Disability Officer in UCD Access & Lifelong Learning

Julie is the Disability Officer in UCD Access & Lifelong Learning, a former member of the Board of Directors of AHEAD (Association for Higher Education Access & Disability) and is currently the chair of the Disability Advisers Working Network (DAWN), the professional organisation for disability officers who are primarily responsible for supporting learners with disabilities in Higher Education in Ireland.