A Review of Inclusive Education & Employment Practices

November 2017
This electronic journal is not a newsletter nor is it an academic journal. It is a space for you working out there ‘on the ground’ to share innovations and your examples of good practices that deserve to be showcased.

ISSUE 6, NOVEMBER 2017

All views expressed in this online publication are the views of the author and are not necessarily endorsed by AHEAD. We will not be liable to you in respect of any loss or corruption of any data, database or software.
© AHEAD 2017

ISSN 2009-8286
‘I have one of your students’ is a common communication from faculty to Access and Disability Officers. It is a telling remark as it reveals a lot about the culture within HEIs in which many staff see the Disability/Access Office as responsible for all disadvantaged students and don’t see it as part of their job. This raises the question about just how inclusive institutions are, do they welcome all of their non-traditional students? Do they ensure that this cohort of students feel that they belong? The ever growing diversity of students together with modularisation, pressure on staffing and changing standards and requirements leads to less contact time between students and lecturers, and less understanding of the needs of these students.

Yet all of the research on student engagement and well-being emphasises the importance for students of a sense of belonging. Belonging, in an academic environment, according to Liz Thomas of Edge Hill University, is tied up with the capacity of the student to cope with the academic demands of the course, to reach the academic milestones and to be supported in doing so.

DAWN - the Disability Advisors Working Network - deal day-to-day with students at the edge and work at the front line with staff to build inclusive learning environments in their institutions. DAWN is aware that the Add-On funding model of inclusion in operation in HEIs is unsustainable. With 6% of students nationally having a disability and up to 45% of students from non-traditional backgrounds, the ‘I have one of your students’ approach to inclusion is surely obsolete. It is not enough anymore to leave inclusion to the Access and Disability Office, inclusion is a whole institution approach and is everyone’s job from admissions officer, to faculty, to careers.

DAWN are working collaboratively with AHEAD exploring the changes needed to build a more inclusive and engaging institutional environment. It is not a green field site and there are
many examples of inclusive initiatives in every institution. The challenge is to mainstream inclusion and to make it everyone’s responsibility; part of everyone’s job.

DAWN together with AHEAD are advocating for a system of Universal Design for Learning in higher education, (UDL). UDL is a new way of thinking about learning.

UDL is an approach to design and delivery of curriculum and learning built on three key principles:

1. Every student learns differently and this must be built into the curriculum, methods of teaching, and assessment.

2. There are many ways of teaching and learning that faculty and those supporting inclusion need to have knowledge of and also the skill to choose ones which best meet the differing learning needs of a diverse group of students.

3. Within this context of UDL and inclusive practices, formative assessment is an important part of the learning process.

DAWN and AHEAD have developed a road map for the introduction of UDL which builds on current good practices and explores the changes needed to move UDL on, including job roles. A Position Paper: Inclusive Education – a road map for disability support in higher education will be launched on the 7th December. Watch this space...

Ann Heelan, Executive Director
November, 2017
Welcome to the Autumn 2017 edition of the AHEAD Journal. Following on from Ann Heelan’s introduction to the Digital Badge for Universal Design in Teaching and Learning in the Journal 5 edition, we are now able to bring you the latest information both on the work of the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning from Roisin Donnelly and Terry Maguire, and AHEAD’s work on rolling out the learning materials for the Digital Badge to the sector, from Dara Ryder. Linked with analysis on implementation of National Access Policy from Anna Kelly, we hope you will feel well informed and able to share this important information with colleagues. The latest news from the WAM programme highlights developments to support Deaf sign language users into work. As always we welcome ideas and actions from colleagues around the world. I do hope you enjoy a good read. Do keep sending in your ideas for articles, we really enjoy reading them. There is no need to wait - we are happy to hear from you at any time, and to offer help and advice.

Barbara Waters, Editor
November, 2017
## Table of Contents

Sectoral Update on the National Professional Development Framework for Teachers in Higher Education: The Initial Implementation Strategy ........................................... 1

Earn Your UDL Stripes with the Digital Badge for Universal Design in Teaching and Learning ................................................................. 16

An Analysis of the Implementation of National Access Policy to Integrate and Mainstream Equality of Access in Irish Universities - through the Lens of Inclusive Design ......................................................... 21

Diversity as the most valuable tool to make learning potential flourish .................. 34

Mindfulness + Reflection → Engaged Learning .................................................. 39

DESIGNS - Improving employment opportunities for sign language users in the EU .................................................................................. 44

‘Inclusion Culture’ - Promoting Leadership in Intercultural Understanding within Mixed-ability Groups ..................................................... 51

MappED! Enhancing opportunities for students with disabilities to study abroad .. 64

Unlocking Potential: Dyslexia and Confidence - A Student Workshop at Dublin Business School ........................................................... 68
Sectoral Update on the National Professional Development Framework for Teachers in Higher Education: The Initial Implementation Strategy

Dr Roisin Donnelly (Project Manager) and Dr Terry Maguire (Director)
National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education.

Dr Roisin Donnelly is currently completing a one-year secondment to the National Forum from the Dublin Institute of Technology, where she has worked for 18 years in Academic Professional Development. She is a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy (FHEA), and the Staff & Educational Development Association (FSEDA). Roisin’s role in the Forum as a Project Manager, was to guide the initial implementation, management and evaluation of the national Professional Development Framework for those who teach in higher education. She also contributes to the Forum’s work in advancing the scholarship of teaching and learning in Irish higher education by engaging in current and relevant pedagogical research in professional development (PD).

Dr Terry Maguire is a senior manager and Irish educator with a passion for adult mathematics education; she is actively committed to supporting student success in and through higher education. After 25 years working in higher education in Scotland and Ireland, pioneering flexible, blended approaches to teaching and learning, she was seconded (2013-2017) from her role as Head of Lifelong Learning at Institute of Technology Tallaght to the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education.

Background

The National Forum (NF) for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning is currently in the early stage of implementation of the National Professional Development Framework (PDF) for all who teach in higher education. Prior to the publication of the PD Framework in 2016, there was no mechanism or route in place nationally to give structure, focus and support to individual staff to avail of relevant professional development and utilise it to realise their full potential in their teaching role. This important work is deepening sectoral understanding of the PDF itself and leading towards national recognition of an individual’s commitment to their professional development across the universities, institutes of technology and private colleges.

This article highlights what is unique about this PD Framework, its underpinning values and distinctive domains, as well as complementary PD initiatives in open access digital badge development and implementation.
Introduction

A national PDF is important for teaching and learning across the higher education (HE) sector in Ireland. At the forefront of this work by the National Forum is an aim to drive and maintain engagement in professional development initiatives for those who teach in order to support their career-long growth. With competing forces and priorities in Higher Education today, initiatives related to professional development sometimes become side-lined or relegated to an exercise in compliance. Against a scene of increasingly demanding requirements within the teaching role, the PDF is about promoting a culture of sustainable engagement for teachers to take ownership of their personal and professional development.

The rapidly changing environment of HE, increasing student diversity, the pervasiveness of technology and its potential to enhance teaching and learning and provide more access for student engagement requires all those who teach to have a personal commitment to their own professional development. The National Forum responded to this need and an extensive consultation process with the HE sector across 2014-15 (NF, 2015) highlighted a range of (often contradictory) views about a national PD Framework. What emerged was the need for a values-based framework, underpinned by scholarship that was flexible enough to be inclusive of all those who teach in Higher Education, one that included all types of professional development, and encourages those who teach to engage in a continuous cycle of evidence-based reflection on their practice over the lifelong learning process. There was a need for flexibility for institutions to interpret the framework for their own context. There was less agreement about whether the need to develop personal and professional digital capacity should be included explicitly or to be integrated across the framework. The diversity of opinion about what the national
framework would look like (the form it took and its content) means that the framework as developed may not be considered perfect, but importantly it is accepted by all those who teach in the sector as usable for their practice.

The PD Framework was published by the National Forum in mid-2016 at http://www.teachingandlearning.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/PD-Framework-FINAL.pdf to provide guidance for the professional development of individuals and gives direction to other stakeholders (e.g. institutions, HE networks, educational developers, policy makers and student body representatives) for planning, developing and engaging in professional development activities. As requested by the sector, the PDF provides descriptions of the domains of PD activity, elements and professional values associated with the performance of teaching, and associated leadership roles. The term ‘teacher’ as used in this framework is inclusive of all the activities involved in the teaching and the facilitation of student learning in the higher education context, and incorporates the principles of student engagement in the learning process.
Sectoral Understanding of Professional Development: A Typology

The consultation process identified a shared typology (Figure 1) for the range of professional development opportunities incorporated in the framework which include activities which are non-accredited (including collaborative, unstructured and structured) and those which are accredited.

Staff who teach develop their knowledge, skills and competencies in their teaching through a range of learning activities. Each learning activity can be described by different types of learning, singly or in combination. The framework identifies and recognises four types of learning associated with any professional development learning activity (‘new learning’; ‘consolidating learning’; ‘mentoring’ and ‘leading’).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conversations with colleagues, peer networking &amp; observations, blogs/discussion forums, mentoring, critical friends engaging in informal dialogue on how to improve teaching</td>
<td>Reading articles, following social media, self-study, watching video tutorials, keeping a reflective teaching journal/portfolio, preparing an article for publication</td>
<td>Workshops, seminars, MOOCs, conferences, summer schools, structured collaborative projects, research project on a topic of professional interest</td>
<td>Professional Certificate, Graduate Diploma, Masters, PhD, EdD in: Teaching and Learning, eLearning, Leadership in Education; Education Policy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1: Typology of PD opportunities incorporated in the PD Framework
The National Professional Development Framework

The uniqueness of the PDF is in reframing the PD conversation through a shift in discourse to one of advocacy, and it repositions professional development in Irish HE so that it places priority soundly on the individual’s needs. The PDF (illustrated in Figure 2) presents a holistic approach to professional development, incorporating the five domains with the individuality of the staff member at its core.

A key feature of the framework is its flexibility in how it uses a domain-based approach to professional standards in teaching and learning. Each of the five PDF domains are applicable to a wide number of staff roles and to different career stages of those engaged in teaching and supporting learning. The domains and elements are underpinned by professional values, all of which emerged from the extensive and concentrated sectoral consultation. By setting objectives and charting progress towards their achievement, identifying strengths and development needs and enabling discussion of career aspirations, the PDF can support individuals to be responsible for determining what they need to learn, for managing and undertaking their own PD activity, and to consider how best to incorporate innovations to their professional practice.

Individuals can interpret the framework in their own unique way, depending on disciplinary background, and can showcase their engagement with relevant domains of the PDF.
At the core of the domains is the centrality of ‘the Self’ recognising that the professional and personal values that the individual brings to their teaching are pivotal in their development as a teacher.

**Professional Identity and Development** captures the development and self-evaluation of professional identity and recognises that an individual’s professional identity can change at different stages of their career.

The **Professional Communication and Dialogue** domain emphasises the need for those who teach to be able to communicate, and collaborate through a range of media.

**Professional Knowledge and Skills** ensures the individual remains current in terms of their professional/disciplinary knowledge and can implement teaching, learning and assessment approaches which are reflective and underpinned by a strong evidence base.
• The explicit inclusion of the domain **Personal and Professional Digital Capacity** recognises that we live and work in a digital world, and that teachers must develop digital skills to have the self-assurance to harness the potential of technology for learning impact. This domain has made explicit the need to develop skills and confidence for those that teach in Irish higher education.

The development of an individual’s engagement with the scholarship of teaching and learning is an integral component of each of the five domains.

The PDF is underpinned by five key professional values [Inclusivity; Authenticity; Collaboration; Scholarship; Learner Centredness] which act as a guide for individual staff, academic departments and institutions to recognise, inform, enhance and sustain PD in Irish Higher Education (Figure 3):

![Figure 3: The underpinning professional values of the national PDF](image-url)
Implementing the PD Framework across the sector

Once the PDF was developed, considerable thought went into planning its early implementation and we feel that the connections formed through each stage contribute to the uniqueness of the work. One of the first steps taken earlier this year was the formation of an independent PD Expert Advisory Group with 10 academics and education experts to develop sectoral capacity to support the PDF in the HEIs. The work of this group was crucial for guiding sustainable engagement with the PDF throughout the sector, as they facilitated a number of pilot studies nationally. The pilot studies were designed to capture how individuals (from a range of individual professional identities) navigate the PDF with a view to informing support material and resources to guide others using the framework in the future. There were 22 pilot groups formed in the HE sector from universities, institutes of technology and the private colleges. These groups incorporated a range of professional identities: new and experienced academic staff from a wide range of disciplines; Heads of Department; Part-time Lecturers from industry; Teaching staff from the Health Professions; Academic Writing Tutors; Maths Learning Support Tutors; Learning Technologists; Nurse Educators; Educational Developers; Careers Advisors; Disability Liaison Officers; Teacher Educators; New Teachers in the HECA Colleges; Librarians; Work Placement Co-ordinators; Art & Design Practitioner-Educators; PhD Supervisors; Teachers who research; Researchers who teach.

Each of the pilot study groups gave the participants an opportunity to begin a professional development portfolio (PDP) to explore the domains of the framework, using it to think about how they can develop as teaching professionals. Those involved were encouraged to develop their PDP in any format and media that enabled them to collect their evidence in a way that suited their
needs and context, and allowed them the space to undertake the continuing process of assessment, analysis, action, and review of their practice, at a time and pace that suits them. Compiling the PDP reinforces professional learning by directing the teacher’s attention to strengths and gaps in their knowledge and skills and enables them to set clear goals for their own development. It is also evidence of the teacher’s development and commitment to PD and to keeping up-to-date with rapidly changing knowledge, and the need to maintain and develop skills. Arguably, such a PD record is something that can support national professional mobility.

The evaluation phase of this work is currently taking place, and early insights come directly from the 210 participants who engaged with the pilot studies. Clear benefits are emerging in terms of collaboration, authenticity and learner centredness which is a resounding endorsement of the underpinning professional values of the PDF. A range of short-term and potential long-term impacts have been identified (Table 1):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly agreed / Agreed</th>
<th>Short-term impact: engaging with the PDF...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>93%</td>
<td>increased my confidence in my professional role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>87%</td>
<td>supported the development of my T&amp;L skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>88%</td>
<td>increased my engagement with PD activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>78%</td>
<td>enhanced dialogue and discourse about T&amp;L in my institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85%</td>
<td>enhanced my T&amp;L practices</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Long-term impact: the PDF has the potential to impact on...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Short-term and potential long-term impacts of engaging with the PDF
National Digital Badge System and ongoing PD Initiatives

Complementing the work taking place on the PDF through the pilot studies, an innovative initiative that has captured the collective imagination of the sector is the design, development and delivery of a series of fifteen open access professional development programmes. Subject expert development teams from across the sector collaborated to design and develop these PD programmes (each requiring 25 student effort hours) against nationally agreed criteria. Programmes cover a range of key topics, shown in the matrix below (Figure 4). Participants who complete these programmes are awarded a National Forum digital badge matched to the domain it relates to on the PD Framework. Although these badges do not have any associated ECTS, the badges can improve the mobility and recognition of non-accredited professional development of staff across the sector. The programmes and associated resources are available to download by all institutions through the National Forum PD Resource Portal. These include workshop-based and independent learning materials, presentations, activity sheets, facilitator guides and PD videos to attract prospective participants.
Staff who want to begin their professional development journey using the PDF as their guide are encourage to take the following two programmes:

**PD Reflective Practice**
- PACT: Commitment to professional development
- Reflective practice in teaching

Lecturers new to teaching or staff who want to develop their teaching skills can select from a range under the ‘Teaching Skills’ cluster:

**Teaching Skills**
- Teaching and learning strategies for new lecturers
- Getting started with online teaching
- Postgraduate research supervision
- Mentoring essentials in teaching and learning

For more experienced teaching staff who may wish to explore professional areas of interest, an alternative pathway offers the choice of three clusters (Specialist Expertise; Curriculum Design; Student Focused):

**Specialist Expertise**
- Digital policy development for T&L
- Entrepreneurship education
- Academic writing in higher education
- Developing intercultural awareness
- Programme design

**Curriculum Design**
- Universal design in teaching and learning
- Programme-focussed assessment

**Student Focused**
- Enabling student volunteering
- Student engagement
An important step in recognising structured non-accredited professional development for the sector, these national badges were designed and developed following a rigorous process captured as a model of open-access digital badge development outlined in Figure 5.

Two further PDF initiatives have gained significant traction and supported the embedding of the framework across the sector. Institutions are being financed through the T&L Enhancement Fund 2016 to map their existing professional development provision onto the PD framework, to develop specific resources for those in a leadership role as well as entry programmes for graduate assistants. Ten collaborative projects are underway involving 22 HEIs. Full details of these projects are available at http://www.teachingandlearning.ie/digital-enhancement-funding/2016-tl-fund-proposals/
Professional development has also been included as a funding stream the 2017-18 national funded seminar series and will enable institutions to run introductory workshops for their staff or to run some of the 15 open-access programmes discussed earlier. These funded initiatives help to keep up momentum around the implementation of the PDF, and will continue to give more and more teachers the chance to engage with the framework.

Emergence of a National PD Recognition Framework

In summary, the PD Framework provides an opportunity for all who teach to progress, enrich, develop and enhance their practice, expertise, knowledge, skills and professional values. It supports teachers as they develop as reflective, accomplished and enquiring professionals who are able to engage with the complexities of teaching and learning and the changing contemporary world of their learners. In the next phase of development, our aim is to develop a PD Recognition Framework informed by the PDF pilot implementation and complementary PD initiatives. The PD Recognition Framework will support a national professional development community of those who teach in Irish higher education, and will acknowledge an individual’s commitment to continuous professional development. As a membership organisation, it will recognise the professional knowledge and pedagogical expertise, accomplishment and enhanced, sustained reflective enquiry that members will have undertaken in the development of their professional learning. Registered members will develop and maintain their standing in the community-centred organisation as they continue to progress in their teaching role and across the profession of education.
The incorporation of a peer triad support mechanism will allow teachers from different disciplines to work together in bringing their PD further into their practice and bridge the theory-practice gap. The PD Recognition Framework will nurture and accelerate good ideas, showcase innovative practice, and encourage collaborative networks and partnerships among HE teaching staff. It will enable a sector-wide learning community to form that will enrich the practice of the immediate three individuals involved, but also the profession as a whole. Through the triads, teacher success stories, as well as the challenges and how they overcome them, can be shared for the benefit of all involved.

**Conclusion**

Implementing the PDF in the HE sector is undoubtedly challenging; but the unparalleled enthusiasm and commitment of the teachers who have embraced the challenges and engaged in all stages of the PDF pilot implementation has reinforced belief that this is the way forward for the sector.

Findings from the PDF initial implementation show that policymakers and institutional leaders must take a leadership role to encourage and enable the sector wide implementation of the framework. They must support all educators within their institutions to engage in continuous professional development and enable them to apply that learning to improve student learning. Interviews with senior staff were held in 2017 across the HE sector indicated their commitment to increased availability and uptake of professional development opportunities in teaching, learning and assessment within their institutions (NF, In Press).

Learning Communities at discipline, programme or department/faculty level, together with communities of practice are the major engines of change, and such learning communities can support those involved in PD development and recognition.
There is an emerging theme of professionalisation of teaching in higher education which has been positive and visible in the period 2014-2017, and there is strong support for retaining this theme in the foreground of activities at institutional, regional and national levels. A more nuanced understanding of PD needs is now evident, with an emphasis on support for specific areas and on the development of academic teams. There is openness to mapping existing and future PD provision to the Framework. The national PDF offers a clear definition and roadmap for engaging with professional development within Irish HEIs for the future.

The take-away message about the PDF, the recent pilot study implementation, and the range of ongoing PD projects and seminars funded by the National Forum is that it can encourage those who teach in HE across all disciplines and professional roles in teaching and learning to grow, and to develop their careers. The significance of this work is the continuous improvement of teaching staff, students, institutions, and the Irish higher education community. We firmly believe that this national PDF is essential for driving future improvement in, and continuing to raise the profile of T&L across the Irish HE sector.

(Editor’s note – Also in this issue of the Journal, read about AHEAD’s involvement in rolling out the Digital Badge for Universal Design in Teaching and Learning)

References


Implementation of Universal Design principles in Teaching and Learning promotes inclusivity and equity while also ‘future-proofing’ teaching practices. As our classrooms and lecture theatres become increasingly diverse, our practices must also adapt to reflect the changing landscape of further and higher education. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is an educational framework based on research in the learning sciences, including cognitive neuroscience, which guides the development of flexible learning environments that can accommodate individual learning differences and cater for the wide range of diversity in our lecture rooms. It provides a clear pathway to a more inclusive and sustainable campus. But if UDL provides the pathway, who provides ‘the map’ to get there? How can we reach as many academics and support staff members as possible and guide them to be better, more inclusive practitioners?

These are questions we have pondered much in AHEAD since incorporating UDL principles in our education system became a key pillar of our strategy back in 2015. In our discussions and consultations, it became clear that professional development would play a key role in the transition to a UDL campus. We knew that we had the expertise to draw ‘the map’ and debated how we could get it into the hands of as many in the third level sector as we could. Then we saw an opportunity.

Dara Ryder, Digital Media & eLearning Manager, AHEAD.

Dara Ryder is currently managing AHEAD’s digital media presence as well as further developing their eLearning platform which hosts online professional development courses for staff, students and graduates. Having gained a BSc in Music Technology from Queens University, 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 in a variety of roles involving administration, training, multimedia, communications, events and research. Dara has a particular passion for using multimedia to convey information accessible to everybody.

Earn Your UDL Stripes with the Digital Badge for Universal Design in Teaching and Learning
The Digital Badge Initiative

In 2016, The National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning announced its Digital Badge Initiative. The Forum, having long realised the importance of professional development in the higher education sector, recognised that there was a huge amount of unaccredited ‘micro CPD’ (continuing professional development) ongoing in institutions across the country and that much of this work was being duplicated nationally. Additionally, they saw that there was no validation by the sector for staff who undertook this type of small scale CPD and a lack of recognition of skills acquired when staff sought to move to other institutions.

They found part of the answer to this problem in Digital Badging. For those unfamiliar with the concept, any organisation can issue digital badges as a recognition for work achieved or skills acquired – think of them as the certificate of the future. Unlike ordinary certificates however, digital badges come with a weight of other useful information such as a descriptor of the badge, a set of criteria met in order to receive the badge and in some cases, links to evidence of how the criteria has been met (e.g. an actual course assignment). Digital badges are collected by individuals in a personal digital backpack, which acts as an online record of the person’s learning journey. This backpack can then be displayed on websites, e-portfolios and professional networks such as LinkedIn, giving potential employers a much richer picture of the person’s skills and achievements than a simple few lines on a CV would.

The National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning realised that with the weight of their name behind these bits of micro CPD and the recognition by HR departments that would come with that, they could become more meaningful, valuable and ultimately more desirable. So, they went about identifying common areas of CPD being replicated across the
country and placed a call for expert contributors in these areas to design open source learning materials, which would form the basis of their suite of digital badge courses. These courses would then be available for colleges to roll out locally themselves, and all participants undertaking them nationally would receive a relevant National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning digital badge to add to their ‘digital backpack’. All that colleges would require was an interested staff member on campus to act as a course facilitator/administrator and they would receive the relevant learning materials and instructions free of charge.

Creating the Digital Badge

AHEAD, with UDL advocate Lisa Padden of UCD Access & Lifelong Learning as a partner, successfully applied to be the expert creators of the Digital Badge for Universal Design in Teaching and Learning. This gave AHEAD the opportunity to play a key role in drawing ‘the map’ for UDL and to leverage the credibility and recognition of The Forum within the higher education sector to enable us to reach as big an audience as possible.

We set about creating a full set of learning materials for an introductory UDL course and an accompanying facilitator’s pack which lays out the course structure and instructions for those interested in rolling out the course in their institution. After months of hard work, our team produced materials for a blended learning course covering all of the basics of UDL and giving participants a framework to analyse and adapt their own teaching practice. The course begins with an online module introducing the concept of universal design for learning and explaining how you can use the framework to reflect on your own practice. This is followed by a 2 hour group workshop in which participants will examine existing barriers for students and how the application of
UDL principles could help to remove them. Finally, participants are tasked with redesigning one aspect of a module they are currently teaching in line with UDL principles and reporting on the results in a case study format.

As well as being a final assessment for the course, documenting the work undertaken to receive the digital badge, these case studies can be shared to encourage others to analyse their own practice and to contribute to sectoral knowledge around UDL. Those who successfully complete all three key aspects of the course receive the Forum’s digital badge for Universal Design in Teaching and Learning.

All of the materials produced are open source and freely useable under a creative commons license and the full facilitators pack is available to download from the Forum’s Professional Development Portal (Link available soon – see here for more details: https://www.teachingandlearning.ie/professional-development/)

Figure 1 Screen shot of the online module - part of the digital badge for Universal Design in Teaching & Learning
What next?

The next stage of the process is to identify potential facilitators in institutions from around the sector – individuals working on campus who are prepared to take on the course administration and be UDL champions. We have already run one workshop for interested facilitators outlining how to deliver the course and intend to run another next semester so be sure to join our mailing list to be kept informed of developments. This is your chance to be a real UDL advocate in your institution and make a positive lasting imprint on your campus. We’ll provide the map. Are you ready to lead the way? will be gather in the future and this will assist us in identifying more targeted interventions. Positive psychology has more to contribute and we will watch space this with eager anticipation.
An Analysis of the Implementation of National Access Policy to Integrate and Mainstream Equality of Access in Irish Universities - through the Lens of Inclusive Design

Dr Anna M. Kelly, DipEd(HEc) MEd(SEN) MSc(Mgt), PhD (Inclusive Design)
Dr Anna Kelly is Director of Access & Lifelong Learning at University College Dublin (UCD) - Ireland’s largest university, with over 30,000 students. Dr Kelly leads a team of access specialists who support the University to realise its strategic objective to become a diverse and inclusive scholarly community. Dr Kelly is Ireland’s European Access Network (EAN) representative, she chairs the Steering Group for HEAR/DARE Alternative Admissions Routes to Higher Education. She has extensive experience of further education, including with St Michael’s House, the National Rehabilitation Board and the National Training Authority (FÁS).

Introduction

This is a study of the implementation of national access policy to integrate and mainstream equality of access in Irish universities - through the lens of Inclusive Design. Situated in the field of Inclusive Design for Education, it investigates the implementation of the national policy objective to

integrate the principle of equity of access more fully into the everyday life of the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) so that it permeates all faculties and departments, and is not marginalised as the responsibility of the designated access office (HEA, 2015, p. 25).

Two definitions are central to understanding in this study. ‘Access’ is understood as the participation of under-represented students beyond entry pathways, to include access to an inclusive learning environment, where pedagogical practices, student services, and operational elements are designed to meet the needs of a diverse student body (NQAI, 2003; HEA, 2008; Lee, 2010; Burke, 2012). Under-represented students typically include those with disabilities, mature students, those from communities experiencing low progression, part-time/flexible learners, further education award holders and members of the Traveller community (HEA, 2015). ‘Inclusive design’ grew out of the Universal Design movement, and places emphasis on inclusion and adaptation of education systems to individual differences (Rose & Meyer 2002; Gordon & O’Leary 2015; Goodman 2016; Treviranus 2016).
This research study further developed this definition for application in higher education. In this context, ‘inclusive design’ is understood as design for full range of human diversity, rather than perceived notion of typical, average or so called ‘traditional’ student. This approach applies to all aspects of higher education (HE), including built and technological environments, educational experience, student supports, and ensures that they are designed **inclusively**, to meet needs of all. In so doing, access is infused and embedded throughout HE, and is promoted, supported; the responsibility of all.

Ireland has a well-developed policy approach to access (HEA, 2004, 2008, 2015); nevertheless, implementation has yet to be fully realised (HEA, 2006, 2010, 2014). Over the past decade, the higher education sector in Ireland has endeavoured to respond to a more diverse student population, to create inclusive learning environments, and also to open learning opportunities to under-represented groups. The sector is no longer universally seen as the sole preserve of an elite group (Walsh, 2014). **Institutional compacts** are now the means by which national policy targets are monitored: one of which concerns Participation, Equality of Access, and Lifelong Learning (HEA, 2013).

**Research Design**

Drawing on the work of Van Horn and Van Meter (2009), the views of the leaders of Ireland’s seven universities were gathered. Twenty-one leaders, including University Presidents/Provosts, University Registrars/Chief Academic Officers, and Student Union Presidents were invited to participate, of which nineteen (90.5%), agreed to be interviewed. Five University Presidents participated and a further two nominated representatives. Four University Registrars took part, and an additional three designated representatives. Six of the seven Student Union Presidents took part.
A semi-structured interview approach was adopted, using a mixture of question formats (Robson, 2002; Dillman, Smyth and Christian, 2009). Participants were assured that their anonymity would be protected (Sieber, 1992).

Findings
In general, this study found early signs of mainstreaming and embedding equality of access, but it also found an absence of institution-wide policies and practices to foster and inculcate inclusion and diversity. More detailed findings are set below.

Institutional Priority

All university strategic plans contained a commitment to equality of access, as well as specific targets for the equity groups, as specified by the HEA. While strategic plans represent the institutional aspirations, they also arguably signal the organisation’s intent and, in this context, they conveyed both the institutional perspective and established equality of access as a stated institutional priority. However, the leader interviews revealed that the equality objectives that featured in these strategic plans were not among the named key university priorities.

Twelve different priorities were mentioned:

- educational experience
- research
- international recruitment
- engagement
- enterprise and innovation
- non-traditional students
- ranking
- campus development
- resources
- Irish language
- curriculum development
- institutional autonomy

When these were ranked by the number of mentions in the interview transcripts, University Presidents identified educational experience and research as the main priorities, while Registrars named research and resources, and SU Presidents were unanimous in their view that increasing the number of international students was the top priority. It is noteworthy that each interviewee received, in advance, a written invitation explaining the nature of this study, in addition to copy of the interview questionnaire: thus leaders had time to reflect on the information sought and the emphasis they wished to give. Hence, it might be assumed that interviewees would frame their responses to more favourably reflect the researcher’s area of inquiry. Based on these responses, this does not appear to be the case.

Universities operate in a challenging world of growing demand for higher education, public policy emphasis on access for under-represented groups, and significant resourcing constraints (RTE, 2013b, 2013a). A balance is required between competing needs, priorities and opportunities. Some university leaders seemed reluctant to be seen to lead on equality of access; as one Registrar remarked, ‘we would not want to particularly brand ourselves as the university for non-traditional entrants because, actually, that stigmatises non-traditional entrants and actually makes it harder for them to progress’. Were all universities to proactively prioritise access and inclusion, the challenge and potential for stigmatisation could be diminished. The Provost of Trinity College Dublin, Professor Prendergast, interviewed on RTE radio by Seán O’Rourke said
I believe everybody should have access to a university education if it’s what they want, if it suits their talents, access opens up university education for all. I firmly believe that: regardless of means (RTE, 2013b).

Support of Senior University Leaders

In general, university leaders were favourably disposed to positive discrimination; University Presidents and student leaders stated their support most strongly, while Registrars’ support was qualified and more nuanced. Many leaders emphasised the importance of diversity, ability and the context in which learning was achieved, identifying a need to ‘level the playing field in regard to using the Leaving Certificate as a criterion for entry’. Being exposed to the particular circumstances of people or communities helps to sensitise perceptions and responses, as demonstrated by one University President, who was well disposed to positive discrimination, and rated that support at the highest level, saying, ‘It mightn’t have been so high before I became more aware of it. I’ve seen what the kids can do, so it’s... I’ve learnt’. However, some leaders expressed fears that positive discrimination could lead to tokenism, and ideally, it should not be needed. Arguably, university leaders are central to their institutions’ mission, endeavour, and ultimate success. Their personal commitment to equality is important, and

Their beliefs and values act as a catalyst to subsequent leadership on equality and diversity (ECU, 2014, p. 3).

This current study found that responsibility for the implementation of access policy is assigned at the most senior organisational level. Typically, these senior academic executives hold the position of Registrar/Chief Academic Officer/Vice-President for Academic Affairs, Vice-President of Student Experience. It is noteworthy
that access was understood and interpreted differently. The institutional arrangements tended to mirror the distinction drawn between part-time students, and other target groups. Part-time students were not generally regarded by the University leaders as part of access provision which may point to a misunderstanding of the breadth of national access policy (HEA, 2004, 2008, 2015), or the overall status of these students, who do not attract state supports. Mixed messages emanate from policy makers regarding the importance, priority and funding of flexible provision:

**By 2016, full equality of provision and support will have been achieved in higher education for all students, regardless of time, place or pace of study (HEA, 2012, p. 33).**

Universities are increasingly encouraging academic staff to support the participation of non-traditional students. Many leaders offered examples in areas such as, creating supportive environment, the role of teaching and learning, development of policies and guidelines, and the role of specialist staff. In addition, the work of university committees (e.g. equality), participation targets, and the personal commitment of staff, also featured in the examples offered. The impact of equality legislation was evident in the range of examination accommodations identified for students with disabilities. The role of teaching and learning and associated schemes such as, teaching and learning awards, and staff development funding, were all considered to foster innovative practice and build competencies. One university leader, however, observed that changes in the teaching domain are ‘more of a slower shift in approach, and everything to do with pedagogy has to be that way ... So that has to be a developmental piece of work. While some leaders identified examples of inclusive practice, expressed broad satisfaction with the progress made, and acknowledged staff commitment, a systematic coherent approach to inclusive teaching and learning was not evidenced. Embedding inclusive practices is not without it challenges, as
recounted by one Registrar who said, 'That kind of thing would be done at a department level. The departments are, I think like most universities, they’re very autonomous here. So, they design their own programmes and they design their own teaching and assessment strategies’. The competing missions were alluded to by a Student Union President who said, ‘I think academic staff may even feel under pressure in a lot of third level institutions in Ireland, to focus more on research rather than around the students’.

University Processes

The development of access strategies shows early signs of mainstreaming, with some ‘joined up thinking’ emerging. Examples offered included, the importance attributed to the development of access culture, which is evident when ‘the leader of the organisation keeps talking about it’, rethinking organisational design to enable ‘learning support services [to be] more widely available on a needs basis, as I say rather than on a category basis’, or to ‘treat students as students and we need to be thinking of every student as an individual with individual needs’. Some universities have begun to ‘ensure that there has been a rule run across it [policy] in terms of diversity and the equality agenda and that the policy aligns with it’. Institutions too are working with their academic staff, who are ‘briefed on what is meant by an inclusive learning environment, or an inclusive teaching environment, an inclusive assessment environment, [which] promotes that culture and that awareness within the departments right across the university’. However another said ‘You said in terms of inclusive design and that’s something that we have not really even talked about a lot, it’s something in the background and occasionally the words are used but I don’t think the reality of what that means across programmes and pedagogy has really
sunk in yet. The big difficulty will be persuading people that it’s not a resource-intensive change, it’s a change and that takes effort but it’s not more work to deliver in steady state’.

The access objectives articulated by leaders underpinned the early signs of an institution-wide approach and included six themes:

- participation targets
- quality learning experience
- admissions systems
- changing the perception of the university
- creating a diverse campus
- financial resources

Leaders were concerned that students were not only admitted, but also enabled to progress, and some thought that access students required ‘more one to one support, more input, more accommodations, if people are going to succeed’. A more inclusive perspective was also enunciated by one University President who said, ‘The overarching first goal of the university is to provide an outstanding student experience for every one of our students’.

A question that arises is how to ensure that such a mission is realised for all students, particularly ‘given the fact that academic staff, to be honest, are promoted on, you know, research, teaching and more often research, obviously, the impact on having to cater for students who are unwell or can’t take exams or need special accommodations, which is not measured within the university’.

These sentiments point to an apparent contradiction between institutional ambition, and the activity that is measured and regarded. Universities, too, identified a need to effect change in how their institutions are perceived, as part of their access approach. These institutions understandably guard their brands, celebrate the success of high achieving alumni, publicise the
pioneering work of their researchers, and mark their contribution to wider society. The task of presenting the university as a place for all is some way off, though some encouraging evidence was forthcoming. Specifically, the related issue of creating a diverse campus was also identified, as part of the access strategies. As one Registrar said, ‘we believe that diversity itself is very important on a campus; that adds an awful lot to the value of the campus, for all students and for all teachers; that it creates a better community and everyone learns better from having people from different backgrounds’. Encouragingly, one university leader said, ‘we don’t see it as damaging our quest for excellence, because we know that the students who come through these routes are also excellent. So, it enhances that excellence’. However, some university leaders were concerned that there is a lack understanding and appreciation of the issues surrounding equality and access, and that there is need to persuade others ‘that what we’re recognising is achievement relative to the investment, in effect that the individual has had invested in them, be that through the family, through the school, community’. 

Some progress was reported in aligning the approach to access with student recruitment, admissions, services and supports, and university governance arrangements. A less-developed alignment was evident in human resources. For example, supports for students were found to span an alignment continuum, ranging from those universities who operate specialised, separate services, based on the student categories, to those a more holistic inclusive arrangement. Some universities embraced greater structural alignment and co-ordination of services for all students, with increasing levels of cooperation and collaboration between general student services and access teams. It should be remembered that responses to address the needs of particular target groups emerged over time and, as such, ‘they developed in an ad hoc way and there’s a very kind of strict divide between the access office or
the access students, the international office and the international students, graduate office and everybody else’. Universities who have reshaped and consolidated services, are also aware of the differing student needs. As one Registrar said, ‘I think we are aligned quite well ... [although] we probably do more for access students than for the average student and part of it is I suppose in recognition that most of them will be first generation entrants’.

In contrast, many universities traditionally ‘regard access strategies about students and HR policies about staff’; thus, the intersection of these two functions has tended to be less clear. One University President observed ‘in terms of equality and diversity in the institution, the most important step is that access and HR have a common world view, you know just get them together and then they will reinforce each other’s missions’.

University Structures

Universities in this study are moving towards the dispersal and accountability for access throughout the academic and professional structures. Many favoured arrangements that spread access responsibilities among a range of academic or service functions: in several instances these were also accompanied by central co-ordination. A dispersed approach to access builds ownership and further embeds access throughout the university, though ‘it’s not as easy as it sounds. It’s challenging. But equally, it encourages a sense of partnership’.

Universities also reported that they had made some progress in ensuring that the built environment accommodates the needs of students with disabilities. Progress was also reported in meeting the technology needs of students with disabilities, with some acknowledging that ‘it is a work in progress, because we’ve recognised a need to be compliant and I think we’re moving to
compliance but we haven’t got there in any sense’, while others were concerned that ‘the university’s general IT investment is less than it should be, so our systems and our general web accessibility and so on, is not what I would like it to be’.

Conclusion

This study offers signs that Irish Universities are slowly evolving into inclusive institutions. The pockets of good institutional practice need to be nurtured and embedded. Despite the early signs of mainstreaming, an ‘inclusion implementation gap’ persists. National access policy (HEA, 2015c) promoting the integration of access into everyday life of the university, remains to be fully realised. From a policy perspective, the institutional dimension of access needs further emphasis. The Inclusive Design Framework such as that proposed by Kelly (2017) offers a useful starting point and highlights four priority dimensions:

1. institutional vision and priorities
2. organisational arrangements
3. teaching, learning and assessment
4. research and data collection

The emergent field of Inclusive Design situates access and diversity in education as central, not marginal, and offers a way forward. It challenges traditional perspectives, offers an approach to redesign and reconfigure our institutions to reflect inclusion and diversity, and find solutions to the many inherent challenges associated with inclusion in higher education. In other words, it offers real and practical ways to fill the ‘inclusion implementation gap’.
Bibliography


RTE (2013a) 'Dr Hugh Brady, outgoing UCD President', Today with Sean O’ Rourke. RTE.

RTE (2013b) 'Dr Paddy Prendergast’, Today with Sean O’ Rourke. RTE.


Diversity as the most valuable tool to make learning potential flourish

Elke Emmers

Elke Emmers is the coordinator of the diversity policy for the university college Odisee. She also teaches in the field of social work and is associated with the research unit ‘Parenting and Special Education’ at the university of KU Leuven where she is a PhD student. Her research topics are inclusive education, attitudes towards inclusive education and attitudes towards people with disabilities participating in higher education.

The University College Odisee is, with 17,000 students, the third largest university college in Flanders (Belgium). As a member of the ‘Association Katholieke Universiteit Leuven’ we offer bachelor study programmes on different campuses in Aalst, Brussels, Ghent and Sint-Niklaas. Odisee has a clear vision for the future, which came about after an intensive consultation process involving all staff, at all campuses. Our focus is on ‘people’, their talents and development. The student is our central focus point. Optimism drives us in everything we do. We trust each other, share experiences, knowledge and skills in open networks. Thinking, daring, doing, persevering and dreaming are our guiding motives. We have a clear strategy to transform that vision into practice. We take pride in our vision and have translated it into five key policy objectives to deliver our strategy in daily education practice. A thorough quality culture is essential to ensure its realisation.

There are five key policy objectives which are inextricably connected.

1. We offer state-of-the-art education. Together with internal and external stakeholders, we continuously evaluate and improve our training and service.

2. We anchor our courses in the field of work (and vice versa).

3. We build an open, innovative and prestigious educational community.

4. We want to develop and implement an integrated talent policy according to international recommendations.

5. We are preparing and shaping our educational community for super diversity.
Due to the major changes in the educational landscape and the expansion of higher education to the idea of education for all, these two last key policy objectives appear to be leverages to one another to grow towards an inclusive education community. The student population in (Flemish) higher education should be a reflection of the people in the society (Pliner & Johnson, 2004). It is a social necessity to deal constructively with the super diversity of modern society, and with our different campuses in different major cities. In these major cities we speak more and more of ‘super diversity’. There are several minority groups (e.g. Romanians, Albanians, North Africans, Spaniards and other populations), which brings together more social, economic, cultural and ethnic differences. We need to address this issue to overcome the challenges and to find connection with each other and the bigger society. Diversity policy then means, for our university college, recognising and accepting the unique qualities, talents of all students (and staff) to enable opportunities for fully developing the potential of students to enter the field of work successfully.

Students entering higher education take on a new role in life next to the different roles they already hold in other contexts, such as brother, son, scout leader, friend and so on. They are not just students on our courses, they are much more. In Odisee we started looking more holistically at the student, and we saw that a much wider learning environment unfolds, characterised by the student’s unique learning needs, talents and personal qualities.

This unique composition of learning needs, talents and personal qualities for each student is translated educationally as their individual learning style and learning potential but often shows in student differences. Differences between students often cause difficulties in class management, group composition and sometimes create unwanted cultural barriers. Barriers such as having a negative image of students with a migration background,
as well as lower estimates of academic performance for some students and doubting the study ethics of students with a diverse background.

Lack of understanding can sometimes make teaching more difficult or challenging.

Every day, we allow opportunities to perish due to differences between students and forget how to deploy diversity as the most valuable tool to make learning potential flourish. To grow towards inclusion, we need to align our educational environment and education practice to the learning needs and talents of each student in the diverse student population.

Creating a strong learning environment

We are now creating a powerful learning environment for each student, where a broad basic understanding is the basis for an inclusive education community in which the learning environment is stimulated to make use of student differences.

To create this powerful learning environment we needed to install three important pillars (Booth, Ainscow, Black-Hawkins, Vaughan, & Shaw, 2002).

**First of all, we are creating an inclusive culture** with inclusive values and standards, and an open climate where all students are welcome. All teachers, students and other personnel have to find fellowship in the concept of diversity - in our college this is defined as a broad spectrum from the mother with 5 children who wants to obtain a bachelor’s degree, to the student with dyslexia, or the student who is multilingual because of another social cultural background. Within this pillar we focus on sensitising the entire staff and organising educational days on the theme of diversity.
During these educational days, we inspire the lecturers with success stories about student diversity and reflect on our own attitudes and students’ attitudes towards students with a diverse background. In order to follow up on the educational days, tailor-made trajectories are made to further work on shared values and standards concerning student diversity.

**Secondly, universal design for learning.** We are building an inclusive education community by using inclusive strategies in practice following the principles of universal design for learning. By building our courses keeping in mind the unique strengths, talents and learning needs of each student, a very powerful learning environment can be created. In this second pillar we focus mainly on professionalising teachers to focus on talents. For example, we use a broader evaluation process, whereby students will become more and more owners of their learning process. The student then chooses, based on his talent, a particular evaluation format, for example, a presentation, written, or oral submission. This led to empowerment of students but also produced some stress about making the ‘right choice’.

Using differences between students as a tool to increase engagement in classes is strong leverage for academic success.

**Thirdly, our diversity policy.** We should not ignore the challenges of student diversity and must be open to dialogue. Talking together about barriers and seeking good practice are the first steps towards anchoring a solid diversity policy. Within the policy, we are installing a broad basic care for all students according to the principles of universal design and broad evaluation ([CAST: About Universal Design for Learning, z.d.](#)) as blueprints for further policy plans. In order to shape these plans, we created different expert cells, each of which explores and elaborates a theme. For example, there is a team of experts around the influx of minority groups in higher education; there is a cell around developing talent
profiles for students and there is a cell around creating a powerful learning environment based on UDL. The managers of these cells come together in a steering group that then translates the work into an implementation strategy for practice by anchoring these themes into the policy plan. Conversely, the steering committee also determines which themes are on the agenda and will be elaborated. The interaction between the steering group and the expertise cells makes sure that there is a great deal of support for the different themes. This way, both bottom up and top down approaches are ensured in working on diversity policy.

**By focusing on these three key pillars**, we connect talent with diversity. Working on a talent-based approach makes it possible for us to take advantage of the unique differences between the students and thus to create a powerful learning environment for all. As metaphor we picture the idea of a boat. We are heading towards inclusion with the main compass being respect for difference with a focus on the talent base, we see talent as the boat that takes us along the way with universal design for learning as the wind in our sails.

For more information on our policy, please contact our diversity coordinator **elke.emmers@odisee.be**.

**References**


Mindfulness + Reflection → Engaged Learning

Alexis A. Reid, M.A., Director of Learning-Based Services, Educational Service Consultant, Boston Child Study Center, Boston MA, USA.
Alexis has worked in a variety of educational settings and is currently the Director of Learning-Based Services at the Boston Child Study Center (BCSC). Currently she is focused on helping to improve executive function skills training through a strengths-based and mindfulness approach. Additionally, Alexis also serves as a CAST Professional Learning UDL Cadre member and is a sought after presenter, mentor, and coach. Trained at Loyola University in Baltimore, MD and Boston College, Alexis is a consummate learner who seeks to bridge research with practice especially in the areas of learner variability, mindfulness, executive function, and positive youth development.

Introduction

For the past 15 years I have had the privilege to be both an expert learner and educator in different capacities, from working with elementary, secondary, college and graduate level, as well as adult learners. Fortunately, my brother and I were raised to understand ourselves as individuals, which was highlighted as an integral part of our journey toward seeking a purpose-driven life of service to others. We were encouraged to stop and think about the environment around us, appreciate each experience and interaction, and tune into what was going on internally within us. Though I have been trained by and worked with experts in the field, I credit my ability to understand expert learning to my upbringing. Mindfulness and reflection are not concepts I was introduced to as strategies to try; rather, they were embedded into the way I was raised and how I strive to live.

Engaging Learners

While working in different learning environments I don’t adhere to the traditional definition of ‘teacher’. Coach, facilitator, confidant, or guide better fits my style and approach to working with learners. While working with learners, be they young, practiced, or veteran, I know that how I learn best does not always match up with or even traverse the same path others take in their learning.

I recognize variability wherever it is found, be it in the cultures and homes from which each learner comes, previous experiences with learning, or the range of neurocognitive
profiles that define and influence both skills and performance. I cannot assume that my experience, or that of those who trained me, is the same as those with whom I work. Being reflective in my practice in order to be flexible in my thinking and approach allows me to be open to providing alternate options to support learners and help them to fully experience their own, best path.

Encouraging reflection and the role of mindfulness
Through my years in education, one of the ways in which I elucidate the complex web of proximal and distal influences around each learner in order to foster expert learning is to encourage and prompt guided or spontaneous reflection about what they are learning, and subsequently make connections within their learning. Integrating opportunities to reflect allows for each individual to think about their learning preferences, and making connections supports learners’ understanding of the process of learning across contexts and content. Finding opportunities to cultivate reflection and genuine connections is something that I treasure. I feel it is an honor to influence others’ lives to help along their learning journey and I likewise I have committed to this work as my own life’s purpose.

Know yourself to improve yourself  (Auguste Comte)

In graduate school my early studies of Positive Youth Development (PYD) by authors and researchers like William Damon, Richard Learner, and Reed Larson (to name a few) solidified an understanding and approach to cultivating a culture of learning through connection, understanding, and positive developmental ‘nutrients’. The power of reflection, connection, and being present while fully engaged in each moment, otherwise known as being mindful, are not only experiences that allow me to find success in my own life, but are empirically based and supported to best guide the field of education to think differently about how we teach
and learn. Combined with my studies in PYD, Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a framework for learning that closely maps onto working with youth to grow character and competence across domains. UDL also emphasizes the importance of engagement in learning as a dynamic interaction across the connectome of learning networks in the brain.

The power of UDL

Working with colleagues and mentors at CAST I realized the power of the UDL framework as a guide for educators, administrators, and learners to consider variability, access, and engagement as proactive approaches to designing learning experiences. Explicit and nuanced reminders from best practices by way of empirical studies on learning, cognitive neuroscience, and developmental psychology interwoven and embedded into the UDL guidelines serve as a roadmap for how to best teach and learn. The focus through the guidelines is not solely on creating access, as some may believe, but to broaden the definition of ‘access’ to include full engagement in learning. Additionally, the goal of UDL is for individual learners to understand themselves as learners, thinkers, and a part of learning communities.

Through UDL and countless international efforts to promote more inclusive environments, learners have had greater opportunities to be challenged and engaged in different ways. Neuroscientific research on learning has allowed for educators to better understand the value and importance of full engagement in a task, lesson, or activity. With such knowledge, it is the field’s responsibility to not only promote full engagement for learners, but also the adults who work with them. Often we forget about the importance of activating passion, motivation, and full engagement for the adult learners who work in the field of education.
In order to be the best guides, mentors, facilitators, coaches, employers, or educators, we must also allow ourselves to reflect on how we learn and grow best. Not only does mindfulness, reflection, and connection lead to full engagement in learning, the combination is also true for educators. In order to activate and inspire such skills in others, we must embody and model them ourselves.

You cannot transmit wisdom and insight to another person. The seed is already there. A good teacher touches the seed, allowing it to wake up, to sprout and to grow. (Thich Nhat Hanh)

The frenetic world that we live in has us inundated with media, responsibilities, and the ever changing technological landscape which provide a deluge of information and competing influences on our attention. The educational landscape is not much different as educators are responsible for maintaining numerous roles as teacher, social worker, lead learner, technology and content specialist, statistician, content developer, character and grit promoter, interventionist, family mediator, and time manager, to name a few. Similarly, learners are also juggling multiple responsibilities as they are asked to manage increasingly complex demands. In such a world laced with stress and oftentimes unrealistic moment to moment expectations, it is important to utilize the power of reflection, mindfulness, and connection to maintain focus on priorities, while guiding the process of understanding expert learning. Expert learning has been defined in many ways, but through the UDL lens, it intends for learners to be strategic, goal-directed, resourceful and knowledgeable, while also being purposeful and motivated. This combination of skills is foundation for understanding how to best learn, take on tasks, and navigate through different environments and experiences.
References


DESIGNS - Improving employment opportunities for sign language users in the EU

Caroline McGrotty, WAM Programme Coordinator, AHEAD.

Caroline McGrotty holds a Bachelor degree in Deaf Studies from Trinity College Dublin and a diploma in Irish Sign Language Teaching [TCD]. She also has a higher certificate in Equality Studies from UCD. Caroline has over ten years’ experience of working and volunteering with various organisations within the Deaf community. She is currently Vice Chair on the board of Sign Language Interpreting Service (SLIS) and the WAM Programme Coordinator for AHEAD.

AHEAD are one of seven partners working together in an Erasmus+ project entitled DESIGNS (Deaf Employment for Sign Language Users in the EU). The overall aim of the project is to create Vocation Educational Training (VET) and Continuous Professional Development (CPD) training resources and exchange best practices across Europe to facilitate greater participation of Deaf sign language users in employment. (Deaf with a capital D is used in this article to represent those who are Deaf and use sign language as their language and their preferred means of communication.) DESIGNS aims to develop an innovative training programme and guides for key social actors to support the employment of Deaf people in skilled jobs, to offer career progression and promote upward mobility. The project aims to reach out to:

1. **Employers** – this ranges from all human resource professionals, large enterprises and small to medium size enterprises (SMEs), employer bodies, career and placement personnel as well as access and disability professionals in higher education.

2. **Sign Language Interpreters** - those who support Deaf students in education, transitioning from education to employment and those who interpret at all aspects of recruitment and participation in Deaf employment.

3. **The Deaf Community** – students in higher education and graduates transitioning from education to employment but also those deaf people who are unemployed and actively seeking work.
DESIGNS brings together experts in the fields of employment, sign language training and Deaf studies to tackle universal problems and propose some tried and tested solutions which can be replicated across many countries.
The consortium comprises 7 leading organisations from 4 countries; Ireland - Interesource Group (Ireland) Limited, Trinity College Dublin (TCD), Association for Higher Education Access & Disability (AHEAD); Belgium - European Forum for Sign Language Interpreters (EFSLI), European Union of the Deaf (EUD); Germany - University of Hamburg; United Kingdom - Heriot-Watt University.

The project is due to be completed by May 2019.

**Why the DESIGNS project has been established**

There is a direct link between early education, attainment of professional and/or educational qualifications and advancement into the labour market and social inclusion. Apart from financial autonomy, work and paid employment serves to develop a sense of belonging with positive mental health benefits and identification with the wider community (National Disability Authority, 2005). However, Deaf people in Ireland, as well as throughout the world, continue to face barriers in education, employment and access to services such as healthcare, legal and social welfare settings. In a report on poverty in the Deaf community, Conama and Grehan (2001) stated that Deaf people experience higher rates of poverty, social exclusion and unemployment. Factors such as leaving school with no examination results or qualifications and inadequate support for Irish Sign Language has resulted in far poorer outcomes for Deaf adults with 80% having literacy problems compared to 25% of the population as a whole (Irish Deaf Society, 2007). Research and data on unemployment is under reported and inaccurate. ‘Deafness and hearing loss’ is often used to report data, and sign language users who are Deaf are under-researched. The World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) also reports that figures on (un)employment are inaccurate and difficult to quantify (Hauland, H. and Allen C., 2009).
WAM’s Experience of Placing Deaf Graduates

AHEAD, more specifically, The WAM Programme, were asked to be a partner in this project as we can offer valuable information and knowledge. This has been gained through supporting employers who have recruited graduates with disabilities through paid, mentored work placements under the WAM Programme. In addition to this, AHEAD also works closely with the higher education sector which includes all access and disability staff, careers and placement officers, faculty staff and funding bodies and other working groups such as DAWN (Disability Advisors Working Network).

WAM has successfully placed over 350 graduates with disabilities in work placements with both the private and public sector in the last 12 years.

In the last 12 years, 7% of those who were placed were Deaf / Hard of Hearing. This is two and half times higher than the current higher education participation rate of Deaf / Hard of Hearing students which is 2.8% (AHEAD, 2017).
Breaking down the 7% into two separate cohorts; 38% were Hard of Hearing and 62% were those who identified as being Deaf and used Irish Sign Language as their primary language.

On the surface this may appear to be a very positive statistic. However, if we delve further into why Deaf graduates account for almost two-thirds of this cohort we suggest that it is because WAM offers unique opportunities for Deaf graduates, leading to more positive outcomes. We know at WAM, from speaking and working with Deaf graduates looking for employment opportunities, that many struggle to get past the interview stage and some did not receive any alternative formats when requested to undergo a preliminary phone screening before getting to the face to face interview.

When a graduate applies to the WAM Programme for a placement, the employer is made aware in advance of any interview accommodations a person may require. In the last two years, WAM received almost 800 applications from graduates with disabilities for WAM placements; 22% requested some form of accommodation at interview; 12% of these were requests for an Irish Sign Language interpreter at the interview. Often when an employer is made aware of requests for an ISL interpreter
employer asks for assistance with booking an ISL interpreter as they simply don’t know how to go about it. WAM assists the employer with this and provides training around using an ISL interpreter at interview, highlighting the need for a qualified ISL interpreter who is suitable for the graduate. When a Deaf graduate is placed, a full and comprehensive needs assessment is carried out with the graduate as well as training for the employer and the team the Deaf graduate will be working with, if needed.

Get Involved in DESIGNS

Participating in the DESIGNS project is something that AHEAD are very excited about doing as there are a number of outputs which we hope will enhance and create awareness of Deaf employment. Various focus groups with the Deaf community, interpreters and employers will be taking place to produce a research report; training guides for employers will be developed, including a web based app on Deaf awareness.

If you wish to participate and follow the project, visit the website – www.designsproject.eu and be sure to subscribe to the social media sites

- www.facebook.com/thedesignsproject
- www.twitter.com/designsproject
References:


Introduction

This article showcases the experiences of an international inclusive training coordinated by the European Network on Independent Living Youth Network (ENIL Youth) and Erasmus Student Network (ESN AISBL) in partnership with the European Youth Centre of the Council of Europe in the field of education, inclusion and intercultural understanding, bringing together young disabled and non disabled people together, held in in Strasbourg, France in May 2017. The purpose of a joint training was to create an opportunity for young disabled and non-disabled people to share skills and build each other’s capacity, thus enhancing intercultural understanding and promoting active citizenship. This training brought together young people from diverse backgrounds and cultures from all over Europe, precisely from 18 countries from the 47 Council of Europe Member States.

In the current climate, we strongly believe that intercultural skills and understanding are essential. Often young disabled people have limited opportunities to gain these skills and...
our organisational experience suggests that interculturally focused organisations struggle to be intersectionally inclusive, including disability. At the same time, disability organisations tend to neglect intercultural challenges. The training was based on the values of diversity, inclusion, human rights, equality, social model and human rights based approach to disability, and was in line with the principles and values of the Council of Europe Youth Department.

Background and overview of the training in a nutshell

The training aimed to promote cultural awareness, tolerance and solidarity among disabled and non-disabled young people. Specific objectives were:

- To understand the framework and the essential dimensions of intercultural learning
- To understand the concepts of inclusion and disability, including the concept of social model of disability
- To develop the skills and competence of participants around inclusive, intercultural activities, including how to celebrate diversity in non-formal education settings
- To enhance intercultural cooperation and leadership between young disabled and non-disabled people
- To provide methods and tools to take to local communities in order to promote inclusive intercultural activities

The programme was created with a six block structure reflecting the overall aims and objectives of the training. An ‘About Me’ form was distributed where all participants could indicate three things about them with an additional voluntary question – ‘What do you want people to know about you so that you can be fully included?’
With the attendees’ consent, the programme team circulated their answers among them in order create a smoother start for the group bonding and group dynamic for the training. At the beginning of the study session, the programming team created a buddy system in order to support the mixing of the participants with different organisational affiliations. This approach also helped participants individually and interpersonally support and look for each other during the entire duration of the study session.

**Block 1: Group building activities**

The activity was embedded in an inclusive and safe(r) space where participants could have an overview of the week-long activity, sharing hopes, fears and expectations of the activity and working on group building. The aim of the group building was to break the ice and create a supportive basis to discuss various elements in a harmonic atmosphere where participants feel safe(r) and comfortable. Participants discussed the meaning of and shared their own views about what an inclusive space meant individually and collectively to them. A ‘Social Contract’ was created which supported them working together during the week in a safe(r) and inclusive environment, including elements such as ‘Understanding’; ‘Listen to each other’s needs and emotions’; ‘Communicate your Needs’; ‘Treat each other with empathy’; ‘Engage everyone’; ‘Focus on the learning aspects’; ‘Share your experience; ‘Smile’. In line with the overall purpose of Block 1, discussions and activities in an inclusive space created a good basis for participants to share their experiences, essential to establishing a common ground for the entire group to start working together in a respectful, inclusive way during the whole week.
Block 2: Inclusion in action - Creating a common ground

Block 2 introduced the participants to the concepts of forms of education - highlighting non-formal education, identities, intersectionality, intercultural learning and inclusion – and aimed to establish a diverse, inclusive atmosphere during the week. As individuals varied a lot in terms of background, experience, skills, knowledge and organisational affiliation, this Block was designed to allow suitable time and space in order to establish common understanding; and time to process knowledge and experiences through activities around different principles, values and approaches which frame the training. There were many discussions and activities around diverse layers of our identities and all the enablers, barriers, challenges, stereotypes which can be experienced. It is important to highlight that every person has an individual and unique lived experience, as well as possible collective experiences of characteristics of a group. Unwrapping the different dimensions of our identities facilitated the group’s comprehension of the more complex concept, intersectionality, described as
Disability does not exist in isolation; it must be considered in conjunction with other issues as well. If someone does identify as being a disabled person that may not be their dominant identity. (Todd, 2014, p.1)

Young people must not be viewed as a single, homogeneous subset of society defined exclusively by age, as is often the case. They have diverse identities that can result in multiple forms of discrimination and/or intersecting forms of oppression (European Youth Forum, 2015, p.8).

Participants explored and discussed the differences between the terminologies of exclusion, segregation, integration and inclusion. Exclusion is not providing the opportunity for others to be included. There are different types of exclusion (economic, sexual, professional, gender, nationality, etc.) There are specific exclusions – for example, age limit to certain movies, drinking age, etc. Segregation is when a certain minority group is excluded or separated, not just individuals. Participants highlighted that integration and inclusion are not the same terminologies but unfortunately they are often used interchangeably. Integration is allowing anyone who wants to play the game to join, however not making any adjustments in the rules or structures to ensure everyone has equal chances to participate. Inclusion is where everyone lives in the same community embracing the different characteristics and needs. Inclusion is a broad approach that understands and encourages people to be different and values, respects and celebrates people equally with their diverse identities and backgrounds. Being inclusive requires everyone’s commitment.
Block 3: Bird’s eye view and on the ground perspectives

In Block 3, participants looked at the overall purpose and role of the Council of Europe in general and how inclusion, intercultural learning and human rights have been promoted across Europe and especially through the Council of Europe structures. It included an opportunity for participants to think about how they could make real change in their own community through the new Council of Europe Disability Strategy 2017-2023.

Block 4: Non-formal education: an inclusive tool for intercultural understanding

Having in mind the principles of non-formal education from Block 2, participants explored and got familiarised with the tools for non-formal education, including training manuals, for example:

- Bookmarks – Manual on combatting hate speech online,
- Compass – Manual on Human Rights Education with Young People,
- Comasito – Manual on Human Rights Education with Children.

They investigated ways in which these tools could be helpful for implementing activities and became more confident and ready to take the initiative for their group work and the workshop preparations with the French High School students. Participants spent time in small groups working on their practice projects.

Block 5: Delivering inclusive intercultural activities

Block 5 facilitated the learning space and tools for participants to work together to develop and deliver activities and projects which support inclusive intercultural learning. Participants worked in groups on accessibility, intercultural learning. Three groups worked with French High Schools students from the local Lyceé Kleber School to explore the topics of inclusive societies, inequality and intercultural learning.
Key learning that came from working with the French High School Students included:

- How to produce something which was accessible and relevant and usable to French High School students, who hadn’t had a level of input of the entire training.
- Working with French High School students, the groups were encouraged to think about the reality outside the environment we had created within the training.
- They learned a great deal about the division of tasks and the importance of creating tools and resources relevant for many.
- Participants got to experience planning and delivering inclusive intercultural training sessions, for some participants this was their first experience.
- ESN and ENILYouth have created materials which can be promoted to increase inclusion and accessibility.

The concrete result of this block was that 50 French High School Students received human rights education around inclusion and inequality.

**Block 6: Becoming an inclusive intercultural leader**

Block 6 was designed to complete and reflect on all the activities undertaken during the entire week, and to act as a catalyst to enable participants to be multipliers and share what they have learned and experienced with their communities and daily realities. This ‘closing and the way forward’ block contained tools for participants to become individual multipliers. The second half of the block was dedicated to recalling the key learning outcomes during the training, review and critically and constructively evaluate positive and negative aspects of the various elements, re-evaluating the change in fears, hopes and expectations from the beginning of the training. To meet the need for closure from an individual and collective point of view, the block included space to express closing remarks both individually and collectively.
Overall outcomes from the training from the young peoples’ viewpoint

Bringing together young people from diverse backgrounds and cultures from all over Europe, from 18 countries from the 47 Council of Europe Member States, created the opportunity for them to bring their areas of expertise and knowledge, and individual lived experiences, to create a rich experience to exchange and build knowledge, ideas, strengthen solidarity, intercultural understanding and awareness about diverse backgrounds through:

- sharing different experiences
- working together as a group and respecting each other and celebrate diversity
- be open and aware of individual’s needs
- design the environment universally to the greatest extent possible attracting a wider number of young people to become involved with a more extensive number of activities.

Participants summarised inclusive intercultural learning by using Benjamin Franklin’s statement:

‘Tell me and I forget, teach me and I will remember, involve me and I learn.’

Participants mentioned that they gained skills and experiences in working as a team and taking into account the different learning and access needs to create an inclusive environment to the greatest extent possible.

Gaining project planning and management skills were highlighted and the workshop planning and delivery working with French High School Students were definitely a challenging, but rewarding new experience in terms of gaining skills.
Connecting the learning from this training to their current studies encouraged participants bring their inclusive, intercultural awareness to their individual lives.

In terms of knowledge, participants highlighted that by the end of the training they learned a lot of new things, and strengthened their knowledge in some topics which they were familiar with before but now had the addition of the inclusion and diversity aspect. Intersectionality as a concept was definitely a new area for many participants.

In terms of attitudes, participants highlighted that by the end of the training they were more comfortable to ask someone if they needed any support, were more patient towards each other and each other’s access needs, and the inclusion of others. They felt encouraged by working together. They highlighted that in general, they gained more confidence in the value of their personal experiences and therefore to work in their local communities on the topics covered during the training.

Participants comments highlighted their learning during the weeklong training:

- Learned that we are all equal and everyone has a right to be heard
- Approach disabled people and offer support without being scared of mistakes
- Perception by others can be just one aspect of one’s identity and often that is being a disabled person
- It is important to show solidarity and to work together for meaningful social change
- Everybody involved is needed to make inclusion happen – inclusion only works if all of us are participating in the process of creating an inclusive environment
• Inclusion happens when we are aware of each other’s needs and adapt to the situations we are in

• Inclusion is mostly about attitude and willingness rather than expertise on methodology because there is no such thing as a ‘one solution’ for inclusion

• The identity(s) that a one holds closest to themselves are not recognised by the wider world always.

Recommendations for Organisations

This training has been an exceptional opportunity to run a mixed-ability activity which is not primarily focused on disability. This is an essential step because it embraces the concept of intersectionality and the belief that full inclusion happens when it supports all people, regardless of their background or needs, in a safe(r) space. We believe that this unique experience of collaboration encourages various stakeholders, educators, practitioners in the field of education to strengthen inclusion, intercultural understanding and intersectionality in their practice. Both organisations have strong networks in the field of intercultural understanding and disability. However, the framework which the European Youth Centre has
and has offered was a perfect space to bring these two fields together. We have benefited from the input of the Council of Europe Youth Department - particularly around intercultural learning and the non-formal education. We were delighted to see that this activity has brought a variety of benefits because of its inclusive intercultural nature.

Specific recommendations include:

- more cooperation in general with various stakeholders, organisations on inclusion, diversity
- more training on inclusion, diversity in cooperation with various stakeholders
- more Human Rights Education in classrooms.

The outcomes of the training can be adapted by various stakeholders, considering the mixture of different educational methods, including our non-formal intercultural inclusive educational methods to their practices.

Reflections

Last but not least, accommodating the diverse learning and access needs to create an inclusive training session was made possible due to ‘Having a yes approach’ to make the environment inclusive to the greatest extent possible, due to the open mindset, collaboration, support, patience, creativity, commitment of the programming team (Zara Todd, Safi Sabuni, Frank Sioen, Eliza Popper, Agnes Sarolta Fazekas, and László Milutinovits – Educational Advisor). Their devotion of energy, time, endless motivation, together with the enthusiasm of all participants and support we have received from various staff of the Council of Europe Youth Department has been a critical part of the success of the project.
The variety of facilities provided (listing a few without the full composition) for personal assistance users, Speech to Text Reporters (Palantypists) (Julia Jacobie, Norma MacHaye) was not only essential for disabled young people who have sensory impairments, but it was beneficial for the access needs of the entire group of participants (to be better supported in case of different level of level of English language skills). Accommodation of assistance animals and providing accessible workplaces also played their part.

Tools that were used to support the access needs of everyone, including an extensive Access Needs Form for all participants in order to create an inclusive way of planning the training in terms of educational content and facilitating training delivery using multiple ways of representation, action and engagement – following the guidelines of the Universal Design for Learning (Meyer, Rose, Gordon 2014). Examples included making training materials available in multiple formats, the training methodology was flexible to meet diverse learning and access needs, and support mechanisms were in place. Further examples include the ‘envelope station’ where people could leave nice messages to each other that were also available in Braille (both in Russian and English) format and the welcome poster and name tags of individuals were also available in electronic, hard copy and Braille (both in Russian and English). The methodology was to use sticky bumpons (adhesive tactile markers) and the online platform of Byron Knoll’s free tool which translates English characters to Grade 1 Braille. http://www.byronknoll.com/braille.html and Russian Braille converter http://braille.ru/.

Last but not least, capturing the inclusive intercultural nature of the training and the principles and values of the Council of Europe Youth Department could not happen without the excellent work of our Film-Expert, Patrick Doodt. We believe that the accessible
**video-report** will engage various stakeholders, educators and practitioners to include intercultural inclusive elements in their practice.

The full version of the Final report **will be available** on the Council of Europe website: [http://www.coe.int/en/web/youth/activity-and-project-reports](http://www.coe.int/en/web/youth/activity-and-project-reports) (will be updated with our training report in the upcoming months, currently the database is until 2016)

The full version of the Training Manual can be requested at the European Network on Independent Living Secretariat via: secretariat@enil.eu

Contact: [https://hu.linkedin.com/in/agnes-sarolta-fazekas-21b99725](https://hu.linkedin.com/in/agnes-sarolta-fazekas-21b99725)

[https://twitter.com/agnessarolta](https://twitter.com/agnessarolta)

email: fave@t-online.hu

** Literature Resources **


[https://esn.org/article/save-date-mapability-strengthen-accessibility-heis-students-special-needs-launching-conferen](https://esn.org/article/save-date-mapability-strengthen-accessibility-heis-students-special-needs-launching-conferen)


Most of us are familiar with the phrase ‘travel broadens the mind’ and so every year, thousands of students take up the opportunity to study abroad through the Erasmus+ programme in third level institutions across Europe and beyond. A study period abroad as cited by the Erasmus Student Network is

...a great opportunity for personal development, to gain new skills, learn a new language and be more employable in the job market.

Indeed, one could go as far as to say that with the move towards a more globalised economy, going abroad during ones studies and having an international experience is becoming increasingly important. But all too often, students with a disability miss out on this opportunity. The National Agencies Working Group identified a number of issues to participating on an Erasmus study abroad program for students with disabilities including:

- Disclosure of a disability
- Increasing numbers of students with complex needs who need more support
- Preparation time needs to be factored in, the work doesn’t start at the Airport
- Lack of information or inaccurate information
- Anxieties and fear of the unknown may deter students
- Both physical and cultural barriers

and they suggest sometimes shorter trips might be helpful.

MappED! Enhancing opportunities for students with disabilities to study abroad

Lorraine Gallagher

Lorraine has a Masters in Fine Art from NCAD. She has worked in the area of disability equality for many years and is currently the Information & Training Officer for AHEAD. Lorraine managed AHEAD’s participation on the MappED! project. Prior to working for AHEAD, she worked as research assistant and co-facilitator to Peter Kearns at The Workhouse. Lorraine also worked as the Disability Equality Trainer on Music Map, a music management course run by the City Arts Centre, Dublin.
So what could be done to redress the situation? ESN - Erasmus Student Network came up with the idea ‘mapping’ university campuses across Europe in a bid to provide students with disabilities with key information about the accessibility of a university’s physical location, the user-friendliness of its website and the availability of services for students with disabilities. This would enable students with disabilities to make informed decisions around participating on an Erasmus+ study abroad programme, with the expressed aim of increasing the involvement of this cohort of students. Seven partners got involved in the project, entitled MappED! - **ESN International, ESN France, University of Vigo** (Spain), **University of Warsaw** (Poland), **UNICA Network** (Network of Universities from the Capitals of Europe), **AHEAD** (Ireland) and **Jaccede** (Specialist NGO - France).

At 0.15%, the rate of students with disabilities going on exchange is abysmal. With MappED! we hope to encourage more students with disabilities to go abroad, by providing them security in the knowledge that support services are available to them at their host universities.

- Thomas Pappas, Board Member of ESN.

---

![Fig 1. Meet & Map Dublin event](image-url)
The MappED! Project created a web platform and mobile app for universities and students with disabilities to promote mobility and a set of guidelines for international and disability officers in relation to supporting students with disabilities partaking on Erasmus+ programmes.

The information on MappED! is crowdsourced, with content generated through user submissions. This has been made simple with the MappED! mobile app, available on Android. Through the app anyone can review and submit information on their universities’ accessibility within minutes. Each partner of the MappED! project held Meet&Map events across Europe. Participants learnt about why and how to create inclusive and accessible environments for those with disabilities and contributed to the MappED! online platform - thereby making information available about their college and city to students with disabilities considering a study abroad period. To date over 350 higher education institutions have been mapped.

The MappED.eu website features an Info Centre, where students are able to read about the special funding opportunities available and find contact information for all relevant bodies in the application process. The website includes testimonials of those who participated on a study abroad programme with lots of useful tips and insights.

Unique online platform to foster mobility for students with disabilities

Online map
Discover the accessibility of the buildings and universities around you

Info Centre
Find out all the information about going abroad as well as the extra special needs grant opportunities

Testimonies
They did it! Read their stories and find out how their experiences helped them to grow personally

Get involved!

Cooperate with your Disability Office
Read how in our Best Practices guidelines

Organise a mapping activity
Invite your friends and map the accessibility of your university and surrounding buildings

Download the mobile app
Do everything from the comfort of your phone

Partners

Contacts

João Pinto
President
Erasmus Student Network
mapped-coordinator@esn.org
president@esn.org
Unlocking Potential: Dyslexia and Confidence - A Student Workshop at Dublin Business School

Jane Buggle, Deputy Librarian and Learner Supports Coordinator, Dublin Business School

Jane is Deputy Librarian and Learner Supports Officer at the Dublin Business School. She has a BA in Philosophy and Greek and Roman Civilisation (UCD), PG Diploma in Library and Information Studies (UC London) and Masters in Library and Information Studies (UCD). She previously worked in Portobello College and in Camden Public Libraries in London. Her interests include disability support, research support and publishing. Jane is Senior Editor of Studies in Arts and Humanities Journal (sahjournal.com) and Sub-Editor of the DBS Business Review.

Dublin Business School (DBS) is a private third level college which provides courses to Master’s level in a wide range of subject areas, including Law, Business, Accounting, Psychology, Sociology, Film and Media. With some 9,000 students, DBS is keen to ensure that all students experience equality of opportunity in reaching their educational potential. DBS holds institutional membership of AHEAD and DAWN and its Learner Supports Service has been informed and developed through dialogue with these bodies and with other stakeholders in the area. The role of the Learner Supports Service is to support students with disabilities and specific learning difficulties by putting in place the reasonable accommodations that they require, by training them in the use of assistive technologies and by advocating on their behalf.

At the beginning of every academic year, a college-wide advertising campaign is rolled out to encourage all students who require our services to register with the Learner Supports Service. Despite our best efforts, some students still fall through the net. It is especially unfortunate when students register in their final year when they have reached the very end of their tether.

One such student came to see me in late November last year. She was on the cusp of dropping out altogether. Although she had received her assessment while at school, she was too embarrassed to register as having dyslexia in college. She said that she felt that she would be asking for unfair advantage. I quickly disabused her of this and told her to accept all the help that she could get. I put the reasonable accommodations in place and put her in touch with the library and faculty staff who are there to provide assistance.
The student followed up with the key staff and also reached out to external agencies. In this way, she made contact with Nicola James, CEO and founding director of Lexxic.

**Lexxic** is a for-profit, private, UK-based, company which provides specialist support to staff in the workplace who are affected by a range of specific learning difficulties and other neurological differences. Lexxic staff are employed by companies to provide support and advice on specific learning difficulties to employees and management.

The DBS student contacted Nicola James to ask for advice on how to overcome the difficulties that she was having in college because of her dyslexia. Nicola offered to facilitate a free workshop on building confidence in students with dyslexia. This event was advertised to the general public and was held in Dublin Business School on Wednesday 5th April, 2017. Nicola and the final year student facilitated the session with some twenty-five students in attendance. They used an informal interview structure to get to the heart of how it feels to be a dyslexic student in an academic world which focuses largely on the written word.

The student and Nicola described their experiences of coping in school before and after they were assessed as having dyslexia. The student said that she was an exceptionally diligent student but she never attained the grades that her classmates reached with less effort. She was immensely relieved initially when she was assessed in secondary school but little changed for her because she was not armed with methods and strategies to overcome the difficulties. Nicola was assessed in her third year at university after years of applying herself relentlessly to her studies with less success than others. She went on to qualify as a Neuropsychologist and was recently offered a PhD place in Trinity College Dublin.
The ways in which dyslexia can impact on confidence were outlined:

- Focusing on your difficulties
- Comparing yourself to peers
- Labelling
- Negative thoughts about being able to succeed
- Not feeling capable
- Performance and your experience from school

Nicola explained that having low confidence can hold back your career and prevent you from reaching your potential. She assured us that confidence can be learned and practiced through:

- Setting and achieving goals – building confidence
- Positive thinking
- Reflection

Students should be encouraged to celebrate all of their successes. Getting into college builds on many past successes! A good exercise is to make a list of six things you have done well each week for six weeks. This helps to build a positive mindset; physiologically, high performance releases endorphins.

The student gave her top tips for achievement:

- Eat a good diet, she found food with plenty of good fats (nuts, avocados, fish) helpful
- Watch out for negative thoughts – recognise and banish them!
- Exercise – changes the brain in ways that protect memory and thinking skills.
- She chose to take fish oil supplements – as they could be really good for the brain
• She found that being careful of who she mixed with helped –
good friends encourage, praise and motivate
• Maintain a clean, ordered environment
• Get to know the way you learn best – audio, podcasts, etc. There
  are lots of tips on the internet on giving presentations, etc.
• Sleep - you can come up with creative ideas and solutions after
  a good night’s sleep.
• Work on stress reduction – practice mindfulness and
  meditation can be helpful

The student and Nicola shared some of the methods they used for
studying and writing:
• Mind mapping software helps you to record all of your thoughts
  on a subject. These can then be used to produce a clear linear
  order for your assignment
• Write each of your key ideas onto a post-it and stick them to a
  wall. You can then organise them into a logical order for your
  assignment.
• Print out everything you need and then go through it with
  coloured highlighters: orange for the introduction, red for the
  body of the assignment, green for the conclusion.
• **The Pomodoro Technique** alternates 25 minutes of study
  with a short period of activity. The activity (kinetic energy)
  helps engage the brain. When you break off the study after 25
  minutes, leave a short plan behind so that you can get back
  into that thought straight away. If you study longer than the 25
  minutes, you can leave tired, headachy and disheartened and
  then return to the work with that same feeling of disillusion.
• Break your calendar into chunks and vary the activities – this
  helps break the cycle of doing and re-doing.
• **Audible** has a massive range of audio books, podcasts, etc.
• **Grammarly** is a great free tool for correcting your writing.
• **The Codpast** is an excellent blog which advises on useful apps and ideas to assist adults with dyslexia
• **Mnemomics** – use mnemonics as an aid to memory. There are many helpful sites out there. Joshua Fore has a great Ted Talk on **memory pilates**

Nicola and the student reminded everyone to keep focusing on their strengths. At the end of the workshop, students were invited to share their experiences, strategies and tips over refreshments. Feedback by attendees was uniformly positive and it was decided to repeat the event in Dublin Business School, Aungier Street on the 29th of November from 7 - 9 pm in DBS. See DBS website or contact Jane Buggle for further information: [Jane.Buggle@Dbs.ie](mailto:Jane.Buggle@Dbs.ie)
Ahead would like to thank all contributors to this publication for their time and input.

All views expressed in this online publication are the views of the author and are not necessarily endorsed by AHEAD. We will not be liable to you in respect of any loss or corruption of any data, database or software.

© AHEAD 2017

ISSN 2009-8286
AHEAD, the Association for Higher Education Access and Disability, is an independent non-profit organisation working to promote full access to and participation in further and higher education for students with disabilities and to enhance their employment prospects on graduation.

AHEAD provides information to students and graduates with disabilities, teachers, guidance counsellors and parents on disability issues in education.

AHEAD works with graduates and employers through the GET AHEAD Graduate Forum and the WAM Mentored Work Placement Programme.

AHEAD coordinates LINK, a worldwide network of professionals promoting the inclusion of students & graduates with disabilities in Higher Education managed by 6 European partner organisations.