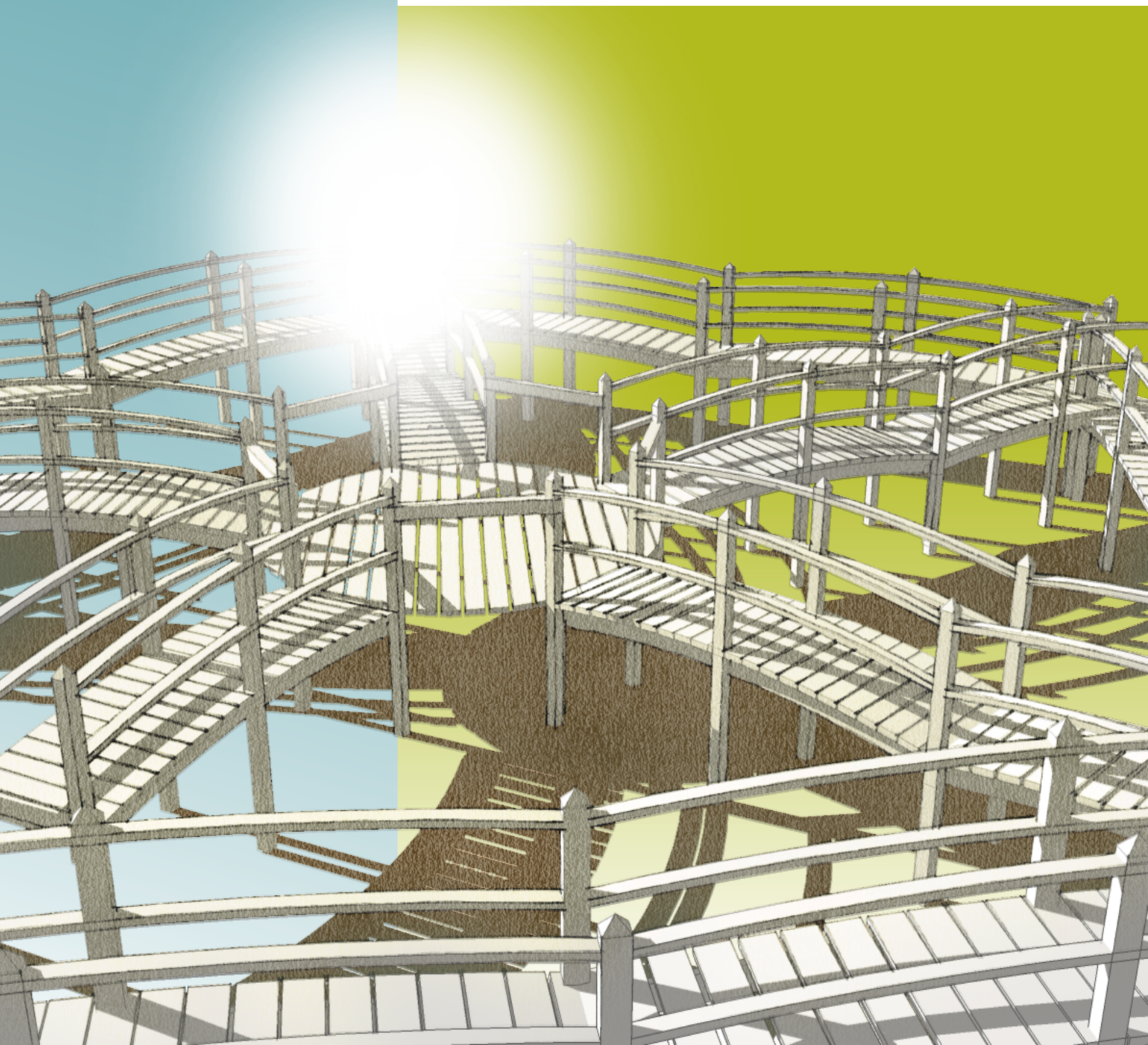
Teaching and Learning

Making learning accessible for students with disabilities in further education

ahead

Association for Higher Education Access & Disability



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National Qualifications
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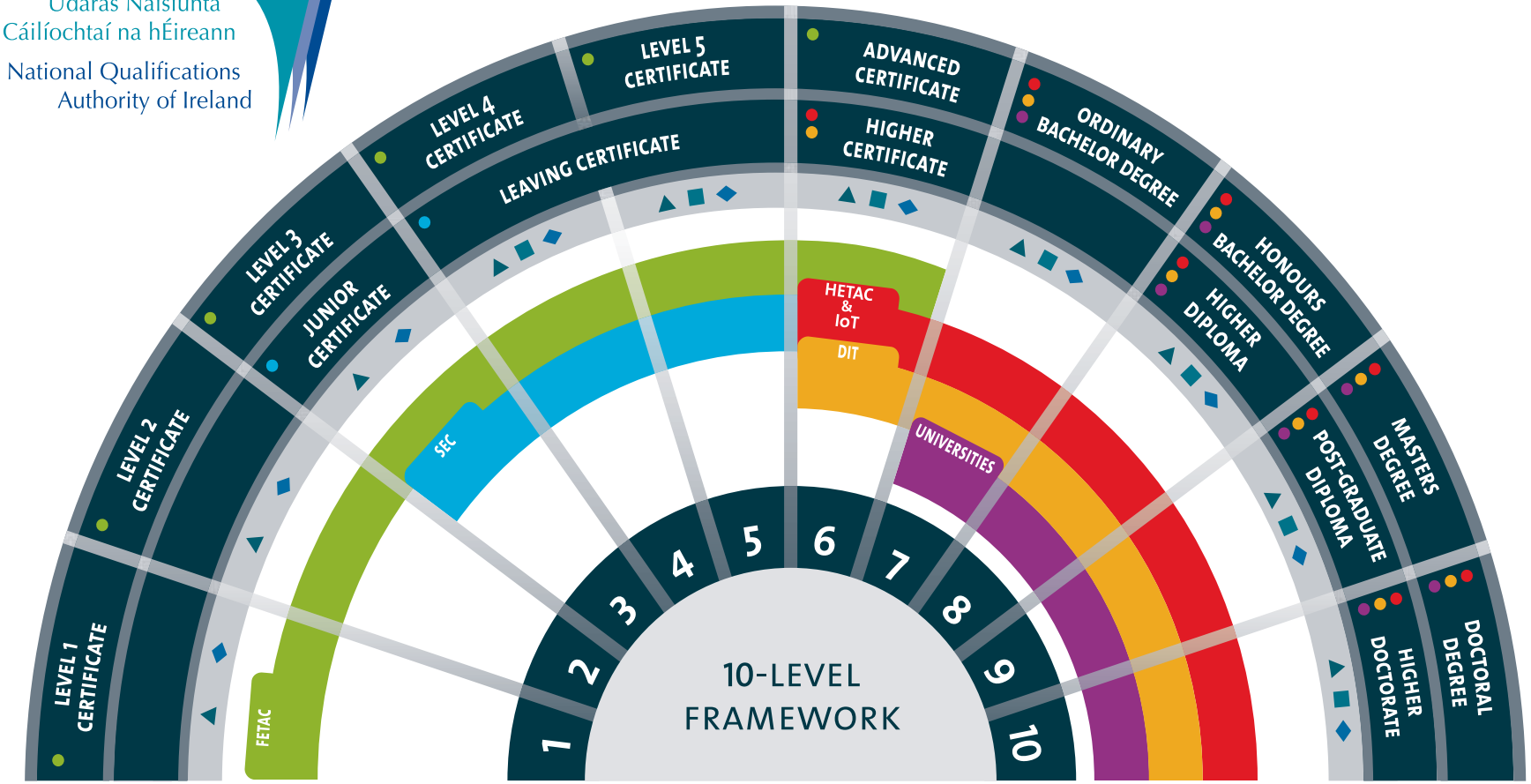


AWARDING BODIES

- **FETAC - Further Education and Training Awards Council**
- **SEC - State Examinations Commission** *(Department of Education & Science)*
- **HETAC - Higher Education and Training Awards Council**
- **IoT - Institutes of Technology** *(make their own awards at specified levels under Delegated Authority from HETAC)*
- **DIT - Dublin Institute of Technology**
- **Universities**

AWARDS IN THE FRAMEWORK

There are four types of award in the National Framework of Qualifications:

- **Major Awards:** are the principal class of awards made at a level
- **Minor Awards:** are for partial completion of the outcomes for a Major Award
- **Supplemental Awards:** are for learning that is additional to a Major Award
- **Special Purpose Awards:** are for relatively narrow or purpose-specific achievement

Introduction

Further Education now has a diverse student population attending a wide variety of courses and we can anticipate that over the coming years more and more adults with disabilities will avail of the excellent opportunities to gain qualifications offered within the sector. Further education is an important option for people with disabilities and has the advantage of offering locally based flexible courses. Further education also has a strong reputation and tradition of student centred learning. This type of approach provides students with wider learning opportunities as it incorporates learning strategies such as problem based learning, self learning, and collaborative group learning in addition to more traditional methods. More flexible approaches to teaching and learning are further enhanced by the accessible teaching and assessment methods inherent in FETAC courses. This type of flexibility helps ensure that learning is barrier free for students who learn in different ways.

This brief guide has been designed to assist teaching staff and support staff in further education to have a better understanding of the needs of students with disabilities. It describes ways of adapting course design and teaching practices so that all students have access to the same learning opportunities. Building accessibility and inclusive practices into the design and delivery of courses will benefit all students and will ensure that further education institutions reflect the spirit and requirements of current legislation. Quality assurance procedures will also help ensure that the inclusion of students with disabilities is embedded into existing practice.

Further Education and legislation

In the past, people with disabilities frequently encountered social and physical barriers when attempting to access the sort of services routinely available to their non disabled peers. Key legislative changes have been enacted in Ireland in the last decade, which enshrine fundamental rights for people with disabilities to have equality of access to the same services, buildings and information as other citizens. It is now unlawful for employers and institutions to discriminate against people on the grounds of their disability. This makes it important for those working in further education to have an awareness of current legislative requirements in relation to the education and employment of people with disabilities.

Equal Status Act (2000)

The Equal Status Act (2000) (the Act) was established to promote equality and all organisations providing services, such as education and training, must now make every reasonable effort to accommodate the needs of people with disabilities. All educational establishments are therefore now covered by the Act which prohibits discrimination on the basis of gender, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, race or membership of the Traveller community.

The Act defines discrimination as treating one person less favourably than another and educational establishments are prohibited from discriminating against people with disabilities in relation to:

- Admission and terms or conditions of admission
- Access to any course
- Access to any benefit or facility provided
- Expulsion of a student or any other sanction against a student

According to the legislation, an educational establishment discriminates against a student with a disability if it does not do all that is reasonable to accommodate that student. It has been established within the sector that a reasonable accommodation 'is any action that helps alleviate a substantial disadvantage'. Classes, for example, are delivered through the spoken word which makes them inaccessible to students who are deaf. A reasonable accommodation for these students might be the provision of written class notes which will remove that particular barrier to learning.

Keypoint

It is important to emphasise that the purpose of accommodations for students with disabilities is to minimise the impact of a disability on academic performance and not to give them an advantage over other students

The Disability Act (2005)

The Disability Act (2005) (the Act) is an important part of a framework of government legislative steps designed to improve the participation of people with disabilities in everyday life. The Act provides a legislative basis for improving access to a wide range of public services and facilities for people with disabilities and states that all public bodies must ensure that their services are both integrated and accessible. This accessibility requirement extends to information as well as buildings and it is now required that public bodies, such as educational institutions, make all relevant information accessible in a range of formats such as Braille, electronic copies, Plain English, large print or audio.

The Act establishes a statutory basis for:

- An independent assessment of the health and educational needs of people with disabilities and the provision of resources to meet those needs
- Access to mainstream public buildings, facilities, information and services
- Obligations on public bodies to be proactive in employing people with disabilities with a 3% quota for public sector employers
- A Centre for Excellence in Universal Design to promote standards and principles to ensure that all buildings, products and environments should be accessible to everyone

Keypoint

It is important that course design and delivery are based on the principles of Universal Design, an approach to learning which presents materials and classes in ways which are user friendly and accessible to all students, not just those with disabilities

Case Study

A student, who has both a visual impairment and limited mobility, has difficulty accessing the Principal's office, which is located of the third floor of the college. As a public building, the college is obliged to ensure that the Principal's office is accessible to all students.

This could involve ensuring that such an office is located in an accessible area. The college could also contact experts in Universal Design for advice and information

The statutory requirements of the Disability Act mean in that, in practice, public bodies will have to:

- Ensure that accessibility is a key criterion to be considered throughout the entire purchasing process. So if a college wishes to purchase items such as vehicles, computers, equipment or services, it needs to ensure that these items are accessible as far as is possible, appropriate and affordable
- Make all relevant information accessible in a range of formats such as Braille, Plain English, electronic copies, large print or audio
- Appoint at least one Access Officer to provide assistance as required
- Draw up and publish a policy on how to deal with complaints in relation to failure to comply with these sections of the Act.

(National Disability Authority Code of Practice, 2005)

Keypoint

The Disability Act (2005) places an obligation on all public bodies to make their buildings and services accessible to people with disabilities by the year 2015

The Disability Act (2005) places an obligation on all public bodies to make their buildings and services assessable to people with disabilities by the year 2015

Needs assessment

An inclusive learning environment makes success possible for all students including those who do not learn in conventional ways. The results of an assessment of student needs should specify individual student's accommodation requirements which will provide guidance as to how best to structure learning.

What is a Needs Assessment?

A needs assessment is a systematic process for the collection of information and data upon which to base an accurate description of the strengths and learning needs of a particular individual.

Identifying the impact of a disability on an individual is the beginning of the process of understanding how they can best be supported. Time spent in carrying out a needs assessment is a good investment for the future and an invaluable way of identifying the sort of learning strategies and accommodations which will be of benefit to learners.

Keypoint
The results of an assessment should form the basis for planning the provision of reasonable accommodations and supports for students who are assessed

Carrying out a needs assessment helps to:

- Clarify what supports and accommodations are needed
- Identify any gaps in learning
- Identify the type of resources and accommodations which are needed
- Form a basis for planning and reviewing a student's progress
- Provide evidence when applying for student support funding
- Fulfill the legal obligations outlined under the Disability Act (2005)

There are three main components involved in carrying out a needs assessment:

1. Identification of course demands: what are the skills and competences needed?
2. Identification of student needs: what supports or accommodations are required?
3. A statement of needs or an assessment report which should specifically detail the type of accommodations needed by individual students

(For an example of the needs assessment format, see appendix 1)

Keypoint
A needs assessment report is used as an important part of an application for funding for students. The quality of an assessment report can make a real difference to the success of an application

Funding supports for students with disabilities

Funding for supports and accommodations for students with disabilities studying in Further Education is available from the Fund for Students with Disabilities which is administered by the Higher Education Authority - National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education. This fund is only available to students attending full-time third level education.

Funding enables colleges to provide support services and specialised equipment for students with disabilities and specific learning difficulties. Support Services can include: special needs assistance, personal assistants, sign language interpreters, speed text operators, photocopying and additional tuition and learning support. Specialised equipment can include tape recorders, radio aids, and computer software such as JAWS or Text Help Gold.

Applications to the fund are made by the designated disability support person in the college. Any support provided must be agreed and signed off by both student and the designated staff member. Information provided by the student will be treated as strictly confidential and is subject to the terms of the Data Protection Act (1998). Funding does not go directly to the student and it cannot be used to cover costs such as food, books or study materials. Any equipment provided remains the property of the college.

Making learning accessible

Accessibility of access to further education is crucial in creating equality of opportunity for all students. A student centred, active learning approach which includes interactive, problem based and experiential learning suits a broad group of learners and is more likely to engage students and make learning more meaningful. A student centred approach also enables both teacher and student to think outside the box when it comes to carrying out assessments of student's work. This type of flexibility in assessing student achievement is an integral part of FETAC courses.

Students with dyslexia

Learners

Dyslexia is a condition which affects up to eight per cent of the general population and over thirty per cent of students in third level education. Dyslexia is commonly found in people of above average intelligence and people with dyslexia frequently demonstrate a particularly high aptitude in areas requiring good technical and scientific skills.

The underlying problems for people with dyslexia are related to poor short term memory and the processing of information. As a consequence, students affected are likely to experience particular difficulty with reading, writing, spelling and note taking. Students with dyslexia can do very well in Further Education with appropriate supports and the use of assistive technology.

Teachers

Tip
Participating in further education can be challenging for students with dyslexia but there are a number of strategies which may help:

- A multi sensory, practical approach works best so make use of demonstration, videos, visual cues, examples and simple flow charts or diagrams when delivering classes
- Keep text simple and break it down into paragraphs, using bullet points and clear headings
- Break complex topics into smaller, simpler sections and avoid unnecessary jargon
- Highlight patterns or themes in subject matter as this enables students to associate ideas
- Encourage students to use mind mapping techniques when taking notes, completing assignments and preparing for examinations

Case Study

Ann was identified as having dyslexia at secondary school. A psychological assessment revealed that both her reading and spelling were delayed by several years. Ann experienced difficulty with reading and writing throughout school but, with some accommodations, she was successful in passing her Leaving Certificate.

Ann is now enrolled on a social care course and is experiencing similar difficulties in further education. Ann is finding the level of reading and written work required on the course difficult and is also encountering new and complex language on the psychology module.

It is clear that Ann will need accommodations during her course and whilst sitting examinations. Individual tuition would help Ann to plan and organise her work and focus on learning new terms and vocabulary. She would also benefit from using a laptop with Text help, Dragon Naturally Speaking and dictionary software installed. Providing her with an exam paper on an MP3 player would enable her to replay her questions throughout the exam.

Students with physical disabilities

Learners

A wide range of physical conditions can limit a person's mobility. Some of these conditions can also impair strength, speed, stamina, balance, co-ordination and manual dexterity. Access is a major issue for students with reduced mobility and there can be difficulties with gaining access to college buildings, particularly those which are old. Getting from place to place to attend classes takes more time and can be tiring.

Teachers

It is important to know exactly what sort of barriers students are likely to encounter in a learning environment. Some, for example, might have difficulties with note taking or page turning whilst others might need assistance in reaching shelves and equipment in the library.

Tip

Individual students will be able to identify potential barriers and possible solutions.

- Access issues need to be discussed with students at an early stage and suitable arrangements put in place for attending classes if necessary

- A wheelchair user or a student with mobility problems may encounter obstacles or barriers in getting to class on time. Flexibility around timekeeping and attendance may, at times be needed - but ground rules need to be agreed with individual students
- Arrangements for assistance may need to be made with library staff for access to card indexes, bookshelves, microfiche, photocopiers and other equipment.
- Assistance may also be needed with the manipulation of documents and page turning
- Staff need to be familiar with the building's emergency evacuation plan for students who have problems with mobility
- Be prepared for a change of classroom or building if no other solution is possible

Case Study

Following a serious accident as a young child, Paula has a severe physical disability. She has very limited use of her upper limbs and fingers but has sufficient movement to allow her to operate an electric wheelchair. Paula's disability means that she needs a considerable amount of assistance with her daily living activities.

Paula is undertaking a social science diploma course and although she expects to do well, she is worried about the fieldwork and placement requirements. She also expects to be involved in a considerable number of individual and group research projects. Mobility and physical access are major considerations for Paula and the sheer effort involved in getting from place to place often leaves her feeling fatigued.

Students with Asperger Syndrome

Learners

People with Asperger syndrome have a lot of unique learning characteristics and academic strengths. Individuals with Asperger syndrome tend to have normal to above average levels of ability so with the right supports and accommodations can do well in further education. Some people have exceptional memory for detail and can be very creative and original in their thinking. (One striking example is Alexander Bell, who invented the telephone). They may, however, have difficulty with understanding the complexities of language and communication and may not pick up on humour or sarcasm. They tend to take things literally and often will not grasp the intended meaning of a figure of speech for example, if asked to read a passage aloud, a student with asperger syndrome may read it loudly.

Some individuals can have difficulty empathising with others and may prefer to be alone. They may not be able to read social cues, interpret body language or understand social conventions such as taking turns when speaking. They also have a tendency to say exactly what they think, regardless of the impact this has on others. Tasks requiring cognitive skills such as problem solving, organisation and abstract thinking may present some difficulties.

Keypoint
Routine and consistency is very important for people with Asperger syndrome so some students may find change or new situations difficult

Teachers

Each individual has different requirements and carrying out a needs assessment will help determine the type of accommodations which are appropriate.

Tip
The following tips may be useful:

- Consistency and routine are very important. Prepare the student well in advance for any changes to their normal routine
- A visual approach works best so use graphics, demonstration and storyboarding where possible
- Individual tuition will help students to develop their study skills and to structure and organise their academic work
- Some students may find it difficult to listen and take notes at the same time so will need to be able to record lectures
- Some people may find it difficult to work in a group so alternatives to group assignments may need to be considered
- People with Asperger syndrome have a natural affinity with computers. Regular computer access will give students a break from social interaction and provide them with a quiet space in which to work
- There may be a tendency to take things literally, so avoid figurative and abstract language and be explicit when giving instructions or explaining things

- Some students may be sensitive to light, particular smells or noise. This may be particularly apparent in laboratory settings
- Try and facilitate students by giving them some space in the classroom, for example, seated at the end of a row
- Some students may find multiple choice questions confusing so alternative types of assessment may need to be considered
- It may be helpful for students to have examination instructions explained to them to avoid confusion and minimise anxiety. Some students may need to sit examinations in a separate room
- Some students are likely to need additional time to complete assignments and examinations
- It is estimated that between 50% and 90% of people with Asperger syndrome will have difficulty with motor co-ordination. This can affect their balance, manual dexterity and handwriting
- Depression and anxiety are common so students need to know what support services are available to them. Keeping things simple and clear and minimising ambiguity will help reduce anxiety

Case Study

Ed was identified as having Asperger syndrome during a needs assessment when he applied for a business studies course. He prefers to work alone so finds it very difficult participating in group work. Ed is also something of a perfectionist and will let his classmates know when he feels that they fail to make the same effort that he does. He prefers to focus on specific areas of interest and resists becoming involved in other areas.

Ed is only beginning to realise that the way in which he interacts with other people is different from that of his classmates. He finds it difficult to pick up on social cues, particularly sarcastic remarks and always says exactly what he thinks. This sometimes alienates him from his classmates but Ed does not really understand why this is a problem.

(Recommended reading: 'The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night time')

Students who are blind or visually impaired

Learners

Blindness or visual impairment is a sensory disability where the level of impairment varies greatly. Limitations imposed on reading and mobility can make it difficult for some students to access the learning environment. Technological advances however have made it possible for students who are blind or visually impaired to compete on an equal footing with their peers. Students who are blind will probably need to use assistive technology devices in class and may need course materials to be made available in alternative formats. Some students may use guide dogs which will need to be accommodated in all locations.

Teachers

Tip

Students who are blind or visually impaired need access to learning materials in a non-visual way. It may be necessary therefore to:

- Provide reading lists well in advance so that they can be translated or transcribed
- Keep reading lists focussed and direct students to key texts and online resources
- Ensure that reading lists, syllabi and core texts are available in alternative formats such as audiotape, Braille, large print or electronically
- Remember to convey information orally as well as in writing during classes
- Front seats may need to be reserved for students with low vision
- Be flexible in assessing student's work. If a student is unable to carry out a task, consider alternative assignments that will allow them to demonstrate their knowledge of the subject matter
- It can take up to 50% longer for a student with a visual impairment to complete a piece of work so additional time will be needed for assignments and examinations
- Some students may need to use a reader or scribe during examinations
- Encourage students to be independent learners with the assistance of assistive technological tools such as screen readers or voice recognition software

Case Study

Johnny has just started a course in Business Administration and is living away from home for the first time. He has a visual impairment and coped well in secondary school using large print as an aid to learning. Johnny has never learned how to use a computer so lacks the computer literacy he needs in order to be able to manage his assignments. As a consequence, he is falling behind with his written work and is really worried about his future on the course.

A meeting with his disability officer resulted in a set of recommendations for Johnny. These included the use of a tape recorder for use in lectures and a scanner for books. The disability officer also recommended study skills support for Johnny with a particular emphasis on computer skills.

Students who are deaf or hard of hearing

Learners

People who are deaf or hard of hearing miss out on a lot of the incidental opportunities for learning that most of us take for granted. The main difficulty experienced by students who are deaf is likely to be related to language. Since most courses are taught through the spoken word, lectures and tutorials can pose particular problems. For example, students who lip read are likely to find it difficult to lip read and take notes at the same time. The presence of audio loop systems in classrooms and laboratories can make a real difference for many students.

Teachers

Tip

In teaching students who are deaf or hard or hearing, the emphasis needs to be on making course materials available in visual or written format.

- Classrooms need to be well lit and seating needs to be arranged so that students are able to see other people's faces
- Avoid moving around whilst speaking and remember to always face the class
- Speak slowly, using Plain English and illustrate points by using examples, charts and diagrams where possible
- Where sign language interpreters are being used, remember that it takes time for them to translate what is being said

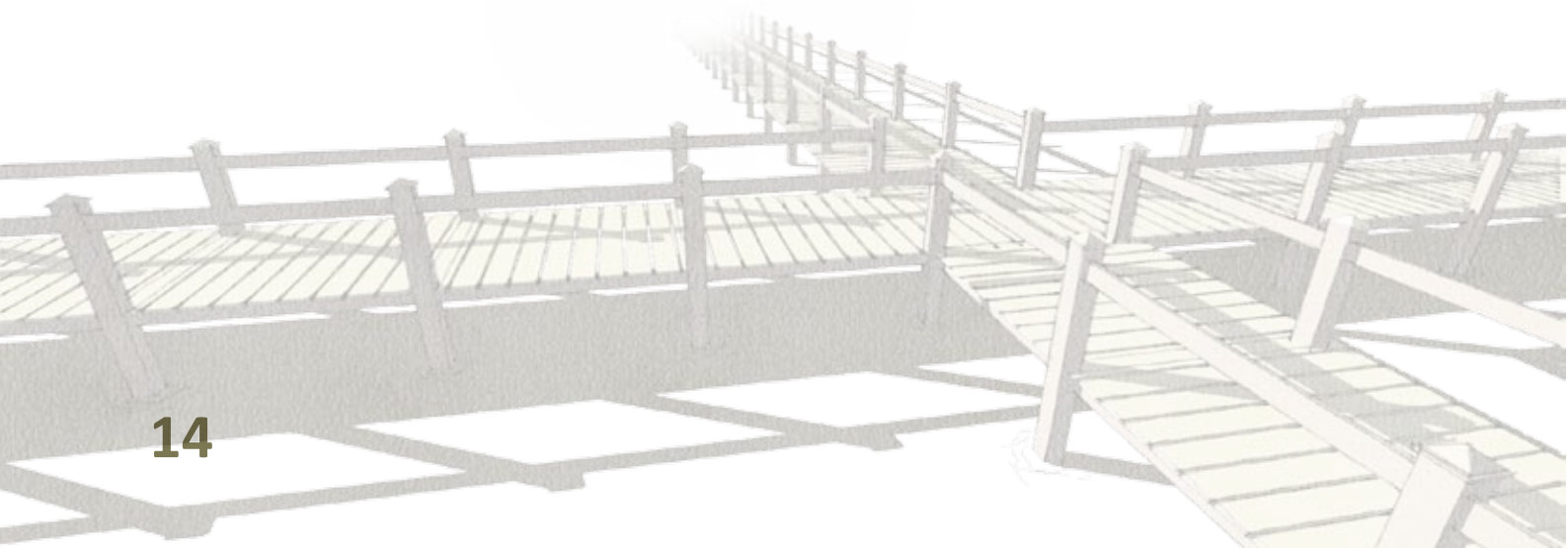
- Write down new information or key points and highlight any new concepts or terminology
- Summarise information regularly and check that students are able to follow
- Use audio loops where possible and try to minimise noise
- Ensure that examination instructions and questions are written in Plain English
- Some students may need to use sign language interpreters during examinations or may need to be examined orally. Additional time may therefore need to be allowed.

Case Study

Mary has enrolled on a Business and Computer course and uses a hearing aid for her hearing impairment. She can follow face to face conversations providing the environment is quiet and there are only a few people involved. Mary is worried that she will not be able to manage to follow what is going on in group discussions in classes.

She has organised a meeting with her course tutor to discuss how she can best access the curriculum.

Mary found the meeting very productive and reassuring and she was pleased to know that the college is well equipped with audio loops. It was agreed that Mary would have access to copies of notes in advance of classes and would have reserved seating at the front of the class. Mary and her tutor agreed to meet regularly in order to deal with any issues which might arise.



Students with intellectual disabilities

Learners

Increasing numbers of students with intellectual disabilities are now participating in further education and with the right supports can make good progress. Some of these students however may find it difficult to learn new skills or may learn them more slowly than their classmates. They may have difficulty with complex information and abstract concepts and may not be able to see the connections and relationships between events.

Teachers

A structured approach is required and information may need to be simplified or broken down. It may be helpful for some students to record lectures.

Tip
You may also need to:

- Restructure tasks or assignments and break down large or difficult tasks into smaller steps
- Use short, simple sentences in Plain English and avoid words with double meanings. Avoid open ended questions.
- Present information in a sequence and give instructions one step at a time
- Provide lots of repetition and feedback. Demonstrate new tasks and give concrete examples to illustrate
- Frequently check student's understanding of topics
- Use visual cues or storyboarding where possible and point out associations, links and connections
- Encourage students to use mind mapping techniques as a learning strategy
- Try to avoid interruptions when working on new concepts or material
- Allow extra time for assignments and examinations

Case Study

Michael is studying on a Retail Skills course in his local VEC. He has a mild general learning disability with a reading level of age 8. This means that he has difficulty in reading some of the course textbooks. His written work is also slow so it takes him much longer to complete written assignments.

Michael is enthusiastic about his course and although he finds complex instructions difficult, he understands them when they are broken down into simple sentences. He is competent in using the computer once he has been given clear instructions but he can sometimes take longer than expected to complete tasks.

Managing boundaries with students

The majority of people have a good understanding of the sort of codes of behaviour which are acceptable in social and work settings. Some individuals however, may come from environments where the boundaries around behaviour are insufficient or unclear. Some students may lack understanding of the conventional social cues which most of us take for granted. In some situations, these students may face challenges in identifying and adhering to the sort of boundaries they are likely to encounter in further education.

Keypoint

Clearly defined boundaries provide protection and help manage difficult situations

There will always be times when even the most experienced members of staff will encounter inappropriate or challenging behaviour in the classroom. Some students may also have difficulty focusing on and managing tasks. Having clear boundaries in place may prevent problems happening and may help you to know what to do if they do arise.

Establishing boundaries

The starting point in establishing boundaries is being clear about roles, rules, rights and responsibilities. Most people function best when they know what the rules are and what the consequences are if rules are broken. The absence of rules and clear boundaries can make it difficult for some individuals to understand the parameters of the various relationships which are part and parcel of being a student. This can make it difficult for them to negotiate some of the situations and relationships they are likely to encounter during their time in further education.

Tip
Here are some tips on establishing boundaries with students

- Outline institutional and classroom rules to students at the beginning of each academic year so that everyone is clear about what is expected. Rules should be short and to the point
- Be clear about expectations. Explain what is expected in terms of behaviour, assignment deadlines, quality of work and the system for assessing and marking student's work
- Explain your role and responsibilities in relation to students, colleagues and the institution
- Discuss people's rights in the classroom. For example, everyone is entitled to learn, to be respected and to feel safe
- Be clear about your own boundaries and set a good example by being on time and being organised

Case Study

Sharon is a wheelchair user in the first year of a Science Access course. Having come from a special school, Sharon was accustomed to having a lot of assistance throughout her primary and secondary education. This is her first experience of mainstream education and her expectations are that she will receive similar assistance during her course. Sharon has, in fact been assigned a Special Needs Assistant to help lessen the impact of her disability in the classroom. Judy, the Assistant, is experiencing some difficulty in managing the various demands which Sharon is placing on her. Sharon expects Judy to help her complete her assignments and asks her for advice on personal difficulties. She has, on occasion asked Judy to do her shopping and once asked Judy to lend her some money.

Judy brought these difficulties to the attention of Sharon's teacher and they both agreed that Judy needed to re-establish professional boundaries in relation to Sharon. Judy met with Sharon and explained the role of the Special Needs Assistant. She described the various areas where she could provide support and assistance and clarified the areas where she had no responsibility. Sharon was accustomed to having a high level of care during her time in special education and was surprised to learn that her relationship with Judy had a different purpose. Judy and Sharon agreed the parameters of their working relationship and Judy consistently reminded Sharon of this agreement on occasions where Sharon attempted to seek inappropriate assistance.

Maintaining boundaries

Boundary management is an institutional concern and everyone needs to focus on managing and maintaining professional relationships between students and staff.

Keypoint
Clear, professional relationships with students reduces ambiguity and creates an environment in which learning can be most effective

Tip
Here are some tips on maintaining boundaries with students;

- Reduce unrealistic expectations by establishing clear policies in relation to your availability. Meet students by appointment and set limits on the amount of time you spend with individual students
- Be clear about when and how often you will respond to student's e-mails
- Discuss sensitive issues in person rather than by e-mail
- Be clear about what is expected when setting assignments
- Be consistent in applying rules so that they are continuously reinforced
- Be friendly but not familiar so as to ensure a professional working relationship with students
- Maintain professional boundaries during extracurricular activities such as Christmas parties
- Return presents
- Remain calm and respectful when dealing with difficult situations. Showing anger will undermine your authority
- Take the class temperature by regularly obtaining student feedback to identify dissatisfaction and keep small problems from becoming large
- Document any confrontations with students and any attempted unwelcome contacts
- Know when and how to refer students to other supports
- Seek help and support when dealing with difficult situations

Designing course materials

Tip
The design of course materials for students with disabilities should employ Principles of Universal Design to ensure that they are barrier free.

Making presentations accessible

The following strategies may be useful:

- Meet with individual students to identify what accessible formats are needed and what assistive technology is currently being used
- Make lecture notes and handouts available on website or electronically
- Use a minimum font size of 18 when making presentations and a minimum of 12 for handouts
- Limit the amount of information used on overheads to a maximum of six points
- Sans Serif fonts such as Ariel, Comic Sans or Verdana are easier to read for some students
- Break continuous text up by using paragraphs and bullet points
- Use 'bold' to highlight points rather than underlining them
- Keep text to a minimum and use bullet points rather than sentences
- Use simple diagrams, visual cues or examples to illustrate points
- Use double rather than single spacing
- Text written solely in upper case can be difficult to read. It is better to use both upper and lower case letters
- Use sufficient colour and brightness contrast for better visibility
- Keep backgrounds simple, avoid patterns and the use of multiple colours
- Maintain consistency of style and colour throughout your presentations
- Use dark text on a light background for bright rooms and light text on a dark background for dark rooms

Structuring documents

Tip
The appropriate use of style and inbuilt structure is the single most important factor in making your documents accessible. Correct use of these elements can make documents much easier for users to navigate.

- It is best to align text to the left, as justifying can cause the reader to focus on large portions of vertical white space
- Avoid using coloured paper for handouts. Glare is reduced, however by using yellow or cream paper rather than white, contrast can be improved while maintaining the reduction in glare
- Use the font toolbar to set the style of your document (click the arrow beside where it says 'normal'). Marking documents in this way enables students using screen reading software to find the piece they are looking for, rather than having to listen to all of the text
- Modify the style (colour, font, size spacing) of your document by clicking on 'Format-styles and formatting'. Right click on the style(s) of your choice. Use the 'Add to template' box if you want to apply these styles to all of your documents
- Using page breaks rather than spacing to move to the next page helps tidy up documents and make them faster to navigate for students using screen readers
- Tables can be difficult for users to access. When using tables, be aware that screen readers read tables from left to right. When designing tables, ensure that your descriptor fields go horizontally across the table
- Use a minimum number of horizontal columns to avoid confusion
- Repeat field names every so often to remind the user of the order the fields are in

Tip
Correctly styling your document at the outset makes it much easier to reformat at a later stage

Using images and sound in documents

The use of images or charts can be a problem for many users. Using alternative text, captioning and sound gets around many of these problems by providing an alternative way to experience the information contained within the image.

- When using images such as graphs, it is best to also use both a caption and alternative text in the document to convey the information contained in the image
- Using alternative text to describe an image will enable screen readers to access the image. To insert alternative text for an image, select the image then click 'format' – 'picture' and select the 'web' tab on the format window that pops up. Type in your alternative text here. This method is particularly useful if the document is to be converted to PDF or HTML
- To insert a caption on an image, first select it, then click 'insert' – 'reference' – 'caption'. The caption dialog will open and allow you to type the desired caption. Captioning works best when you have already detailed the information contained in the image in the body of the document. The caption acts as a short descriptor
- To add sound, click 'insert' – 'object' and select the object 'wave sound' from the list. When the sound object window appears, click 'edit' – 'insert file' to select a sound file from your hard drive
- You can also record your voice to describe large pieces of data. Press the 'record' button and speak into your computer microphone before pressing the 'stop' button to end the recording. Click 'file' – 'exit and return' to return to your document.

A note on quality assurance

Each institution is responsible for assuring the quality of its education and training programmes and for ensuring that students with disabilities are included in all policies, procedures and codes of practice.

Keypoint
The Qualifications Act (1999) requires that all providers of further education and training programmes leading to FETAC awards establish procedures to quality assure their programme and that they agree these procedures with FETAC.

Since 2005, all providers wishing to register with FETAC for the first time must do so through the agreement of their quality assurance procedures with FETAC.

The quality assurance system required by FETAC includes:

- **Communication** – with learners, staff and other stakeholders. A system for obtaining feedback from students should be included in procedures
- **Equality** – Institutions should demonstrate in their programmes of education and training a commitment to combat discrimination, make adjustments for diversity and promote equality of opportunity
- **Staff recruitment and development** – Institutional policy should seek to ensure that staff are well matched to roles and have access to appropriate supports and further training when necessary
- **Access, transfer and progression** – Providers will be expected to facilitate a learner's entry and successful participation in a programme
- **Programme development, delivery and review** – The core function of providers is to design, deliver and review programmes to meet the needs of learners
- **Fair and consistent assessment of learners** – Providers should have fair and appropriate processes for the assessment of learner achievement
- **Authentication process** – The assessment process should include both internal verification and external authentication
- **Protection for learners** – Policy should comply with the Qualifications Act and state arrangements for learners in the event of cessation of a programme
- **Sub-contracting/procuring programme delivery** – A provider's policy should clarify it's responsibilities to it's learners when its programmes are being delivered by a second provider
- **Self evaluation of programmes and services** – A provider's policy should set out it's commitment to improvement through the regular evaluation of programmes

(Quality Assurance in Education and Training, Policies and Guidelines for Providers, FETAC)

Appendix 1 – Example of Needs Assessment format

Name of student:	
Course:	
Student Background:	
Previous Educational Supports:	

Impact of Disability within an educational context:

Please indicate reasons for supports, describe the impact of disability in context of course requirements and demands: (research, workshops, lecturers, library etc).

Learning Supports Personnel:

Note-taker	☐
Subject Specific Tutor	☐
Dyslexia Tutor	☐
I.S.L Interpreter	☐
Speed Text Operator	☐
Educational Support	☐

Assistive Technology:

Jaws voice synthesiser for visually impaired student	☐
Voice Recognition Software	☐
Braille & Speak	☐
Kurzweil Scanner & Zoom Text for visually impaired	☐
Speed Text Operator	☐
Educational Support	☐
Students	☐
Speedtext service for deaf students	☐
Radio Aids	☐
Portable Loop system	☐
Computerised dictionary (e.g.: Franklin Spell)	☐
Text Help Read & Write software	☐
Read & Scroll pen	☐
Adapted keyboard	☐

Please indicate reasons for supports in context of educational demands and course participation.

Personal Supports:

Personal Assistant	☐

Please indicate reasons for supports in context of educational demands and course participation.

Services:

Transport	☐

Please indicate reasons for supports in context of impact of disability on educational demands and course participation.

Photocopying	☐

Please indicate reasons for supports in context of impact of disability on educational demands and course participation.

COSTING OF SUPPORTS

Learning Supports Personnel:

	Hours per week	Weeks per year	Rate Per Hour	Total Cost
Note-taker				
Subject Specific				
Tutor				
Dyslexia Tutor				
I.S.L Interpreter				
Speed Text				
Operator				
Special needs Assistant				

Personal Supports:

	Hours per week	Weeks per year	Rate Per Hour	Total Cost
Personal Assistant				

Services:

	Miles per week	Weeks per year	Rate Per Mile	Total Cost
Transport				

Photocopying	
Photocopying Allocation for Year	
Total Cost	

References

AHEAD Educational Press , An Accessible Curriculum – A Disability Equality Programme for Higher Education (2006)

AHEAD Educational Press, Charter for Inclusive Teaching and Learning, (2009)

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AHEAD Educational Press, Staff Guide to Writing Accessible Documents (2010)

FETAC, Quality Assurance in Education and Training, Policies and Guidelines for Providers

Loftus , T. , Supporting students with dyslexia – Practical guidelines for institutes of further and higher education, AHEAD Educational Press (2009)

National Disability Authority, Code of Practice (2005)

Recommended reading

Haddon,M., The Curious Case of the Dog in the Night Time, Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, (2003)

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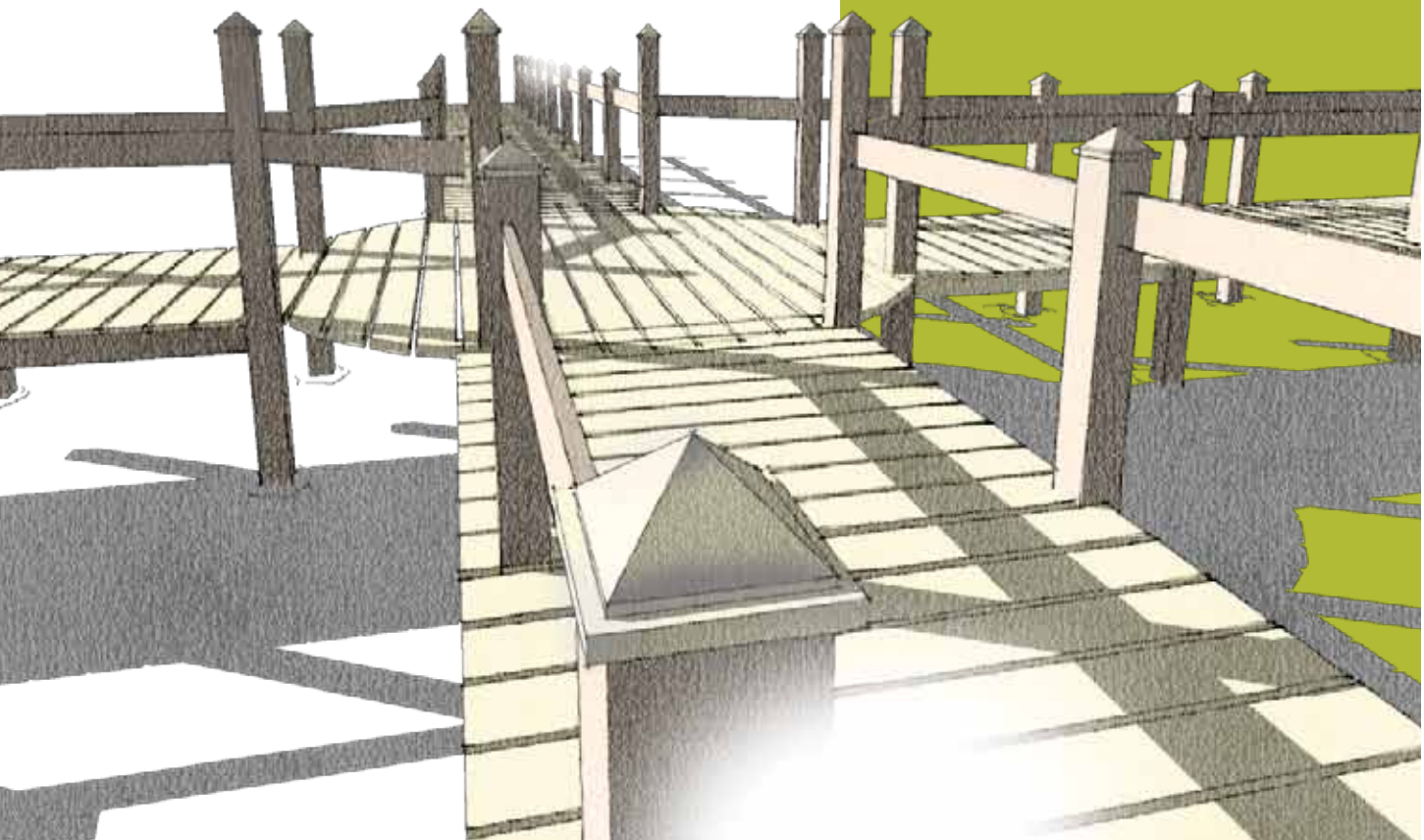
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