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## AHEAD's ARK Platform

ARK is a digital accessibility resource hub for tertiary education which provides practical resources and know-how to support a range of institutional staff to be more accessible in their roles. The ARK platform can help with:

1. Assisting with guidance to help institutions meet their legal accessibility compliance
2. Providing a better digital experience for all
3. Embedding principles of Universal Design for learning into education practices to cater to a diverse student body
4. Helping educators create a more accessible and dynamic virtual learning platform to better engage learners

Amongst ARK resources are role-based ARK courses to support staff to consider a whole of institution approach while incorporating accessibility and Universal Design for Learning into their practices. ARK courses provide a range of completely free role-based programs for educators, administrative and technical staff, and senior leaders in education institutions. Courses can be taken directly with AHEAD at [www.ahead.ie/ARK](http://www.ahead.ie/ARK) or used in internal Continuing Professional Development (CPD) systems throughout Ireland under a creative commons licence.

## Origin of ARK

The idea for the ARK platform was born after consultation with managers in both the higher and further education sectors in Ireland. Leaders and managers shared common feelings that their institutions would largely benefit from accessibility and inclusion courses that could be completed online. While managers generally agreed that AHEAD's previously published articles, courses, resources, and badges were extremely useful and helped staff develop dynamic and applicable practices in accessibility, they often brought up that their staff had heavy workloads and were sometimes too pressed timewise to undertake courses with large time-commitments.

With workloads and time constraints in mind, AHEAD developed three short but extremely impactful ARK courses on accessibility. These courses were designed to be role-based, bite-sized, and applicable to a wide audience.

**With the success of the first three accessibility courses, another two ARK courses will be launched in the coming months with a sixth course to be launched in 2023.**



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## Available Courses

### [An Introduction to Digital Accessibility for Educators – 90-120 minutes](#)

This course will help users gain an awareness of digital accessibility and its legal dimensions. This course goes straight to the heart of accessibility by unpacking the simple practices that make your documents, presentations, and videos more flexible and inclusive.

Target Audience: Anyone working in further or higher education will find this course useful.

### [Digital Accessibility – a Whole Institution Approach – 90-120 minutes](#)

This course will impart information and skills regarding digital accessibility awareness. It will explain digital accessibility as a legal requirement, as a benefit to institutions, and as a benefit to individual users.

Target Audience: Anyone is welcome to enrol but this course has been crafted to support senior managers and senior technical staff in further and higher education.

### [Developing a Web Accessibility Statement – 90-120 minutes](#)

This course helps organisations and institutions create web accessibility statements to be compliant and appropriate for accessible access.

Target Audience: Anyone is welcome to enrol but this course has been crafted to support senior managers and senior technical staff in further and higher education.

## Coming Soon

### [Designing Virtual Learning Environments for Student Success – 90-120 minutes](#)

This course can help with the design of virtual learning environments to pave way for successful student interactions.

Target Audience: Anyone working in higher or further education will find this course useful, though it is targeted to help teachers and managers be more virtually useful to their learners, students, and staff.

### [Universal Design for Learning, an Introduction – 90-120 minutes](#)

This course teaches us the basic principles of Universal Design for learning, giving us practices of how we can apply UDL principles to teaching and management styles.

Target Audience: Anyone working in higher or further education will find this course useful.

When users complete any ARK course, they will automatically receive a Digital Badge. Complete all three accessibility courses to receive a Digital Accessibility Master Badge with an option to explore more master badges in the future.

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## Other ARK Resources

Besides useful ARK courses, the ARK platform also includes a Guidance Pack for strategic use to help managers and leaders roll out ARK courses in their institutions. This Guidance Pack includes links to the course [SCORM](#) files which can be easily embedded in institutional training including professional and field-specific development for staff. The pack also includes email templates to help reach team members and general assistance to help with the dissemination of courses within educational institutions.

In addition, the ARK platform also offers an accessibility and legislation page which helps audiences digest and apply legislation jargon at their own institutional levels. The platform dissects the Web Accessibility Directive in detail, explaining legal and practical ramifications for Irish institutions including a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) facility to explain what the Accessibility Directive means in practice.

## Conclusion

By offering the completely free [ARK platform](#) to all users, AHEAD's ultimate goal is to provide practical resources and know-how to support a range of institutional staff to be more accessible in their roles. The range of free classes also supports educational organisations to consider a whole institution approach to digital accessibility, meet their legal obligations, boost legal accessibility compliance, and provide a better digital and learning experience for all.



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Erica Meslin is the Education Manager with AHEAD. She is an experienced leader in the inclusion field bringing in a diverse background of working with marginalized and disadvantaged communities internationally. Erica is passionate about accessibility and inclusion in education settings and is happy to play a key role with AHEAD's education team.

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This article appeared in the AHEAD Journal. Visit [www.ahead.ie/journal](http://www.ahead.ie/journal) for more information

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