



## AHEAD Conference 2021: Submission Guide

This guide is to support you as part of the submission process to present at The AHEAD Conference 2021 which will take place online over 5 weeks. The below guide provides more information on the formats, themes and criteria which the submissions will be judged by The Conference Committee. All proposals must be submitted to AHEAD via the online proposal form by 5pm (GMT) Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2020.

### Selection Criteria

All conference submissions will be reviewed by a Conference Committee in line with key selection criteria. The below section will give you some information on what are the key elements which are looked for in a successful submission and the link to the Rubric will give you an idea of the weight given to each area.

The Conference selection criteria below will give you an idea of how proposals will be assessed in greater detail, but some points to consider to assist you in designing a successful submission are;

- **Relevance to the Audience:** The conference target audience is FET and Higher Education staff so make sure your submission is relevant for them and tailored to them. You need to be clear about how your submission will be useful for attendees and their work as part of your proposal.
- **Relevance to the Conference Theme and Sub Themes:** The submission is aligned/relevant to the key topic of the conference and sub-theme which is selected under. Submissions that fit closely with the key message of the conference and work more consistently as part of the overall event are more likely to be selected.
- **Quality of Submission:** If the submission includes information about a research project or sharing an example of good practice that you are involved in, it would be beneficial to provide resources or references to illustrate its effectiveness or key outcomes to the audience. It may be useful to provide some evidence of this as part of your proposal submission.
- **Clear Outcomes for Audience:** Are the outcome(s) provided clear and aligns with the objective of the conference theme and/or overall conference?

### Additional Information to note to enhance the success rate of your submission

Providing accessible content and delivering it accessibly is very important to us, therefore it would be preferable if you can illustrate a commitment and/or plan about how your presentation will execute this as part of your submission. This isn't essential criteria for submissions for the conference as AHEAD staff are always happy to help anyone who would like support around making their content and delivery more accessible and will be providing optional training sessions for presenters closer to the conference.

It is also preferable if submissions indicate a more interactive or engaging presentation as these formats are more preferable with attendees.

AHEAD is focussed on creating inclusive environments for people with disabilities in education and employment. One of our key strategies is to promote Universal Design for Learning which provides more

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flexible and accessible experiences for all students – so we are very interested in UDL approaches ([for more information on UDL please visit the AHEAD Website](#)) and also in more specific practice around support delivery targeted directly at students with disabilities. What we are not interested in for this forum is support programmes/practice which specifically focus solely on other underrepresented groups – we love to hear about this work, just not at this conference unless it relates to supporting students with disabilities.



## Conference Themes

AHEAD is principally interested in building inclusive learning environments for students with disabilities and therefore, all submissions should relate their how their proposal either directly or indirectly has or may in the future support the needs of students with disabilities in further or higher education. We are interested in universal design and universal design for learning approaches which benefit all students, but in this forum, we will not be accepting contributions about projects which specifically target underrepresented groups other than students with disabilities.

The overall theme of this year's conference relates to reconnecting students and staff through the new remote and hybrid learning environments they find themselves in by placing inclusion at the heart of design and delivery.

Review the **Conference Themes** and assess which one your proposal best fits under, this is important as they fit in as part of the overall vision and objective for this event.

### 1. "Welcome Everybody!" – Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in the online classroom

The quick move to online and hybrid learning has resulted in huge challenges for educators over the last few months, with many thrown into remote learning with very little time to reflect and plan, all while supporting their students. This theme explores how educators can include all students, in particular those with disabilities, in the delivery of teaching and learning online and offer rich, accessible and engaging learning experiences that build meaningful learning connections between staff and students.

While not limited to this list, examples of the types of work that could be presented by students or educators under this theme could include:

- Great practical examples of applying UDL in online settings – offering voice and choice in remote learning and assessment. How Technology enhanced learning can support inclusion.
- Contributions from Students with Disabilities on their experiences of remote learning, positives and challenges faces – advice for educators from 'the experts'
- Research relating to inclusive pedagogy online or the application of UDL
- Great examples of accessibility practices in online teaching delivery

**Likely to be of interest to:** Teachers, academics, teaching and learning staff, researchers and students

### 2. "I Did It My Way!" – Assistive Technology & Customised Learning

Remote learning has brought a mix of new opportunities and barriers for students with disabilities in accessing education like never before. But more and more, students are understanding how they can use both mainstream and assistive technologies to customise and streamline their learning experience, giving them more control, independence and agency.

Equally, educators are understanding the importance of promoting good tech use by students within their programmes and realising the part they have to play in providing materials which students can engage with successfully using their own technologies.

While not limited to this list, examples of the types of work that could be presented by students or educators under this theme could include:

- Examples of projects and practice that promote inclusive tech use by students
- Explorations of how mainstream technologies are playing a bigger and bigger part in providing learners with control over how they experience learning
- Research relating to assistive technology use, importance during Covid-19 etc.



- Contributions from Students with Disabilities on how they use assistive technologies and advice for educators from ‘the experts’ on how they can support this use through accessible practice

**Likely to be of interest to:** Students, assistive technology officers, FET staff, researchers

### 3. “What Can I Do for You?” Disability Support in Online Learning

The process of assessing the needs of students with disabilities and identifying appropriate supports largely looks at the overlap between the impact of disability and the demands of the course/environment. Since the pandemic, the latter has shifted significantly as we move towards online and hybrid approaches.

Facing into this reality, disability support staff, in conjunction with students and other colleagues, are creating dynamic and innovative new practices and initiatives that embrace modern technology. As we look toward a sustainable future for our students with disabilities, one that has them at the centre, now is an opportunity to share some of the innovative practices and projects that have embedded inclusion and the lessons learned which the sector needs to hold on to.

While not limited to this list, examples of the types of work that could be presented by students or educators under this theme could include:

- Innovations in online needs assessment and support service delivery that support inclusion – here to stay?
- New specific practice in providing reasonable accommodations in online environments for particular target groups (e.g. students who are hard of hearing)
- Research on disability support in online environments
- Examples of disability support service led projects which promote good inclusive practice across campus – how academics play their part in applying reasonable accommodations
- Examples of disability support professionals engaging and involving students with disabilities in the design and delivery on their service

**Likely to be of interest to:** Disability support staff, access officers, SEN teachers in FET, students

### 4. “Home Sweet Home!” – College Wide Approaches that Support Inclusion for All in the digital world

The swift move to remote and hybrid learning has magnified significant challenges that already existed around student access to online environments and accessibility of online teaching tools, materials and practices. The importance accessible digital infrastructure and staff awareness on how to apply inclusive practice and accessibility principles within their own remit is essential to delivering a quality experience for student with disabilities.

With new legislation on the horizon in Ireland’s imminent transposition of the EU Web Accessibility Directive, this theme explores approaches that seek to embed inclusion and digital accessibility practices in the fabric of the college/centre through the implementation of college-wide policy, the featuring of accessibility and inclusion pointers in all staff guidance, the development college campaigns and toolkits, and wide scale professional development programmes relating to inclusion. It explores work that seeks to build a culture where inclusion is everyone’s business.

While not limited to this list, examples of the types of work that could be presented by students or educators under this theme could include:

- Projects that take a whole college approach to ensuring digital accessibility and implementing Universal Design and/or UDL



- Projects promoting digital accessibility or good inclusive practice in individual student services or student unions (e.g. library service, careers service, clubs and societies)
- Exploring the importance of disability/access support professionals being 'at the table' in institutional pandemic response planning
- Great examples of projects that involve students in designing and delivering the message of inclusion across campus
- Student contributions on how they have contributed to shifting the culture in the institution to be more inclusive (e.g. through direct engagement, advocacy, promotional campaigns etc.)

**Likely to be of interest to:** Students and any staff members involved in applying whole college/centre/service approaches to inclusion – ICT, senior management, teaching and learning, examinations, disability support, libraries, careers etc.

### 5. "Let's Do Lunch?": Virtually Connected Teachers and Learners

When faced with new approaches and environments alone, obstacles can seem insurmountable - however when we face them together, connections are built and creative solutions emerge. While the pandemic has meant that we must be more physically distant, we need to ensure that we foster rich virtual connections between staff and students to maintain wellbeing, share learning and meet the challenges of teaching, learning and living in the remote age.

This theme invites staff and students to share examples of good practice in building online social and professional/learning connections between staff, between students and between staff and students.

- Building and maintaining communities of inclusive practice online – examples and advice. Keeping staff informally connected during remote delivery.
- Projects and/or practice which promote social and/or learning connections between students (peer groups, buddy systems) in online settings
- Student contributions on good practice in delivering clubs and societies online in an inclusive manner
- Student contributions on how online societies/networks of students with disabilities are supporting each other

**Likely to be of interest to:** Academics, teaching and learning, students/student unions, disability support staff, FET professionals.



## Format.

After the theme, you will be asked what format you would like to present your work in and there are two key decisions to be made. Due to scheduling restrictions, some contributors might be offered pre-recorded sessions even if this was not their desired type of session- AHEAD will be actively promoting the pre-recorded sessions throughout the conference and making them available after.

The second decision is to select from the below prepared list of session formats which you would prefer to present your work as part of The Conference.

### Format Options

**Snapshot Sessions** (live or pre-recorded) – 10-min presentation. This format requires concise delivery of the key messages you have to share with resources provided for further exploration (rated most preferred by previous attendees)

**Deeper Dive** (live or pre-recorded) – 25 min presentation – possibilities for some synchronous/asynchronous resources and interactive exercises (for example share with resources provided for further exploration.

**Live Workshops** (limited availability) – 50 min - limited opportunities for full workshop sessions with mix of presentation, live discussion, breakout functionality etc.

**Poster** – visual (still image or short 2-3 min animated video) displays of projects/practice, key outcomes for display in the poster section of the event platform. It is recommended that visuals meet all the accessibility requirements in order for all attendees to engage with your content, and to include contact details so people can get in touch for more information or collaboration.

We are open to contributors suggesting innovative formats and styles for contributing at the conference within the medium of our online video conferencing platform. If you have any idea for a format or style that is not listed but could work online, please contact us with your idea (contact Christine at [Christine.hynes@ahead.ie](mailto:Christine.hynes@ahead.ie)). We encourage you to consider an engaging contribution that are universally accessible to all attendees such as interactive, story-telling, round table focussed sessions.

Due to a more restricted conference schedule online, contributors are asked to be flexible to other formats than the one desired format. AHEAD received many proposals and aim to accommodate as many as possible, and contributors who indicate that they are flexible about the format they present their work in are preferable.

### Filling out The Online Proposal Form

Fill in the [online proposal form](#) before Friday 23rd October. You can access [The Conference Submission Form Template](#) so co-contributors can develop their submissions together before final submission. **The final submission must be filled in via the online proposal form.**

For this you will need to know who is the lead contributor who will be leading the session and the main contact for AHEAD to notify you about the outcome of your submission and ongoing updates from The Conference Team.



We will need to know how many contributors will be involved in the session (a maximum of 3 contributors) and we will need their full names, positions, organisations/institutions where they work, short biography about each of them as you wish them to appear. Please note that these details will be displayed on the conference programme and webpage on our website.

To complete this online submission form, you'll have to have the following information ready to enter into the online form:

- Names, Positions, Organisations, Short Bios (max 100 words), accessibility requirements (if applicable) of all contributors – max 3
- Conference theme you would like to align your contribution to (see above)
- Preferred format (see above)
- Synopsis of your proposed contribution (Max. 300 word – may be published on conference website)
- Key take-away message you would like your audience to leave your session with? (Max. 50 word – may be published on conference website)

You can prepare it in this word version first if you like but you will need to paste it in to the online form when submitting.



## Timeline

Please note that we have limited space available in the programme and as such, we often have to turn down good quality submissions to make the programme flow and work well. We'll have lots of different ways to engage as participants and contributors too so even if your submission isn't accepted, there'll be plenty of ways get involved.

- **October:** After you have submitted your conference proposal, AHEAD will arrange for The Conference Committee to meet to review the submission in line with The Conference Criteria.
- **November:** It is estimated we will be in contact to let you know the outcome of your submission by the end of November.
- **December:** If you have been offered to present your work at the conference either live or pre-recorded, you will have two weeks to accept this offer.
- **December-January:** Once all the offers have been accepted The AHEAD Conference Team will begin compiling a schedule and offer conference presenters a day and time (if they're piece will be a live session) as part of this schedule which they will have 1-2 weeks to confirm (depending on the time of year we may give more time). Presenters of pre-recorded sessions will be asked about their availability for pre-recorded sessions.
- **January:** Presenters will be invited to attend a voluntary presenters workshop to discuss with The AHEAD Conference Team about how the sessions will work and also share tips on preparing and delivering both pre-recorded or live content in an accessible way online.
- **February-March:** Presenters will be advised of deadlines for materials to be sent to The AHEAD Conference Team who will be regularly checking in. Pre-recorded sessions to be sent by contributors to AHEAD team for preparation and accessibility checking. All recorded and live sessions will be provided with captioning by AHEAD.
- **April-May:** Final preparations, technical checks and show time!

## Live Sessions

Live sessions will take place every Friday afternoon for 5 weeks from 9<sup>th</sup> April-7<sup>th</sup> May (2.30pm-4.30pm, GMT) and will involve a fifteen pre-broadcast technical check that presenters must attend.

Additional Technical support can be made available to you if needed.

## Queries?

If you have any queries about the conference including anything about the submission process please contact Christine at [Christine.hynes@ahead.ie](mailto:Christine.hynes@ahead.ie)