

Members Newsletter



You reap what you sow

Students with disabilities benefit from flexible approaches to learning

By Ann Heelan, Director

More and more students with disabilities and learning disabilities are gaining the points and going to higher education. Every year there is an increasing number of students gaining access to the course of their choice and there is an increase of over 25% in the number of student seeking additional supports available to them through the HEA Fund for Students with Disabilities. AHEAD statistics on the participation rates clearly show that students with disabilities are broadening their subject choice and many are entering professions such as nursing, medicine, sciences and ICT. Research from the sector carried out by UCC indicates that these students are outperforming other students in the qualifications received and in retention.

In spite of the recession colleges are anticipating and responding to the needs of students with disabilities through disability support services, but also across all departments and aspects of college life. Trinity College Dublin organise a highly innovative summer school for deaf students where they themselves talk to prospective students about what to expect and how to manage college as a deaf student. UCD School of Nursing, Midwifery & Health Systems have developed comprehensive guidelines for students with disabilities going on mandatory clinical placements; UCC have invested in a state of the art Assistive Technology Centre to support student learning while Athlone IT has developed and implemented a system of assessing the learning needs of the student designed to inform tutors across the campus.

The recent NAIRTL conference demonstrated just how higher education is changing, with flexible teaching, group and peer learning, ICT, e-learning, and industry led assignments amongst the innovations described. These changes based on good teaching practices are inclusive of students with disabilities. For example, using ICT as a pedagogical instrument introduces greater flexibility into learning and assessment and benefits all students. ICT suits students with visual impairments and/or dyslexia and who rely on it to communicate, to take notes and to access materials. Most colleges are moving from supports that rely on expensive personnel such as note-takers, readers and scribes in the learning environment, unless absolutely necessary, and are moving instead to the use of computers and assistive technology software. This approach is not only cost efficient but sound pedagogically as it encourages independent learning.

Embedding independent learning is critical to the graduate who, once the economy picks up, will be competing with other graduates for the scarce opportunities available on the jobs market. The graduate with a disability will require a whole arsenal of independent competencies to compete and undertake that job.

They also need to avail of the same opportunities as other graduates and it is disappointing to say the least that the Department of Social Protection has excluded graduates with disabilities in receipt of Disability Allowance from taking up the internship places on Job-Bridge. The AHEAD Willing Able Mentoring Programme, which offers paid internships in companies to graduates with disabilities has proven that internships enable the graduate to apply his/her competencies on the job to acquire real world value. The recession does not justify exclusion and AHEAD have asked the Department of Social Protection to review their policy and to be more flexible. If colleges can be flexible and accommodate students with disabilities, there is no reason why the Department cannot do the same.

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Have you seen it yet?

Our new online shop is now open!

www.ahead.ie/shop



The LINK Network website has also undergone a transformation!

Check it out here:
thelinknetwork.eu

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Including Students with Intellectual Disabilities in NUI Galway

In 2010 NUI Galway secured funding to support the civic engagement of persons with an intellectual disability to experience inclusive higher education through participating in academic, social, cultural and sporting endeavours. Through a university/community partnership the UNESCO Chair in Children, Youth and Civic Engagement, the Community Knowledge Initiative (CKI) and the National Federation of Voluntary Bodies are leading this innovative project. The project is guided by an advisory group of university and community interests. This pilot project will support eight students to achieve the full college experience for a two year period from September 2011.

This initiative at NUI Galway has been prompted by campus community partnerships and demand from persons with intellectual disabilities, parents and families and intellectual disability services in the West of Ireland. With support from national and international partners, including the University of Ulster and the Universities of Alberta and Calgary in Canada, a model of best practice for inclusive higher education for persons with intellectual disabilities is unfolding.

Traditionally the route for a majority of persons with an intellectual disability transitioning to adulthood is entry to rehabilitative training, vocational training/employment, supported employment or sheltered workshops and day services. The emergence of higher education opportunities for people with an intellectual disability is still quite a new, but very welcome, reality worldwide. While diverse models of programme delivery and disciplinary focus exist throughout the world, there are still only a small number of fully inclusive higher education opportunities available – mainly in Alberta and British Columbia in Canada. Inclusive higher education, which provides for the “authentic student pathway” through college, demonstrates student benefits relating to positive identity as a student, enhanced employment opportunities, working within an adult environment, increased self-esteem and confidence, supporting citizenship, enhancing communication skills and expanding social networks and contacts.

The Going to College Pilot Project will draw on the considerable strengths and resources of NUI Galway to the best advantage of students and will be guided by UNESCO’s guidelines on inclusive education. These guidelines highlight the legal frameworks that support inclusion, including the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2008). The pilot project will also be guided by the views and opinions of people who have an intellectual disability and parents and families. Earlier this year ten focus groups with people with intellectual disabilities and six focus groups with parents and families were held in Clare, Galway, Mayo and Roscommon and their views and opinions are reflected in the development of the project.

What will students be involved in?

The overall aim for each of the eight students is that they will have the opportunity to develop the vision, knowledge and transferable skills to live a more inclusive, independent life in their community. Students will be involved in two learning components:

An **academic experience strand**, in which students will follow an existing NUI Galway programme of study and participate in classes and other learning activities alongside undergraduate students. Each student will undertake a series of learning activities based on participation and engagement in existing subject disciplines across the university: attending lectures, laboratory work, field work, tutorials, etc, as appropriate.

A **civic engagement and experiential strand** in which students will participate in a number of existing NUI Galway community and civic engagement offerings, including:

- Volunteering through the ALIVE programme;
- Involvement in community activities/projects;
- Active engagement in university clubs and societies;
- Work placements/internships within NUI Galway and externally.

At the start of their college experience, the Going to College Co-Ordinator will support the student and academic staff to plan for the individual needs and interests of each student, agree learning outcomes and the supports required for both the student and the academic staff to achieve these outcomes.



Options for Supporting Academic Staff

- Options for supporting academic staff include:
- Support from Going to College Co-Ordinator
- Support from post graduate students in making information more accessible for each student
- Links with peers in other universities e.g. University of Alberta and University of Calgary and a number of other universities in Alberta, Canada who have committed to supporting academic staff at NUI Galway
- Peer Network of Academic Staff at NUI Galway
- Universal Design for Learning (UDL) – a method used internationally which provides a blueprint for creating flexible goals, methods, materials, and assessments that accommodate learner differences

Options for Supporting Individual Students

Individualised supports for each student will be key to achieving their outcomes. A number of options for supporting students include:

- Educational Support Workers – through the Disability Supports office
- Peer Mentoring – from fellow students in their class
- Student Support – e.g. from post graduate and/or 3rd year students
- Natural/Volunteering/Mentoring Supports – through CKI's ALIVE Volunteering programme and the Student Connect Mentoring Programme

For further information on the Going to College Pilot Project, please contact:

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This pilot project is a partnership between the UNESCO Chair, Child & Family Research Centre, NUI Galway, the Community Knowledge Initiative, NUI Galway and the National Federation of Voluntary Bodies Providing Services to Persons with Intellectual Disability.



NATIONAL FEDERATION OF VOLUNTARY BODIES

Providing Services to People with Intellectual Disability

Just how smart is a smart pen? By Maria Lawton Murray, NUIG Student

As a 3rd level student with dyslexia I found it extremely stressful while trying to take notes and listen to lectures at the same time. However during second year I was asked to test a new product by the disability support services within NUIG.

The product was a Livescribe pen (Echo `smart pen`) which comprises of an infrared camera which records all you write, along with built in microphone which simultaneously makes an audio recording of your meeting or lecture. The recordings are saved directly to the pens internal memory and can be re-played through the built in speaker within the pen or transferred to your PC or Mac using the free Livescribe desktop software. For an extra cost your written text can also be converted to text.

The pen synchronises the recording of meetings/lectures with your notes. Simply tap on a word within your notes and the pen will replay what was said at the time and what you also wrote at that time. The beauty of this smart pen is its simplicity. However be warned software is not supplied with the pen and this must be preinstalled before the pen is connected to your computer. The pen is also designed to work on one computer only. The pen must be used with special notebooks which contain computerised "dot paper" which aid the pen to visually record your notes. Once all the software is set up just switch on the pen tap record on a page of your notebook and start taking notes. Audio files can be played straight away. Connect the pen to the computer, and both notes and audio will be transferred to Livescribe desktop.

The latest version of Livescribe allows for automatic uploading to Evernote, Facebook and Google Docs through the Livescribe Desktop software. Previously any files saved as PDFs were soundless, however the latest version of Acrobat Reader (10) allows for the unique interactive animation and audio playback similar to the pecast but without the need to download special software from Livescribe.



Test Setting Accommodations for Students with Sensory Defensiveness

Exam accommodations such as additional time and alternative formats are the most common reasonable accommodations used by students with disabilities within school or college. There has been little or no consideration given to environmental accommodations for these students and how it impacts their academic performance within an examination context.

The purpose of this article is to introduce the concept of environmental accommodations for 3rd level examinations. This is based upon an identified need within a cohort of students with sensory defensiveness (SD) (also known as sensory over-responsiveness), which is experienced by some students with ADHD, Asperger's Syndrome (AS), and Developmental Co-Ordination Disorder (DCD) as well as some mental health difficulties. Students with SD can become over-loaded by sensory stimuli (e.g. sound, light, touch, smells, and movement) and can have great difficulty in completing their everyday academic and non-academic tasks in college. Environments such as lecture halls, restaurants, libraries and examination venues can be overwhelming, leading students to avoid them.

A survey of students registered with Disability Service availing of exam accommodations in February 2011 found that although the majority of students were satisfied with the venues a considerable number reported that they were experiencing great difficulty with the environment in these venues.

An audit of the exam venues used for students receiving exam accommodations was then conducted by two Occupational Therapists (OT) working within Unilink Service, Trinity College (which is part of the DS Service). Based upon this audit the therapists recommended to the examinations office that they use low-distraction venues (Figure 1) on a pilot basis and they would give advice on how to develop them.

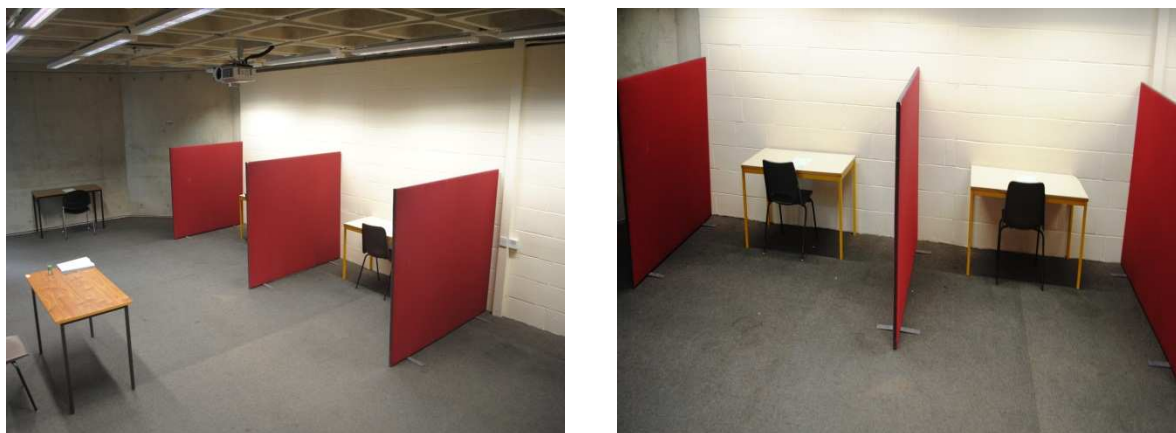


Figure 1: Low Distraction Venue

Students who were deemed appropriate for using these low distraction venues were assessed by the Occupational Therapists within the Unilink Service using the *Adolescent / Adult Sensory Profile* (Brown & Dunn, 2002).

An investigation was then carried out by the DS staff on the low distraction venues in order to ascertain if they were effective during the examination period. Invigilators were asked to complete questionnaires and students were asked for feedback by email following the examination period.

The results showed that all stakeholders found the setup of the low-distraction venues to be a positive experience and an improvement on the traditional group venues. However, some students still experience sensitivity to auditory and visual distractions. The locations of the venues remain to be reviewed and the setup refined. The pilot shows promising results and the venues will be used over the coming academic year and their effectiveness further assessed.

References:

Brown, C. & Dunn, W. (2002) *Adult/Adolescent Sensory Profile: User's Manual*. San Antonio, TX: Psychological Corporation.

Authors:

Kieran Lewis, Occupational Therapist, Unilink Service. Dr Clodagh Nolan, Unilink Service Director. Declan Treanor, Disability Service Director, T.C.D.

Email: klewis@tcd.ie | **For more information on Unilink:** <http://www.tcd.ie/disability/T-Services/Unilink/index.php>

An extended version of this article is available here: <http://wp.me/pjbOx-kb>

Educating Employers: A Network of Learning

The WAM Employer Network is now in its sixth year of operation and is integral to the success of the programme. Senior HR representatives from all WAM employer partners meet four times a year to identify and tackle the barriers, challenges and issues arising for them in attempting to create a truly inclusive workplace environment. These meetings are based on learning from WAM placements and provide an open space for employers to discuss common issues, collectively problem solve and also receive training and expert advice on particular topics.

“Education's purpose is to replace an empty mind with an open one.”

Malcom S. Forbes

The WAM Employer Network met in July to discuss the topic of Aspergers Syndrome (AS) in the workplace. Dr. Rita Honan, an expert on the condition, explained how in situations where there is a good job-skills match, people with AS can excel in the workplace. WAM also provided input at this session based on the programme's experience of placing five graduates with AS in different mainstream workplaces.

At our last WAM Employer Network Meeting in September we held a session on employers' perspectives of WAM utilising the World Cafe Style technique in order to facilitate open and representative discussions. The meeting was facilitated by Chris Chapman, an expert in the area of utilising cafe style groups in order to bring about change in organisations. The results of this day will be discussed at our next meeting in December.

Through these network meetings and work placements, WAM will continue to provide unique and innovative capacity-building opportunities for employers and work collectively towards fully inclusive recruitment, selection and employment models.

Building the Future

On Friday, the 11th November GET AHEAD will hold a unique one-day event for students & graduates with disabilities looking to improve their opportunities in the challenging world of work. Hosted by Bank of Ireland in their Learning Zone premises in Dublin city centre, this event will offer students and graduates the opportunity to engage with employers in an office based, but informal environment, and ask the questions they really need to, to learn what employers really think about issues like disclosure, ability, skills, CV layouts, and more. They will also be able practice their interview skills with HR managers and staff from some of Ireland's top companies in one to one mock interviews.

Using a variety of spaces, and structures, this event will offer students the flexibility to work in a way that suits them and with employers like Citi, Enterprise Rent-a-Car, Dublin Bus, Bord Gais and Abbott Ireland already signed up, this is going to be something special. There will be workshops on self presentation, entrepreneurship and stress management to ensure that all areas around job seeking are covered.

This isn't a jobs fair – it's more than that, it's a chance to make sure that whatever jobs, placements, internships, anything that a student goes to, they are prepared as they can be. For employers, it's a chance to see a workforce they don't always meet, despite being keen to. It's all about students and graduates coming together with employers to ensure that they get to create the future and so it's called just that 'Building the Future' Make sure to put the 11th November in your diaries, and we look forward to seeing you there.

For more information please keep an eye on our website where there will soon be a page devoted to the event www.ahead.ie. You can also contact Niamh Hayes on niamh.hayes@ahead.ie

Want to get into Radio?



Then check this out:

<http://wp.me/s/jbOx-1215>

News in Review

- The Human Condition | <http://bit.ly/qZPKL2>
- Call for intern scheme to include those with disabilities | <http://bit.ly/nViR40>
- It's the final chapter for bulky textbooks | <http://bit.ly/nbNO3A>
- People with autism thrive as software testers | <http://bit.ly/mXtqBQ>
- My long journey out of the darkness | <http://bit.ly/pFdJa7>
- Universities will lose their way if they put commercial activities ahead of the education of students | <http://bit.ly/okvBUR>
- Can a quality education be delivered online? | <http://bit.ly/oH6LpT>
- Sarah scores 'brilliant' grades despite impairment | <http://bit.ly/omGOk8>

Upcoming Events

Gradireland Graduate Careers Fair

Meet over 120 graduate recruiters, course providers and professional bodies from Ireland and the UK. Attend seminars presented by industry professionals and have your CV reviewed by careers advisors at the CV clinic. Wednesday 12 October 2011 | 11.00am–5.00pm | Main Hall, RDS, Dublin.

Conference on Learning Mobility: Addressing the Challenges for Students and Staff with a disability

Hosted by the Irish LLP: Erasmus National Agency in partnership with AHEAD

12 October 2011 | 14.00-17.30 | Bewley's Hotel, Ballsbridge, Dublin 4

If you wish to attend, please complete this online form (<http://bit.ly/rooLFN>) by 7th October 2011.

Building the Future – 11th Nov 2011 (see page 5 for further details)

AHEAD AGM and Seminar on Inclusive Teaching & Learning

Speakers on the day include Dr. Marian McCarthy and Professor Geraldine O'Neill. This event will take place on the 17th November 2011. Further information will be issued to members in due course.

Better Options 2011

30th November | National College of Art & Design, Thomas Street, Dublin 8.

A unique one-day event for students with a disability or specific learning difficulty considering their college options in Ireland in 2012. This year's keynote speaker is Sean Gallagher, Entrepreneur and Presidential Candidate.

This event is **FREE** and all are welcome, including Students, Guidance Counsellors, Resource Teachers, Learning Support Tutors, SENOs, NEPS & Parents. The event is hosted by NCAD in association with AHEAD & DAWN (Disability Advisors Working Network).

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Getahead-blog.wordpress.com

Would you like to know more about including students with disabilities in the classroom or learning environment?

For information about the types of training you can avail of, contact Lorraine Gallagher at:

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Association for Higher Education Access & Disability

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