



Good Practice Guidelines

for the Providers of Supports and Services for
Students with Disabilities in Higher Education

Published by:

AHEAD
East Hall, UCD
Carysfort Avenue,
Blackrock, Co. Dublin

© AHEAD 2008

ISBN: 1-899951-18-0 978-1-899951-18-5

Researched by Fiona Ring
Written by Connie McKernan

Cover & layout design by Aoife Mooney

All Rights reserved by AHEAD. This document may be reproduced, stored and transmitted in other formats with the prior consent of the copyright owner, AHEAD.

Printed on Fedrigoni Freelifa Vellum,
an EU Ecolabel environmentally
friendly paper, produced using
carefully selected pre-consumer and/
or post-consumer recycled waste.

HEA

Higher Education Authority
An tÚdarás um Ard-Oideachas



Ireland's EU Structural Funds
Programmes 2007 - 2013

Co-funded by the Irish Government
and the European Union

Contents

Section 1: The Irish Context – Where are we now? 6

- 1.0 The Irish Context – Where are we now? 6
- 1.1 Myths and fears surrounding disability 10
- 1.2 Language and labels 10
- 1.3 Good practice behaviours 11

Section 2: Disclosure – What are the issues? 15

- 2.0 What do I need to know about disclosure? 15
- 2.1 Advantages and disadvantages of disclosure 15

Section 3: Legislation – What do I need to know? 21

- 3.0 Legislation – Are we compliant? 21
- 3.1 What is the Employment Equality Act 1998 (EEA)? 21
- 3.2 What is discrimination? 22
- 3.3 What is reasonable accommodation? 22
- 3.4 What is the Equal Status Act? 26
- 3.5 What are the responsibilities of educational establishments? 27
- 3.6 What is the Disability Act 2005? 28

Section 4: Pre-entry activities – Doing the groundwork 32

- 4.0 Pre-entry 32
- 4.1 What are pre-entry activities? 33
- 4.2 What is important in planning pre-entry activities? 34

Section 5: Admissions – How do we ensure equity of access? 40

- 5.0 Admissions – How do we ensure equity? 40
- 5.1 What are the alternative entry routes to third level education? 42



Contents

5.1.1	Supplementary Admissions System – How does it work?	43
5.1.2	Models of admissions selections systems	44
5.2	How do we ensure inclusive admissions?	44
Section 6: How do we provide support services and accommodations?		50
6.0	How can we best meet the support needs of students with disabilities?	50
6.1	Disability Support Services	50
6.2	What is the role of the Disability Officer?	53
6.3	What supports are available for students?	55
6.4	What supports are available for staff?	58
Section 7: Assessment of needs, why is it important?		62
7.0	Needs Assessment in Third Level Education – Why is it important?	62
7.1	What are the components of a needs assessment?	64
7.2	Analysing course demands	64
7.3	Assessment of needs – What does it involve?	65
7.4	Student Interview – Why is it important?	66
7.4.1	How should I structure the interview?	66
7.5	The assessment report – What do I need to know?	67
7.6	What are the key features of the assessment report?	69
7.7	How are support requirements disseminated?	70
Section 8: Assistive Technology – What are the benefits?		74
8.0	What is Assistive Technology?	74
8.1	How are student's assistive technology needs assessed?	76

8.2	How are assistive technology services delivered?	78
-----	--	----

8.3	What is the student's role?	79
-----	-----------------------------	----

Section 9: Learning Support – What provisions are available?	82
---	-----------

9.0	Why do students need learning support?	82
-----	--	----

9.1	How do students access learning support?	84
-----	--	----

Section 10: What support is available to students using the library?	90
---	-----------

10.0	Using the library – What do students need?	90
------	--	----

10.1	How can staff help?	90
------	---------------------	----

Section 11: The Physical Learning Environment – Is our college accessible?	94
---	-----------

11.0	The Physical Learning Environment – What are the issues?	94
------	---	----

11.1	How do we ensure that classrooms are accessible?	95
------	--	----

Section 12: How do we create an accessible curriculum?	98
---	-----------

12.0	How do we create an accessible curriculum?	98
------	--	----

12.1	How do we design course materials which are accessible?	98
------	--	----

12.2	Course delivery – How do we make learning accessible?	101
------	--	-----

12.3	What about courses delivered through virtual learning?	108
------	---	-----

Section 13: How do we make examinations and assessments accessible?	112
--	------------

13.0	How can we make assessments and examinations accessible?	112
------	---	-----



Contents

13.1	What alternative forms of assessment are available?	112
13.2	Examinations – How do we prepare students?	114
13.3	How can we accommodate students during examinations?	115
	Accommodating students who are blind or visually impaired	116
	Accommodating students with dyslexia	116
	Accommodating students who are deaf or hard of hearing	117
	Accommodating students with mental health difficulties	119
	Accommodating students with physical disabilities	119
Section 14: Careers Services – What supports are available		122
14.0	Careers Guidance Services – Supporting students	122
14.1	Recent research	122
14.2	Making the transition to employment	123
14.3	How can we ensure good practice in Careers Services?	124
Appendix 1	Example of assessment report from UCC	128
Appendix 2	Individual Learning Requirements Document from Institute of Technology Tralee	136
Appendix 3	Examples of assistive technology devices	139
Appendix 4	Assistive Technology Supports and Suppliers	140
Appendix 5	AHEAD Resources and Publications	142
Bibliography		143

Foreword

The Higher Education Authority is pleased to support the development of these 'Good Practices Guidelines' by AHEAD in consultation with providers of services to students with disabilities. The development of the guidelines could not come at a better time as they follow the recent publication by the HEA of a six-year National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education. The National Plan sets ambitious new targets for increased participation by students with disabilities, the realisation of which will be underpinned by the universal adoption of the good practices and fair accommodations that are described by the AHEAD guidelines.

The last decade has been one of challenge and change for people with disabilities, not least in the area of access to education. At national level, a number of key pieces of legislation - most recently the Disability Act 2005 - have enshrined basic rights to equality of treatment and access to services, including access to education. However, starting over a decade previously, the higher education sector has, through the Fund for Students with Disabilities and targeted funding, driven the very shifts in attitude, policy and practice that are now prescribed for all areas of state provision by law.

The fruits of this pioneering work are plain to see. AHEAD have tracked the rise in participation by students with disabilities from just 0.6% of undergraduates in 1993 to 3.2% in 2006. Over the same period the numbers of students being supported through the Fund for Students with Disabilities have also risen sharply, from just 80 students in 1994 to over 3,000 in 2007. However, in the words of the Irish proverb, a good start is only half the work. More young people with a disability,

particularly those with specific learning disabilities, are participating and completing primary and second level than ever before and are poised to progress to third level in increasing numbers over the coming years. The National Access Plan aims to double the numbers of students in higher education with sensory, physical and multiple disabilities by 2013, as these groups remain under-represented in the sector.

To realise the ambitions articulated in the new national access plan, we need to work towards two major objectives over the next six years. The first is to move beyond the realm of aspiration to the actual achievement of more coherent, integrated approaches to the provision of services and support for learners with disabilities – between state agencies and between education providers at all levels of the system. The second is the whole-hearted advancement by each higher education institution, at a corporate level, of the principle of mainstream, institution-wide approaches to the provision of core services to students with disabilities.

The AHEAD Good Practices Guidelines will be a valuable source of reference for all of us in the higher education sector in advancing these objectives over the coming years. I have no doubt this document will also advise work of partners at other levels of the education system, some of whom may be at an earlier stage of developing their support infrastructure but who nonetheless share our ambition that the quality and outcome of education for all learners in the state is second to none.

Tom Boland

Chief Executive of the Higher Education Authority

Acknowledgements

AHEAD and the authors gratefully acknowledge the contribution of staff from the following institutions who gave so generously of their time and expertise:

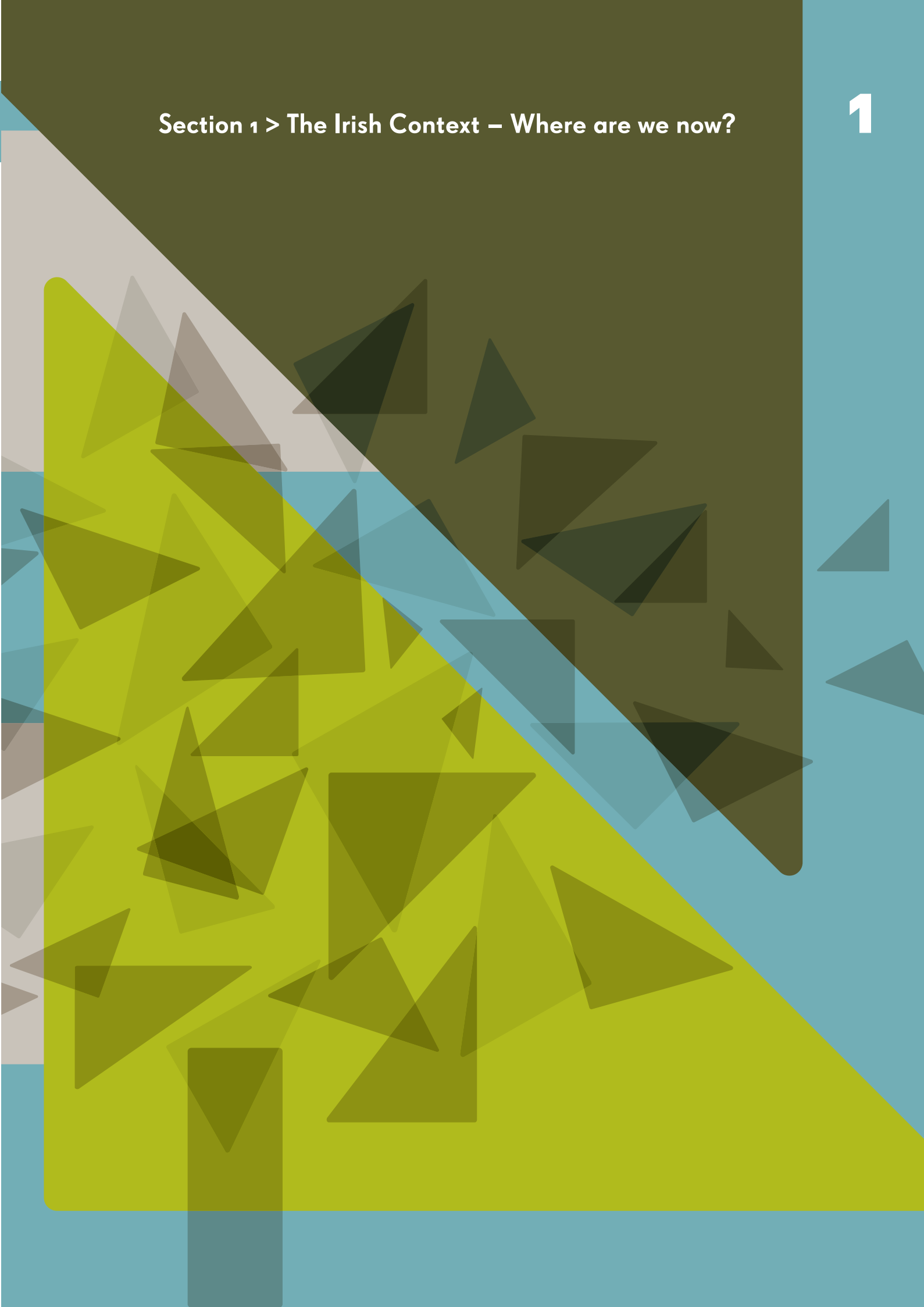
Athlone Institute of Technology
Cork Institute of Technology
Dublin City University
Dublin Institute of Technology
Institute of Art Design and
Technology, Dun Laoghaire
Institute of Technology Blanchardstown
Institute of Technology Tallaght
Limerick Institute of Technology
National College of Art and Design
National College of Ireland
National University of Ireland Galway
National University of Ireland Maynooth
Institute of Technology Tralee
Trinity College Dublin
University College Cork
University College Dublin
University of Limerick
Waterford Institute of Technology

Grateful thanks are also due to the members of the steering group for their advice and guidance in the development of these guidelines:

Patricia Byrne, Dun Laoghaire Institute
of Art, Design & Technology
Dermot Douglas, Council of Directors
of Institutes of Technology
Jen Harvey, Dublin Institute of Technology
Bernie Judge, Teachers Union of Ireland (TUI)
Marie Kiely, Institute of Technology Tallaght
Mairead O'Sullivan, University College Cork
Lewis Purser, Irish Universities
Association (IUA)
Declan Treanor, Trinity College Dublin

Section 1 > The Irish Context – Where are we now?

1



Introduction

AHEAD, with the support of the Higher Education Authority have produced these 'Good Practice Guidelines' for the provision of supports and services for students with disabilities in higher education. These guidelines aim to create a better understanding of the needs of students with disabilities and help to promote inclusive practice across institutions. Included in the guidelines are practical examples, case studies and recommendations.

The initial starting point for the development of these guidelines was a review of materials submitted to the National Access Office as part of its Evaluation of Access Programmes in Higher Education in Ireland (2006). The information submitted by third level institutions provided an overview of the kinds of supports and services currently in place for students with disabilities and also included case studies and examples of good practice. This review of material was followed by visits to various colleges around the country to explore the good practices described in the reports in more detail.

Findings from this research provide a snapshot in time in the continuum of development of good practice in third level education throughout the country during the years 2006 and 2007. It is clear from the National Access Office Evaluation of Access Programmes that there are many innovative practices being developed and implemented in the higher education sector in relation to the inclusion of students with disabilities.

Currently, however, the provision of services to students with disabilities at third level remains inconsistent and decisions about course choice are often dictated by the

level of supports provided by an institution. A substantial amount of work therefore, remains to be undertaken in order to bring all services to an equal standard so that students have access to the same level of supports and services in whichever institution they choose to attend. The importance of a collective, institutional approach where all departments and staff share responsibility, cannot be over-emphasised.

An increasing number of students with disabilities are now accessing courses at third level. The provision of funding for student supports, legislative changes and developments in assistive technology mean that many more students are able to avail of a greater range of educational opportunities. The adoption of equality policies by institutions, adaptations in teaching and assessment practice, alternative forms of course delivery and the provision of support services and assistive technology are all hugely positive developments. Thanks to these types of changes, many more students are able to participate successfully in third level education.



There are a number of key principles informing institutional practice:

- The monitoring and evaluation of service provision is important for all departments. Having systems in place for tracking student outcomes and use of service will assist institutions in planning future developments and assuring the quality of service provision
- A cohesive and multidisciplinary approach is essential to the integration of students with disabilities in the mainstream of student life. Supporting students with disabilities

needs to involve personnel at every level across the institution, from policy makers at managerial level to academics, general and direct line staff and, of course, the student him/herself.

- The development of inclusive policies and practices needs to focus on what is beneficial for all students. Most students, for example, particularly those at first year, will benefit from tuition in study skills, examination techniques or mind mapping.
- The Disability Act (2005) tells us that all people with disabilities are entitled to physically accessible buildings and information in an accessible format as a matter of right. The provision of reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities is an issue of fairness rather than favour and this ethos needs to be incorporated into practice across the institution, from admissions and examination procedures to accessing the library or course materials.
- Many students still choose not to disclose that they have a disability – and this is their right. Institutions need to be positive and proactive in encouraging students at different opportunities to avail of the supports available to them.
- Communication is key and it is good practice for staff and departments to collaborate and share information in order to provide the best service to students
- The monitoring and evaluation of service uptake is essential to ensuring a planned approach to service development

It is the Higher Education Authority's intention to increase the number of students with sensory, physical and multiple disabilities at third level. As the number of students with disabilities in third level education continues to grow, so too does the need to examine our practices and challenge our views. These guidelines have been developed with a view to creating a better understanding of the needs of students with disabilities and will be a useful resource for a range of personnel working within the sector. The focus of this document is on meeting the challenge of providing accommodations for students with disabilities. It seeks to support institutional staff on building on existing good practice and developing a planned and systematic approach to making learning relevant and accessible to students with disabilities in higher education.



[Guidelines for Good Practice >](#)

[Introduction >](#)

Using these Guidelines

Included in the guidelines are a number of tips, examples, case studies and key points.

For easy reference, these have each been allocated an icon as follows:

Example



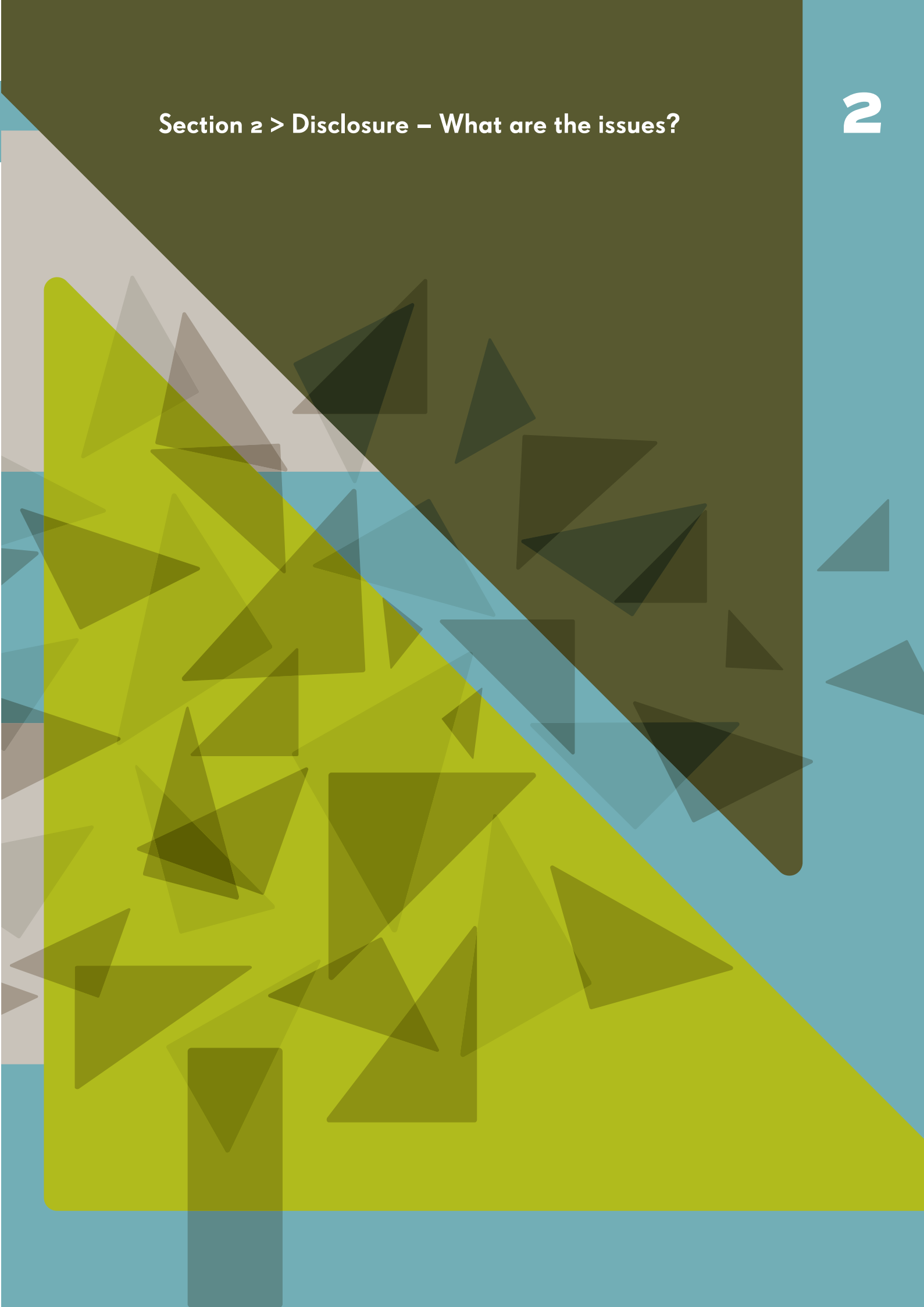
Did you know?



Case study



Good practice tip



Section 1. The Irish Context – Where are we now?

1.0 The Irish Context – Where are we now?

The number of students with disabilities attending third level education in Ireland has risen dramatically in the last decade from 450 ten years ago to a current population of over 3000. (AHEAD) Every year more and more students with disabilities are going to college and graduating with First and Second class degrees in all areas, including administration, law, science, teaching and medicine. Recent statistics gathered by AHEAD show that students with disabilities now account for 3.2 % of the undergraduate population participating in third level education in Ireland. (Figures for academic years 2005/2006 – unpublished)

In response to this development, many institutions now offer supplementary admission routes or alternative entry for students with disabilities. All universities now have Disability Officers in place and most Institutes of Technology now employ Access Officers. Many colleges are gradually moving away from specialised and segregated support services and there is a growing trend towards the mainstreaming of services throughout the campus, a development which benefits all students. Students are gradually becoming integrated into the mainstream of college life and are participating fully in a wide range of student activities. Institutions are increasingly more aware of their legislative responsibilities to include students with disabilities and all now have written equality policies. The Higher Education Authority has made funding available to Universities so that they can develop services for students with disabilities. The National Access Office also provides funding for

supports for student with disabilities and this can make the difference for many students.



Did you know that these supports are available?

Every individual is different, but typically students with disabilities can receive additional supports from the Fund for Students with Disabilities.

Here are some examples:

- Personal assistants, note-takers or sign language interpreters
- Assistive technology devices and specialized software such as Speed text
- Tuition in study skills and examination techniques
- Learning support tutors for students with specific learning difficulties
- Examination accommodations such as extra time and the use of readers or scribes
- Separate examination rooms and rest breaks if required



Some of the significant factors for bringing about change in Ireland over the last decade have included:

- Social policy for the mainstreaming of education and the resulting reduction in specialised services
- The 3% quota for the employment of people with disabilities within the public sector

- Advances in assistive technology which have led to the development of devices and software to make learning and educational materials readily accessible
- The introduction of Disability Support Services and support planning
- Staff training and the adoption of a much more structured approach to the delivery of services
- The establishment of a National Access Office within the Higher Education Authority and the setting of targets for all educational establishments
- The process of auditing the quality of services and service delivery

What Impact does a disability have on a student's education?

Higher education courses are designed to suit the traditional learner and may not cater for students who learn differently, such as the student with dyslexia or the student who is blind or deaf. Accommodations are essential for those students who require assistance in order to successfully complete their course.

Example

A student who lip-reads will only absorb about 40% of what is being said so will need to use Speed-text software or an electronic or human note-taker to compensate during lectures.



Here are some other examples:

Students who are deaf

Students who are deaf or hard of hearing face significant obstacles in a learning situation, particularly in relation to the use of academic English. Teaching relies heavily on the spoken word so students who are deaf are immediately disadvantaged. They cannot hear lectures or discussions so miss out on much of what is being said unless it is also written down. Students with hearing loss are not all alike. Some, who have residual hearing may use a hearing aid or avail of a loop system to amplify sound. Others may speak or use sign language to communicate



Section 1 >

Guidelines for Good Practice >

The Irish Context >

1.0 >

or can lip-read what people are saying. Students who are deaf may use devices such as Speed text to take notes during classes and are likely to need additional time for the completion of assignments or examinations.

Students who are blind or visually impaired

These students are also significantly disadvantaged in an educational context. Although they can hear lectures and discussions, students who are blind cannot access materials which are presented in printed or visual format. This includes presentations, textbooks, course syllabi, examination papers, demonstrations, films and Internet sites. Students with visual impairments will vary, some having no vision whilst others will be able to see light, shapes or movement. Some students will manage to see print which is enlarged or can read material available in Braille. Many will make use of assistive technology devices such as screen readers, scanners or voice recognition software.

Example

It is estimated that students who are blind or visually impaired will take 60% longer to complete a written assignment than a sighted student.

Students with physical disabilities

Physical access is a major issue for students with physical disabilities who face many barriers and obstacles as they go about their everyday lives. Older buildings, in particular can present difficulties, as many of them are not fully accessible. Students with physical disabilities will vary in their degree of limitation of movement, co-ordination, balance or dexterity. Medication for pain relief can

interfere with concentration and it can be difficult to maintain energy levels. Getting from place to place can be tiring and time consuming, so some activities may require extra time. Wheelchair users will require additional space in classrooms and some students may need adaptations such as ergonomic chairs or workstations. During classes or examinations, some students may need to use assistive technology or note takers and may need to be accompanied by a personal assistant.

Example

'How am I supposed to get to classes when the lecture theatre is on the second floor of the building and there is no lift available?'
(Student wheelchair user)

Students with specific learning difficulties

Students with specific learning disabilities are likely to be of average or above average intelligence but will have specific difficulties around short-term memory and information processing. These factors can cause them to perform poorly in areas where language or maths is involved. Students can therefore experience difficulties with the mechanics of reading, writing and note taking and with the general organisation of their work. It will therefore take longer to complete assignments and examinations. Specific feedback on performance, including concrete examples will be helpful.

Example

Students with dyslexia will find it difficult to take notes quickly during lectures and are likely to have problems organising their work



Case Study

James has recently started a photography course at his local Institute of Technology. Most of the course work is practical so it suits James because he has dyslexia. He is, however embarrassed when he has to take notes during class. He never has enough time to copy things down from the board and tends to get lost easily. It is particularly difficult when the tutor uses the white board and a black marker.

When James tries to read his notes at home, he cannot make sense of them and there are always lots of grammar and spelling mistakes. James is enjoying the course too much to give up but is sometimes frustrated in class. He has decided to check with his tutor whether he could tape record the verbal presentation parts of his classes.

When made aware of these issues, James's tutor was able to organise a study skills course to include note taking and mind mapping techniques. He is now investigating assistive technology alternatives to help James with his written work.

Students with mental health difficulties

A mental health disability, such as depression or anxiety, can have an impact on many aspects of a person's life, including their education. The nature of psychological illnesses means that they can be episodic and sporadic. Some students can have long periods of wellness whilst others' ability to function can vary from day to day. Modern medication can be very effective in controlling the symptoms of mental health conditions although some can cause side effects such as drowsiness, dry mouth or blurred vision.

Example

Some students can have problems remaining motivated or focused and may find it difficult to bring work to completion on time



[Section 1 >](#)

[Guidelines for Good Practice >](#)

[The Irish Context >](#)

[1.0 >](#)

1.1 Myths and fears surrounding disability

Many people have little or no experience of disability and are worried about saying the wrong thing. This is compounded by the numerous myths and misconceptions surrounding people with disabilities who are frequently assumed to be unable to do the same sort of things as other people. These myths can create barriers to inclusion so need to be challenged when they arise.

These are some of the recurring myths surrounding disability:

Myth: People who are blind cannot cope with study or work because they cannot read materials or produce written work.

Fact: The use of large print and magnifying devices can be helpful to many people who are visually impaired. Assistive technology software such as screen readers, voice recognition, reading and scanning tools and screen magnification software make it possible for people who are blind or visually impaired to study and to work.

Myth: People who are deaf cannot work in an area where they have to use the telephone.

Fact: Most people who are deaf have some residual hearing and can use a telephone by switching their hearing aid to telephone function by using a loop fitted to their earpiece. People who are deaf can also use a Mini com system, which translates the information into text, which is then viewed on a computer screen.

Myth: People who have a physical disability cannot go to college because most of the buildings have steps

Fact: Buildings with steps are easy to access when there is a ramp and a lift in place

Myth: People who have a mental health disability should not be placed in stressful situations such as sitting examinations or meeting deadlines at work.

Fact: Stress is not always a factor for people with mental health difficulties. People who have a mental health problem are more likely to be able to identify stress triggers and may be more aware of how to manage their stress responses

1.2 Language and labels

The language surrounding disability provides a multitude of opportunities for political incorrectness and many people worry about causing offence. People with disabilities usually prefer that the focus be on their individuality, not on their disability. Their preferred term 'person with a disability' stresses the essential humanity of individuals and avoids depersonalising them. Language is important in the construction of disability and can be used in a positive or a negative way.

Here are some examples:

Appropriate

People with disabilities

The person has...

Wheelchair user

Has a physical disability

Has Downs Syndrome

Seizure

Person with an
intellectual disability

Person who has...

Person who has epilepsy

Congenital disability

Person with a
psychiatric disability

Person who is blind

Inappropriate

The handicapped or disabled

Suffers from...

Wheelchair bound

Crippled, lame

Mongoloid

Fit

Mental handicap

Victim

Epileptic

Birth defect

Mental patient, psycho, neurotic

The blind



The important rule of thumb is, to think of the person first and the disability second.

1.3 Good practice behaviours

How we behave in relation to students can have either a positive or a negative effect.



Here are some tips:

- Focus on abilities and potential rather than on inabilities
- Try not to assume that you know what is best. Ask the person what they need and listen to what they have to say



Section 1 >

Guidelines for Good Practice >

The Irish Context >

1.1 – 1.3 >

- It is better to wait until your offer of assistance has been accepted before helping
- If a person has difficulty in understanding you, give them time and be prepared to explain something more than once
- Treat people in a manner that is appropriate to their age
- Act as a sounding board rather than a therapist
- If a person has a speech impairment, listen carefully and let them finish what they are saying. If you are still unsure, ask the person to repeat what they said or ask them to write it down
- Try not to fuss. Over praising a person for completing a task is patronising
- Speak directly to the person and not through a third party such as a personal assistant
- Resist the temptation to ask intrusive questions. It is more constructive to ask positive questions about the person's abilities and strengths
- Be natural and don't force enthusiasm. Being overly solicitous is inappropriate
- Do not be embarrassed about using everyday phrases such as 'I've got to be running along' or 'I'll be seeing you'. Watching your language too carefully indicates that you are not at ease with the person.
- Use the same active listening skills and results focus that you would with other students

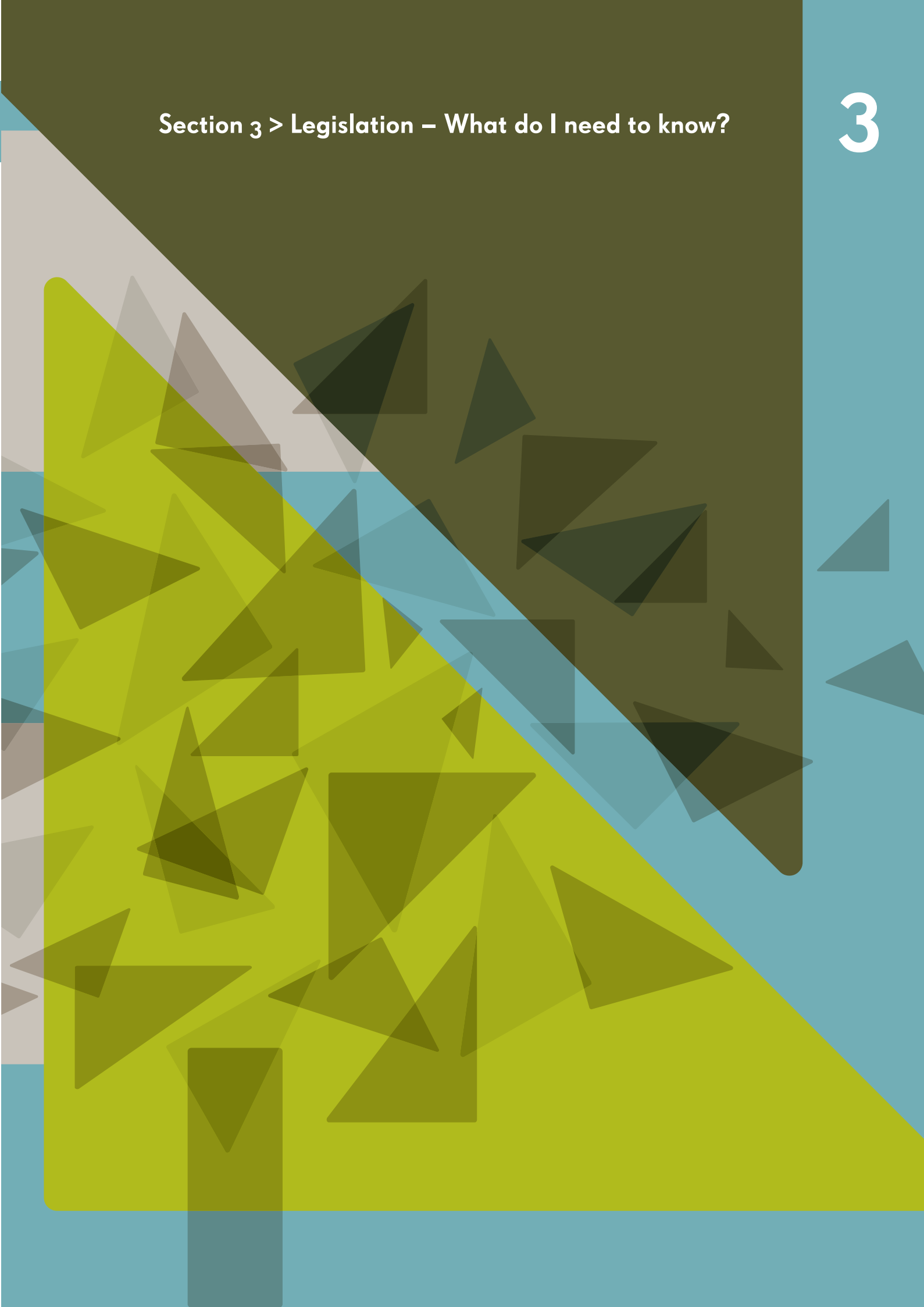


The key word in communicating with students with disabilities is 'respect'

Conclusion

The increasing number of students with disabilities participating in third level education has raised awareness about the need to challenge the myths and misconceptions about disability which still abound. Our language and behaviour generally reflect our perception of disability and good practice now places the person, rather than their disability, at the forefront of our thinking and planning in third level education.

There have been many positive changes in relation to the participation of students with disabilities in higher education – greater numbers taking up places, their gradual integration into the mainstream of college life and improvements in the provision of funding for supports have all contributed to progress in the third level sector.



Section 2: Disclosure – What are the issues?

2.0 What do I need to know about disclosure?

One of the issues faced by people with disabilities entering education or employment is whether or not to divulge that they have a disability. Although there is no legal requirement to make this information available, a person who needs accommodations in their course or job needs to make it known that they need assistance. Not disclosing a disability can sometimes make it difficult for staff to help.

Example

"I know this student has a disability because they are sitting in front of me in a wheelchair. But does this constitute disclosure?"



Students need to identify:

- The entrance criteria for their chosen course or job area
- The knowledge and skills required
- The possible impact of their disability whilst studying
- What accommodations they need and what supports are available

Some students may underestimate the demands of studying at third level and they may not want to be perceived as being different. They may also be unaware of what supports are available.

Example

"...I did not know where to go for advice or support. These are only things that you begin to find out, as I have, when you are near to finishing. I didn't have a clue as to the types of support offered by my university until this year, which is my final year"



It is the student's responsibility to:

- Identify themselves as needing assistance so that suitable accommodations can be put in place
- Provide appropriate documentation, such as psychological reports, to support their application for accommodations or funding for student supports
- Choose a time which is appropriate and which will allow for full discussion
- Fully participate in the identification of their support needs and in finding effective strategies
- Make staff aware of any difficulties being experienced

2.1 Advantages and disadvantages of disclosure

The decision whether or not to disclose that they have a disability belongs totally to the student who will want to weigh up all the advantages and disadvantages first.



Here are some of the advantages:

- It enables students to gain access to the accommodations they need
- It ensures that they are protected against discrimination under current legislation
- It provides an opportunity to present a positive image of one's strengths and talents
- It ensures that students have the resources they need in order to learn most effectively
- It provides greater freedom to ask for help when it is needed
- It avoids the stress of keeping the disability a secret
- It allows greater access to a range of supports, such as additional tuition or extra time during examinations
- It ensures that emergency plans can be put in place if needed
- It acknowledges that many employers have equality policies and are willing to employ people with disabilities



Did you know?

More than 80% of employers involved in a mentoring programme for graduates with disabilities are in favour of disclosure.



And here are some of the disadvantages

- It may focus greater attention on the person's disability
- It could cause the person to be feel underestimated or stigmatised
- Other students or staff may feel uncomfortable with this new information



[Section 2 >](#)

[Guidelines for Good Practice >](#)

[Disclosure >](#)

[2.0 – 2.1 >](#)

- It could lead to being treated differently
- It could have an effect on the person's self-image
- People may see the person as being less able than they are
- Other people may feel that the person with a disability is being given an unfair advantage



Students need to be encouraged, at every opportunity, to come forward and seek any assistance that they need

When is the best time to disclose?

The timing of a disclosure is important, bearing in mind that organising suitable accommodations can take time. The sooner staff are aware that assistance is needed, the sooner supports can be put in place.

There are a number of options available to a student who has decided to disclose that they have a disability:

- On their CAO form
- Prior to enrolment on the course at a time when needs and accommodations can be discussed
- At the beginning of the course when the student has settled in and is familiar with staff
- As soon as the student becomes aware that they are experiencing difficulties
- During the course when the nature of the accommodations needed becomes clearer



Staff have an important role to play in ensuring that students are informed about the range of supports that are available to them and in encouraging them to disclose their disability

Effective disclosure

Disclosing a disability can be a difficult experience and students might want to prepare in advance by:

- Practicing explaining their disability in a few, concise words
- Making a list of things that have worked well in the past
- Researching the course or job and finding out what are the knowledge and skills criteria
- Practicing having a face to face interview with another person
- Describing how their disability might impact on their learning performance
- Identifying and making a list of the sort of accommodations needed



The following tips might be useful for students wishing to disclose:

- Prepare by making a list of strengths and needs
- Choose a time which is quiet so as to avoid interruptions
- Be positive about your skills and abilities

- Talk about examples of previous success
- Focus on the course and what you want to achieve
- Be prepared to answer questions about your disability
- Be honest about the sort of help you need
- Talk about things that have worked for you in the past
- Be yourself and don't over explain

Conclusion

The disclosure of a disability is a very personal choice and one which may have an important impact on a person's social, educational or employment future. Deciding whether or not to disclose a disability requires a lot of consideration to ensure that the decision is an informed one. All staff having contact with students have a role to play in making them aware of the supports that are available and in encouraging them to access the accommodations they require.



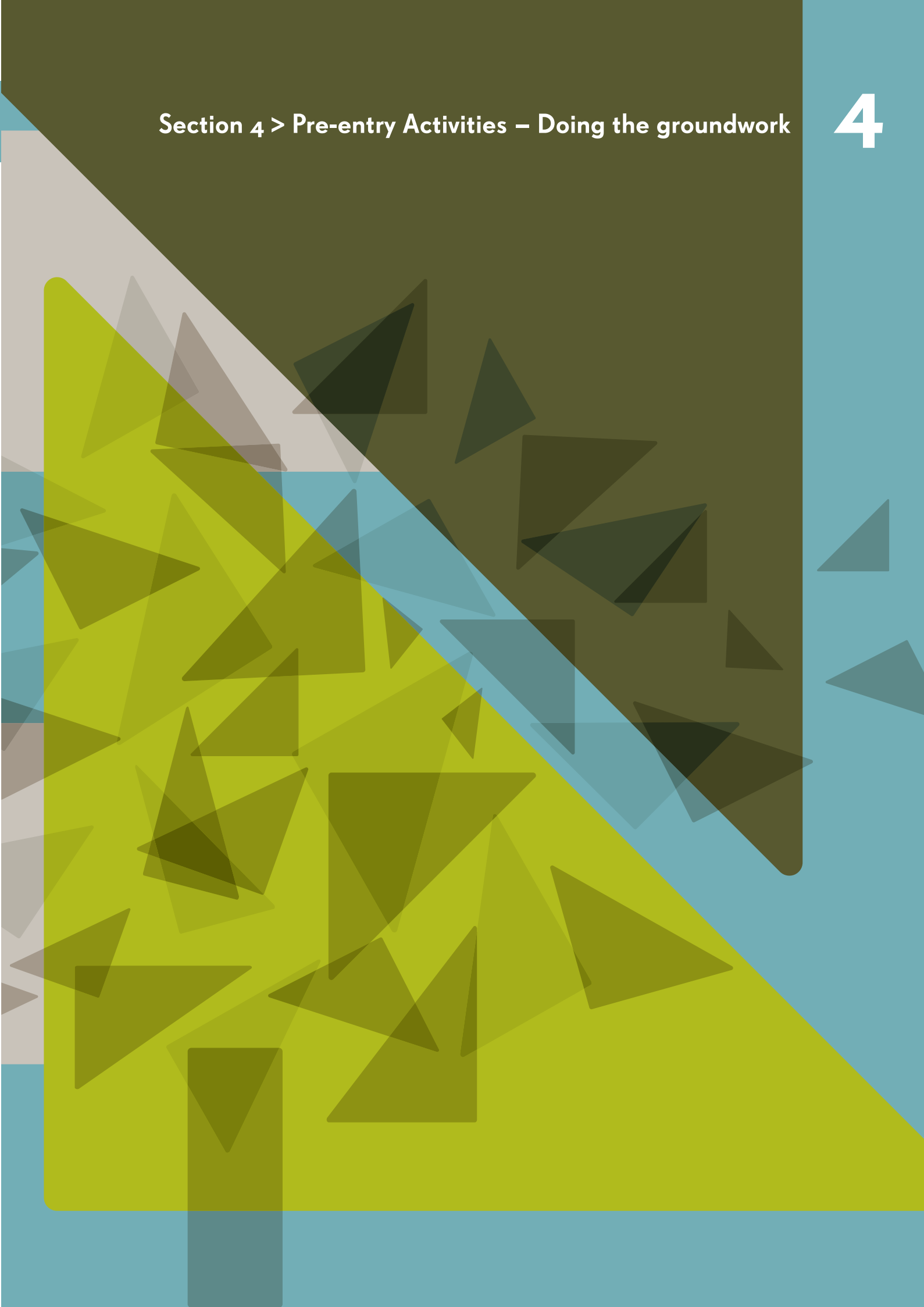
[Section 2 >](#)

[Guidelines for Good Practice >](#)

[Disclosure >](#)

[2.1 >](#)





Section 3: Legislation – What do I need to know?

3.0 Legislation – Are we compliant?

People with disabilities have, in the past encountered many social, economic and physical barriers in their attempts to participate in the sort of everyday activities which most of us take for granted; going to the cinema, taking a bus, getting information about a job or course and being accepted as an equal member of society. Legislation has done much to reduce these barriers and to outlaw the sort of discriminatory practices which were once commonplace.



Educational institutions have a key role to play in ensuring that their policies and practices are in line with current legislation

The last decade has seen the introduction of a number of key legislative changes affecting the delivery of services to people with disabilities. Legislation has been enacted in Ireland to ensure that people with disabilities have a statutory right of equal 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. It is important therefore for those working in education to have an awareness of current legislative requirements in relation to the education and employment of people with disabilities.

These are some of the key pieces of relevant legislation:

The Employment Equality Act 1998
The Equal Status Act 2000 to 2004
The Disability Act 2005

3.1 What is the Employment Equality Act 1998 (EEA)?

One of the most significant pieces of legislation to be enacted in recent years is the Employment Equality Act (EEA) (1998). The purpose of the Act is to promote equality and positive action and to prohibit discrimination across nine distinct grounds. It provides protection for employees against harassment and victimisation and requires appropriate measures for people with disabilities in relation to access to and participation in training and employment.

The Act has significant implications for both providers and recipients of education. This is because the Act includes institutes of technology, colleges and universities in its definition of employers. Under the EEA an employer is defined as ‘...a person offering a course of vocational training...’ and any course ‘required for the carrying out of an occupational activity’ is considered to be vocational training. This covers a large number of courses offered by colleges at third level, such as medicine, teaching, dentistry or engineering. (www.equality.ie)

The aspects of employment covered by the Act include:

- Equal pay
- Advertising
- Access to employment, training and work experience
- Terms and conditions of employment
- Promotion, re-grading and classification of posts
- Dismissal

The EEA prohibits discrimination on nine distinct grounds:

1. Gender
2. Marital status
3. Family status
4. Sexual orientation
5. Religion
6. Age
7. Disability
8. Race
9. Membership of the Traveller community

The definition also provides protection for people with a history of a disability.

Example

A person who has a history of psychiatric illness but who no longer suffers from that illness, may still be subject to discrimination because of their past medical history



3.2 What is discrimination?

Under the Act, discrimination is described as:

‘the treatment of a person in a less favourable way than another person is, has been or would be treated in a comparable situation on any of the nine grounds’

There are different types of discrimination, direct, indirect and discrimination by imputation or association.

Once a person has been brought within the grounds, the legislation then prohibits discrimination or harassment on the basis of their disability.

Direct discrimination means treating a person with a disability less favourably than a person without a disability under the same circumstances.



[Section 3 >](#)

[Guidelines for Good Practice >](#)

[Legislation >](#)

[3.0 – 3.2 >](#)

Example

A Veterinary nurse suffered a stroke and as a result, permanently lost her sight. She informed her employer who responded with a letter of dismissal and a backdated P45. An Employment Tribunal found that the employer had made stereotypical assumptions about the employee and her disability without any input from her and without any medical evidence. The Tribunal subsequently found that the employer had directly discriminated against the employee on the grounds of her disability.



Indirect discrimination occurs when there is an impact or effect of practices or requirements which a person cannot satisfy because of their membership of one of the nine groups. These requirements may appear to suit everyone but if they place a person or group at a particular disadvantage, an employer will be deemed to have indirectly discriminated against them.

Example

Certain pubs operate the practice of refusing entry to wheelchair users on the grounds that they are a health and safety risk. Owners feel that the presence of wheelchair users would make it difficult to evacuate the premises in an emergency. This practice constitutes discrimination.



Discrimination by association occurs when a person is treated less favourably because of their association with another person

3.3 What is reasonable accommodation?

It can sometimes be difficult for people with disabilities to access the same services as other people. Inaccessible buildings and transport, inflexible practices and poor communication, can all create barriers to accessing everyday services. Reasonable accommodations can help reduce these barriers so as to create a greater equality of access for everyone, including those with disabilities.



The purpose of accommodations for students with disabilities is to minimise the impact of a disability on academic performance

Many students are significantly disadvantaged when it comes to accessing educational opportunities. The provision of reasonable accommodations helps address many of the barriers to education caused by the impact of an individual's disability and does not give students with disabilities an advantage over other students.



Reasonable accommodations make the difference for many students and without such supports, these students would be unable to participate in higher education

For example:

- Students who are blind are disadvantaged in lectures because they are unable to see materials which are presented in visual formats. The provision of lecture notes in Braille or audio formats will enable them to access lectures in the same way as other students
- Lectures are delivered through the spoken word which makes them inaccessible to students who are deaf. The provision of written lecture notes will remove this barrier.
- Students with physical disabilities need to be able to enter the same teaching venues as their peers. Ensuring that lecture theatres and laboratories are located in accessible locations will allow this to happen.

Example

It is considered a reasonable accommodation for a lecturer to give lecture notes and handouts to students who have dyslexia or visual impairments, prior to the class



'Reasonable accommodation is a simple, easily achievable part of quality customer service and ordinary common courtesy'

(Equality Authority)

The Act places an onus on providers of goods and services to make such reasonable changes so as to enable people with disabilities to avail of services which, without such changes, would be difficult or impossible for them to access.

The EEA states that an employer:

'Shall do all that is reasonable to accommodate the needs of a person who has a disability by providing special treatment or facilities...'

There was a provision however, that accommodations for employees should not give rise to more than a 'nominal cost' for the employer. This was a result of the constitutional challenge



[Section 3 >](#)

[Guidelines for Good Practice >](#)

[Legislation >](#)

[3.2 – 3.3 >](#)

to the Employment Equality Bill, (1996) when it was held impermissible to impose cost burdens on employers. As a result, employers were able to discriminate against employees with disabilities if the cost involved in making accommodations or adjustments to the workplace was anything more than 'nominal'.

In 2004, The Equality Act made amendments to the 1998 Act, placing a higher burden on employers to provide facilities for workers with disabilities. The 'nominal cost' issue was revised so that an employer could only now refuse to provide facilities for disabled workers if doing so would involve a 'disproportionate burden'. This change now makes it easier for people to make a successful legal claim on the grounds of disability.



Did you know?

In 2002 there was a 69% rise in the number of people referring claims of discrimination under the EEA on the grounds of disability.

Establishing what a 'disproportionate burden' is, might involve examining:

- The financial and other costs entailed
- The scale and financial resources of the employer's business
- The possibility of obtaining public funding or other assistance

Example – Disability fund



The Institute of Technology Tralee makes a disability fund available in the annual budget for its Access Office. This enables the service to put in place a limited programme of supports for students who, for example, are awaiting a psychological assessment to confirm a specific learning difficulty, which has been identified through a thorough screening process. The fund is available to provide additional, subject specific tuition, continuous assessment accommodations and some items of assistive technology to those students who are not in receipt of alternative funding.

What are considered to be reasonable accommodations within an educational context?

It has been established within the sector that a reasonable accommodation 'is any action that helps alleviate a substantial disadvantage'. Making a reasonable accommodation could involve changing procedures, modifying the delivery of a course, providing examination arrangements, altering the physical environment or providing additional services such as assistive technology, materials in alternative formats or extra tuition.



Did you know?

Studies in the United States have shown that the majority of accommodations cost little or nothing

Here are some other examples of reasonable accommodations:

- Accommodations during examinations could include extra time, an alternative examination centre, the provision of assistive technology or a scribe/reader
- The provision of educational support workers such as a Personal Assistant, a lab assistant, a note-taker or a scribe/reader
- Allowing students to demonstrate they have achieved the learning outcomes of a course in an alternative manner. An example would be substituting a written assignment with an oral assessment



Did you know?

There is funding available through the Fund for Students with Disabilities, to assist with the costs of reasonable accommodations or supports in higher education and some courses in further education.

Example

A student wheelchair user was unable to access a particular catalogue which was located on an upper floor of the library which had no lift. In order to accommodate the student, the library moved the catalogue to a location which was accessible for wheelchair users. This was considered to be a 'reasonable accommodation'.

Inclusive practices are of benefit to everyone. Services which are provided to a high standard, are user friendly and accessible will make all students feel valued. Most providers of services are aware of their responsibilities and by providing reasonable accommodations for people with disabilities, institutions will ensure that they are in compliance with current equality legislation. Failure to provide these accommodations can amount to discrimination and students are now entitled to make a complaint to the Equality Tribunal.



Section 3 >

Guidelines for Good Practice >

Legislation >

3:3 >



Having recruitment strategies to reduce barriers, such as considering a person's ability to do the job rather than their formal qualifications, will go some way to bringing equity to the workplace

3.4 What is the Equal Status Act?

Prior to 2000, legislation in relation to discrimination was concerned primarily with the workplace. The Equal Status Act (2000) (the Act) promotes equality by extending the legislation to cover the provision of goods and services being offered by businesses, public authorities and educational establishments. Any organisation providing services must now make every reasonable effort to accommodate the needs of people with disabilities. This extends to bodies which provide health services, transport, entertainment, financial services or education and training. The Act applies, amongst other things, to people who attend or are in charge of educational establishments. (The Equal Status Act was amended by the Equality Act in 2004)

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
- Membership of the Traveller community



Did you know?

In 2002, there was a 178% increase in claims on the grounds of disability under the Equal Status Act. (The Equality Tribunal)

How is Discrimination Defined?

Direct discrimination, for the purposes of the Act, is defined as treating one person less favourably than another on any of the discriminatory grounds, including disability.

Educational establishments are prohibited, under the Act from directly or indirectly discriminating against people with disabilities in relation to:

- Admission
- 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

Example

A deaf student who applied through the CAO Supplementary Entry Scheme was refused a place on a science course on the basis that a deaf person would be unable to do physics. This constituted discrimination as a judgement was being made about deaf people in general. The college would have needed to carry out a needs assessment in order to judge the individual's suitability and ability to meet the core competences required by the course, taking into account the accommodations and supports required.



3.5 What are the responsibilities of educational establishments?

The legislation states that an educational establishment discriminates against a student with a disability if it does not do all that is reasonable to accommodate that student.

These accommodations could include:

- The provision of course materials in alternative formats
- Time extensions for assignments or examinations
- Training in the use of assistive technology
- Tutorial support

Are individuals responsible?

Very much so and the Act also deals with the issue of vicarious responsibility. In the example of an individual lecturer, any action undertaken by a lecturer in the course of his or her employment can be deemed an action of the employer. This means that the college is responsible for such actions and if the lecturer refuses to provide a required support, then proceedings can be brought against the college. Teaching staff also have an obligation to ensure that the learning environment is accessible to students who have identified themselves as having a disability.



[Section 3 >](#)
[Guidelines for Good Practice >](#)
[Legislation >](#)
[3.4 – 3.5 >](#)

Example

A student in the fifteenth percentile of reading difficulty was identified through a needs assessment as requiring a number of accommodations, including assistive technology, a note taker for lectures and extra time during examinations. The Disability Officer also requested that the student obtain copies of lecture notes and other course material prior to each class.

Although some of the lecturers had already posted their notes on the college's website, one lecturer refused to make the notes available online and was also unwilling to give them directly to the student. The lecturer told the student that his notes were in a rough format that only he can understand. Although a note-taker was requested, the Disability Office had a shortage of note-takers that year and could not source one for this student.

Question: In what way could the university be liable for not doing all that was reasonable to accommodate this student?



3.6 What is the Disability Act 2005?

The Disability Act (2005) (the Act) is part of a framework of government legislative steps to improve the participation of people with disabilities in everyday life.

The Act establishes a statutory basis for:

- 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
- Sectoral plans to be developed in six key Government Departments to ensure that accessibility is included in service planning and provision
- Obligations on public bodies to be proactive in employing people with disabilities
- A Centre for Excellence in Universal Design to promote standards and principles to ensure that all buildings, products and environments should be accessible by everyone, regardless of disability
- A 3% quota for public sector employers

The Act was designed to improve 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 includes information, which should be provided in a manner which is accessible, as well as public buildings and premises. It is now required that public bodies, such as educational institutions, make relevant information accessible in a range of formats such as Braille, Plain English, large print or audio. The Act places an obligation on all public bodies to make their buildings and services accessible to people with disabilities by the year 2015.

Example

A student, who has both a visual impairment and limited mobility, has difficulty accessing the registrar's office, which is situated on the third floor of the building. As a public building, the college is obliged to ensure that the registrar'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 the Centre for Excellence in Universal Design for further information and guidance.



What this means in practice is that public bodies will have to:

- Ensure that accessibility is a key criterion to be considered throughout the entire purchasing process. So if a public body wishes to purchase vehicles, computers, machinery, equipment or services, it needs to ensure that they are accessible as far as is possible, appropriate and affordable
- Make relevant information accessible in a range of formats such as Braille, Plain English, 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)

What is positive action?

If reasonable accommodation is effective in reducing barriers for people with disabilities, positive action on the part of employers, can help eliminate them. Positive action means that employers go beyond that which is required by law and are proactive in their efforts to recruit, develop and promote suitably qualified candidates with disabilities. Public bodies must ensure that at least 3% of their workforce is made up of staff that have a significant ongoing difficulty in the area of communication, learning or mobility.



Section 3 >
Guidelines for Good Practice >
Legislation >
3.5 – 3.6 >

Example

The personnel department of a particular college prepared its annual report for the National Disability Authority regarding the level of employment of people with disabilities within the institution. The department included in its figures members of staff who have minor disabilities. This is not acceptable under the Act which requires that the 3% quota be made up of employees who have 'a significant, ongoing' difficulty.



Conclusion

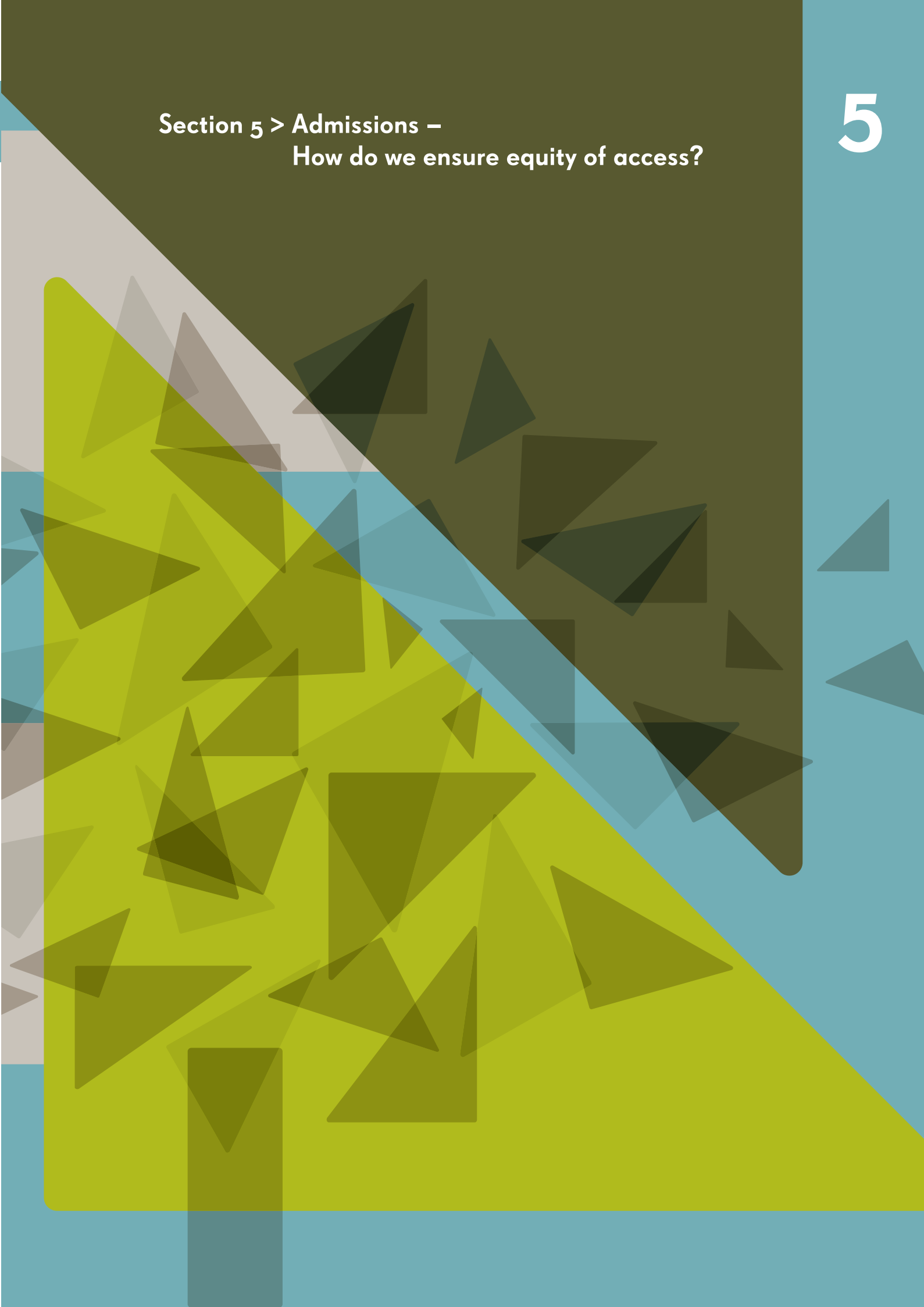
People with disabilities have, in the past, encountered many social, economic and physical barriers in their attempts to participate in the sort of everyday activities which most of us take for granted. Legislation has done much to reduce these barriers and to outlaw the sort of discriminatory practices which were once accepted as commonplace. Educational institutions have a major role to play in ensuring that their policies and practices are in line with, not just the letter of the law but also its spirit.

Here are some examples of good practice

Institutions need to have:

- Equality policies and procedures which ensure that the institution promotes equality and is compliant with the law
- The inclusion of the disability agenda as part of strategic planning
- The provision of training for all staff in disability awareness
- The adoption of a quality focused approach to the delivery of services to students
- Regular evaluation of services to monitor legal compliance and ensure the maintenance of standards of delivery
- Systems for auditing buildings and materials for accessibility

Section 5 > Admissions –
How do we ensure equity of access?



Section 4: Pre-entry activities – Doing the groundwork

4.0 Pre-entry

Pre-entry can be described as the phase when institutions begin to liaise with groups of potential students. The aim of pre-entry activities is to identify groups of potential students and encourage them to consider third level options. This is a good opportunity to let them know about the sort of facilities and supports they might expect.

Many students begin to plan and gather information on their future educational options whilst still at school. The more information they have, the more likely students are to make informed choices about their educational future. It is essential therefore, that this information therefore is both clear and accessible and provided in locations and formats, which are available to all students.



It is good practice that institutions work with students with disabilities at critical stages of development, from primary school upwards, to raise their aspirations in recognising that higher education is a real and valid choice for them.

Partnerships between institutions and groups within the community are essential in raising awareness amongst the various stakeholders: parents, teachers, school principals and guidance counsellors

Example

A recent study on admissions procedures carried out by Disability Support Services, University College Cork (2006), highlighted the need for institutions to develop recruitment strategies to target students with disabilities. It also recommended that institutions should work together to identify schools within a designated region.



The key to developing pre-entry activities is to establish good partnerships and links within the community with schools, specialist organisations and other educational institutions.

Example – Better Options Fair

AHEAD, together with the National College of Ireland and DAWN organised an information day for students with disabilities in second level who were interested in getting a clearer view of the supports available to them in third level.

The Better Options Fair provided information for students, parents and careers advisors on alternative forms of entry to higher education and on the range of supports available.

Attendees were given the opportunity to talk to staff working in Disability Support Services in third level institutions and to graduates with disabilities.



Activities on the day included:

- Exhibitions of disability support services from different colleges
- Demonstrations of assistive technology including the latest DAISY technology
- Information on Dyslexia Support Services
- Information on the Supplementary Admissions route
- Opportunities to talk to the experts.
- Talks by graduates with disabilities

4.1 What are pre-entry activities?

The National Access Office (NAO) (2006) report emphasizes the need for colleges to provide pre-entry activities to help prepare students for the demands of college life. The report identifies the absence of such programmes as a real gap in current higher education institutional practice.

This gap could be filled by providing pre-entry activities such as:

- Open days
- School visits
- Recruitment fairs
- Taster programmes
- Shadowing days
- Summer schools

Example – Trinity College Dublin Pre-entry programme

Students who are deaf or hearing impaired are one of the most under-represented groups in higher education. The Trinity College Deaf Support in Third Level (DS₃) programme targets students who have indicated on their CAO applications that they are deaf or hearing impaired.



Section 4 >

Guidelines for Good Practice >

Pre-Entry >

4.0 – 4.1 >

These students are invited to attend a summer school programme before the beginning of the academic year.

The DS₃ programme, which has been in operation since 2005, aims to support students in their transition to higher education and to give them a taste of college life. These students are invited to attend a week-long summer school programme before the beginning of the academic year. The programme is based on a peer support model and has been run by deaf students and graduates who have previously negotiated the systems in college. Evaluations by students on this programme indicate that it is highly successful. Students report that attending the programme has increased their confidence in dealing with the demands of college life and most students attending the programme went on to take up their college places.

4.2 What is important in planning pre-entry activities?

Equality legislation was designed to improve access to a wide range of public services and facilities for people with disabilities. All public bodies must now ensure that their services are accessible - this includes information as well as buildings.



These are examples of some of the factors which may need to be taken into consideration when planning open days or other pre-entry activities:

- Accessibility of premises for wheelchair users and people with mobility difficulties
 - Campus tours which might pose physical access difficulties
 - Signage around the campus area
 - Availability of assistive technology if required
 - Sign language interpretation for speeches, seminars or workshops
 - Loop systems for those with hearing impairments
 - Availability of printed information in alternative formats
 - Seating arrangements to maximise space and visibility
 - Availability of disability aware staff
 - Availability of assistive technology staff
 - Evaluation of events
- (Adapted from Action on Access, Guidelines for Admissions, 2007)

Example – Summer course for teachers at University College Cork (UCC)



UCC Disability Support Services run an annual summer school for primary school teachers. Teachers wishing to improve their skills in including students with disabilities in education have the option of attending the school for a week during the summer holidays. The aim of the summer school is to focus

on the impact of disability on students in the learning environment and to increase their awareness of the educational and employment opportunities available. Teachers attend seminars and workshops on disability related issues, some of which are presented by students who themselves have disabilities.

Some of the activities included in this year's summer school included, seminars on the impact of different disabilities on the learning environment, workshops on the range of supports available and the sort of strategies which can be put in place to assist students and demonstrations of assistive technology software and equipment. The inclusion of students who are blind or visually impaired as presenters has proven to be an effective way of highlighting issues which are relevant to that particular group of students.



Reasonable accommodations, such as having sign language interpreters present during open days, are important in the delivery of pre-entry activities

Providing information

A recent National Access Office evaluation report (2006) identified a need for better communication on the part of institutions, particularly in relation to accessing adequate information about higher education opportunities. It is important that all students have equal access to the sort of information they need in order to make an informed choice when selecting a college or course.

Institutions tend to focus on supporting students once they have arrived in college although they are also in a good position to provide it prior to entry. This could simply involve providing information by telephone or e-mail or by sending out promotional materials or a college prospectus on request.



[Section 4 >](#)

[Guidelines for Good Practice >](#)

[Pre-Entry >](#)

[4.1 – 4.2 >](#)



Did you know?

That many colleges, through their disability and access services, provide pre-entry support and advice to prospective students with disabilities who contact them?

Example – University College Cork (UCC)



UCC Disability Support Services co-operates with the Department of Education and Science in targeting secondary schools with high numbers of students with disabilities. The Disability Officer receives information on the numbers of students with disabilities in the Cork/Kerry region from the Department's Chief Inspector. This list includes all students who are in the senior and junior cycles and also identifies their disabilities. This information enables the Disability Support Service to target these schools through contact with guidance counsellors and to provide them with information on the college and on Supplementary Admissions.

A similar initiative operates in NUI Galway for their region. This is a practice which could potentially be adopted by other colleges who can access similar lists from the Department of Education and Science in their region.

There are a variety of ways that potential students will acquire information about the colleges they are considering.

Some of the sources of information for potential students are:

- Promotional materials
- College prospectus
- College website
- Course syllabai
- Admissions procedures
- Disability support services

Some students with disabilities will have additional concerns when applying to higher education, in particular how the college will meet their support requirements or if there are any physical access restrictions. Prospective students will really benefit from clear, accessible information on the practicalities of applying to college and on the types of supports that are available.



Potential students need clear information in accessible formats when deciding on their choice of college

Example – Dissemination of information to schools



Dublin City University has established links, through its access programme, with socio-economically disadvantaged schools in the north city area. A college prospectus and information pack is sent to these schools and this is followed up by visits from the Access Office School Liaison Officers. Recruitment personnel participated in a one-day disability awareness training course to enable them to deal with any queries posed by

students, guidance counsellors or teachers on issues such as the college admissions procedures. This targeting of information in 'link' schools forms part of the college's recruitment strategy.



Partnerships with schools, guidance services and other outside agencies is the key to developing effective pre-entry activities and supports

The Higher Education Links scheme, for example, is operated by eighteen higher education colleges. The scheme is designed to facilitate progression from further education to higher education via specific FETAC level 5 Certificates and level 6 Advanced Certificates. There is an ever increasing demand by people with disabilities for opportunities to use this route to higher education courses. While this scheme now makes up 9% of all entrants to higher education, it can be anticipated that demand will continue to grow, particularly in light of the overall HEA plan to broaden entry routes to higher education so that they will account for 30% of all entrants by 2013.

(HEA National Plan for Equity of access to Higher education 2008 – 2013)



Did you know?

According to the Central Statistics Office figures, over 130,000 adults with disabilities in Ireland left school without qualifications. Many now want a second chance to return to education, gain qualifications and benefit from further education and career opportunities



[Section 4 >](#)

[Guidelines for Good Practice >](#)

[Pre-Entry >](#)

[4.2 >](#)



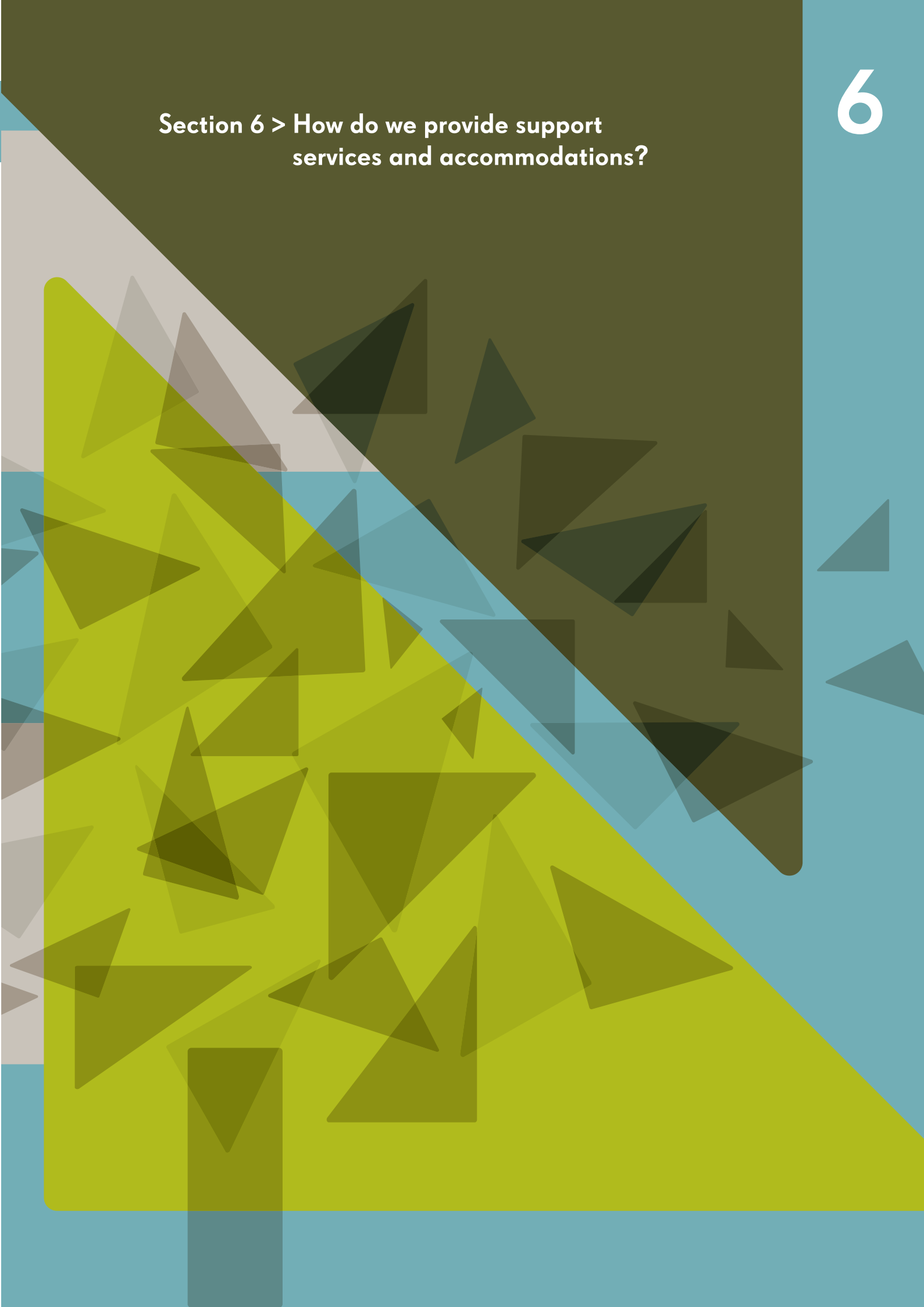
Other examples of good practice by institutions include:

- Building up a network of links and partnerships in the community to underpin the development of targeted initiative programmes
- Working in consultation with students, parents, teachers, guidance counsellors and local agencies to develop pre-entry activities in their area
- Monitoring and tracking of students who have been targeted through pre-entry programmes to evaluate the effectiveness of these programmes

Conclusion

The period prior to entry to higher education is important in laying the groundwork for a successful transition for students with disabilities. It is important that colleges are proactive in forming links with schools and in identifying potential students with disabilities. Pre-entry activities, such as summer schools and access programmes are recommended as being important in raising the aspirations of students with disabilities and informing them of their options, as well as the supports available.

Section 6 > How do we provide support services and accommodations?



Section 5: Admissions – How do we ensure equity of access

5.0 Admissions – How do we ensure equity?

Institutions can be pro-active in increasing the participation of students with disabilities by establishing clear and transparent entry criteria that are equitable and non-discriminatory in nature. The application process is an important stage for students wishing to gain access to higher education. Disclosure here is a key issue for students with disabilities and having a transparent and accessible admissions system will ensure that students are clear on what routes are available, the application procedures for applying to college and the type of supports available in those colleges.



All staff involved in admissions need to be aware that there is more than one entry route for students with disabilities into higher education and need to know how to support students with disabilities during the admissions process

It is important that all staff involved in the admissions process are aware of the Supplementary Admissions routes for students with disabilities and of the requirements to ensure that the admissions process does not discriminate, directly or indirectly, against applicants with disabilities.

How do students apply to third level education?

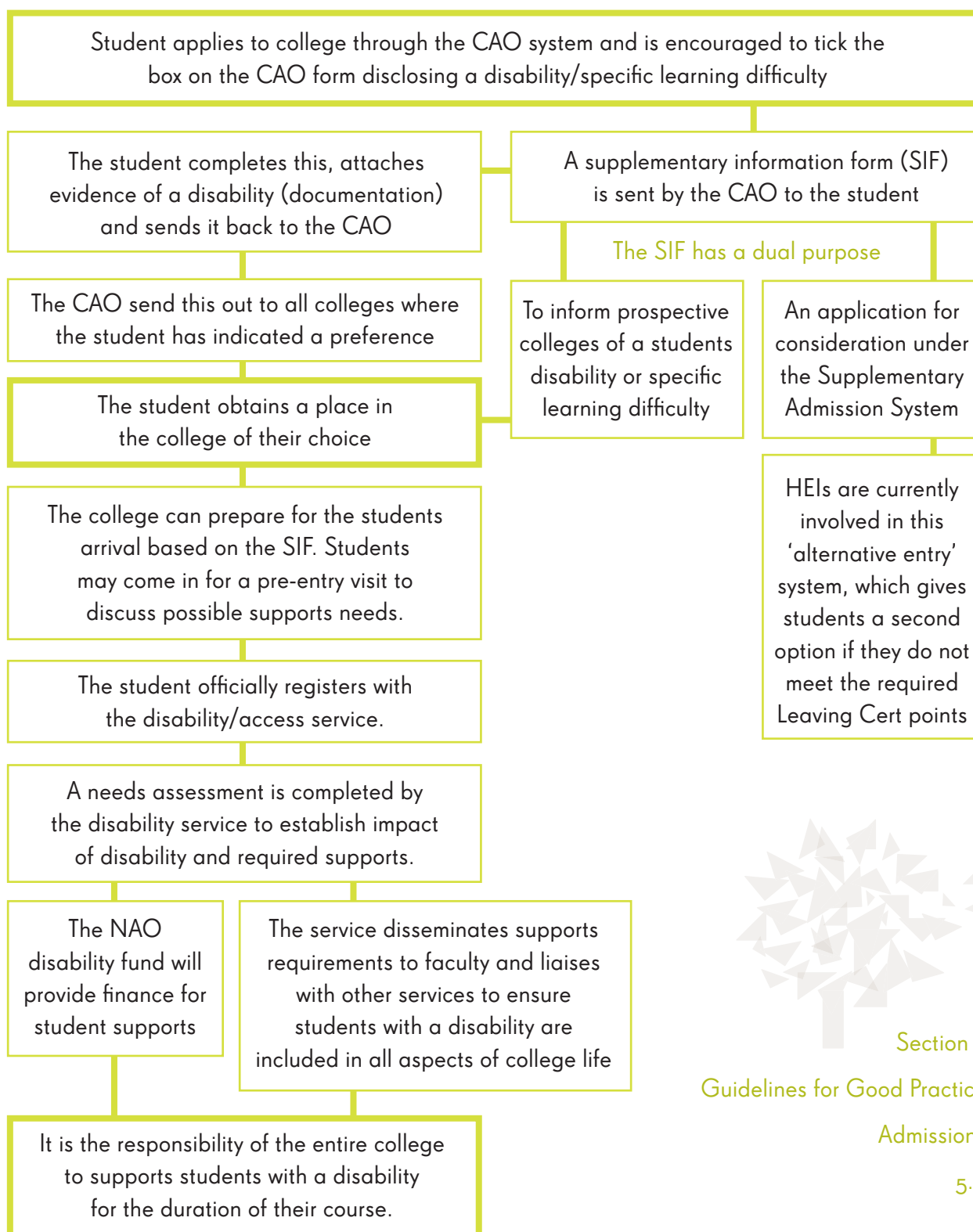
All applications for entry into third level institutions are through the Central Applications Office (CAO). Places on college courses obtained through the CAO system are based on points, which are awarded on Leaving Certificate results. Attainment of the appropriate points qualifies the student for entry into the course of their choice. Students with disabilities, like their non-disabled peers, apply to college through the CAO system and many gain entry to their chosen courses by achievement of the required points in the Leaving Certificate.


Although there is no obligation to do so, students are encouraged to indicate on their CAO application whether they have a disability or medical condition. The CAO will then forward a Supplementary Admissions Form (SIF) to students who have disclosed a disability on their application. The purpose of the SIF is to inform prospective colleges of a student's disability. The SIF needs to be completed in detail and returned to the CAO, with documented, supporting evidence of disability.

The CAO will then forward the SIF to the student's preferred colleges. The SIF will form the basis of the needs assessment and supporting documentation is required for verification of a disability and official registration with the disability or access services. The SIF is also used as the basis of any alternative admissions system in operation.

For further details on the SIF go to www.cao.ie

The following flow chart outlines the steps for students applying to college in the transfer to higher education.



 [Section 5 >](#)
[Guidelines for Good Practice >](#)
[Admissions >](#)
[5.0 >](#)

5.1 What are the alternative entry routes to third level education?

It has been well documented by AHEAD that students with disabilities are a greatly under-represented group in higher education, who may require positive discriminatory measures to ensure equality of access and opportunity. Higher education institutes are keen to address this issue by adapting their admissions policies so as to create alternative access routes for under-represented groups of students. Some colleges offer alternative entry to students who, because of the impact of their disability, fail to meet the admissions criteria. Alternative entry takes into account difficulties the student may have encountered because of their disability during second level education.

Example

A blind pupil may not have received all their secondary school text books in an alternative format and may consequently have been educationally disadvantaged relative to his/her peers

Alternative entry simply acknowledges this type of disadvantage and recognises that some students may not be able to compete and achieve the points required for the course of their choice.



It has been recognized at a national level that a more flexible approach is needed and many colleges now have alternative admissions procedures for students with disabilities or 'alternative entry'.

A number of initiatives have targeted students with disabilities through the establishment of supplementary or alternative admissions procedures. Institutions throughout Ireland offer these kinds of alternative entry initiatives and some give exemptions for specific subject requirements, such as the Irish language for students who are deaf, or an allowance on points.



Institutions can ensure best practice and compliance with current legislation by establishing alternative routes of entry

The procedures for gaining alternative entry differ from one institution to another and can include:

- Quota system
- Reduction of points
- Reserved places

Example

Trinity College Dublin reserves 15% of all places on first year undergraduate courses for students from non-traditional learning backgrounds, students from a socio-economically disadvantaged background and mature students with 20 or more places on offer.



Example

Dublin City University has a target of 25% set for students from under-represented groups by the year 2008. The target for students with disabilities is 6%.



Some colleges will grant exemptions for non-essential subjects, for example, a modern language requirement for students who are deaf or have a specific learning difficulty.

All institutions, however require that prospective students meet the essential requirements of their course, for example, the languages required for Business and Languages or the minimum Maths requirement for Engineering.

5.1.1 Supplementary Admissions System – How does it work?

The Disability Advisors Working Network (DAWN) has devised a common supplementary assessment system for applicants with disabilities applying via the CAO system. The objective of this development was to bring greater clarity and transparency to higher education institutions supplementary application procedures. It was also expected that places available under supplementary admissions were targeted at those experiencing the greatest educational disadvantage in second-level education. Trinity College Dublin, together with ten other HEI's has agreed to review all applications for supplementary admission as a group. These HEI's are Athlone Institute of Technology, Cork Institute of Technology, Dublin Institute of Technology, Dublin City University, National College of Ireland, NUI Galway, NUI Maynooth, University College Cork, University College Dublin and the University of Limerick.

Students with disabilities and specific learning difficulties are deemed eligible for inclusion in the common assessment used in the supplementary admissions procedure for students with disabilities on the basis of a completed CAO Supplementary Information form and verification of their disability provided



Section 5 >

Guidelines for Good Practice >

Admissions >

5.1 – 5.1.1 >

by recognised professionals. Applications and evidence in relation to students with specific learning disabilities are reviewed and assessed in the light of significance of educational disadvantage.

Example – Exemption on the basis of a disability



Students seeking to matriculate in Trinity College Dublin are required to present six Leaving Certificate subjects, including Mathematics, English and one other modern language.

Students in the following circumstances may apply for a waiver of the modern language requirement:

(i) Those who have a specific learning difficulty of such a degree of severity that they fail to achieve expected levels of attainment in basic language skills in English

(ii) Those who have a significant hearing impairment or are deaf, and are also failing to attain adequate levels in language skills in English.

The evidence of such a disability must be furnished by a qualified psychologist, in the case of (i) and by a report from an appropriate medical specialist in the case of (ii) above.

Source: www.tcd.ie/Admissions

5.1.2 Models of admissions selections systems

A recent report on the supplementary admissions system commissioned by

University College Cork (2006) found that there were three distinct models of admissions selection systems that had developed in institutions involved in the Supplementary Admissions System.

- The use of a set of 'differential achievement band of points' lower than competitive points, with no referral to an admissions board.
- The use of an Admissions Board with representatives from specific faculties, with further referral to Heads of Schools in some cases.
- The use of Ad Hoc Admission Meetings with various Heads of Schools or Departments. (UCC, 2006: 5)

The report found that the majority of the institutions have adopted formalised admission boards, with some consultation with institutional faculties/schools or departments. Most of the institutions also operated a differential model of achieved CAO points.

5.2 How do we ensure inclusive admissions?

The Equality Act makes it unlawful for institutions to directly or indirectly discriminate against students with disabilities in relation to admissions, terms or conditions of admission and access to any course. Institutions need to ensure that their admissions procedures are carried out in a manner which is non-discriminatory and equitable for all students.

Example



Many health related courses have fitness to practice requirements which the student must satisfy before

admission to the course. It is important that the faculty consider if these requirements can be met with or without reasonable accommodations. For example could a student nurse use a mini disk to record her/his own notes during a handover meeting while working on a ward?



The following are some tips on ensuring good admissions practice:

- College publicity materials and information relating to the college and courses needs to be available in accessible formats
- The selection of students for admission should give equal consideration to all applicants
- Enrolment, registration and induction of new students should accommodate the needs of people with disabilities
- Open days, student orientation and induction activities should be carried out in accessible locations
- Institutions should have a policy on the confidentiality of information relating to a student's disability
- Admissions procedures should be monitored for compliance to current disability legislation
- Appropriate accommodations need to be made available to applicants attending selection interviews
- At registration, students with disabilities should be encouraged to respond on a voluntary and confidential basis to the Equal Access Survey on the background of new entrants to higher education
- Disability awareness training needs to be provided for all staff involved in the selection and admission of students
- Where appropriate, applicants should be given the opportunity to demonstrate their ability to use alternative methods of meeting the course requirements

(Amended from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education Code of Practice, 1999)



Section 5 >
Guidelines for Good Practice >
Admissions >
5.1.1 – 5.2 >



Did you know?

In 2007, as part of the HEA national data collection initiative, twenty four HEA institutions piloted a new, equal access survey of the social, economic and cultural background of new entrants to higher education which included students with disabilities. The questions in this survey are similar to those asked in the 2006 Census which will enable comparisons to be made between this group and the wider population in relation to access to higher education. The findings of the survey will also inform the ongoing development of national and institutional policy and practice. The first year of the survey has succeeded in increasing awareness amongst students and their families of the importance of third level access and the role of disability services. It also provides new entrants to higher education with another opportunity to disclose whether they have a disability and to apply for an assessment of needs.

(For further information see www.heai.ie)



The following are some additional recommendations for good practice:

- There needs to be a clearly defined admissions policy and formal written procedures on the admission of students with disabilities, including

the implementation of any supplementary or alternative admissions systems

- Details of policies and procedures need to be made available in accessible formats on the colleges' website and in the prospectus
- Each higher education institution should have a systematic approach to the gathering and analysis of data on the participation of students with disabilities through which progress in achieving national and institutional targets can be consistently measured over time.
- The institutions' strategic plan needs to include targets for the admissions of under-represented groups, including students with disabilities
- Application and registration forms need to be made available in alternative formats
- Students need to be provided with opportunities to disclose that they have a disability throughout the application, admission and induction process
- The prospectus, course syllabi and other essential material need to be made available in alternative formats such as Braille or Plain English
- Essential information and course related materials should be available electronically wherever possible
- Admissions procedures for applicants with disabilities need to include a clear and transparent appeals mechanism
- Information on available supports for students with disabilities should be included in Fresher packs

- There needs to be a system in place for ensuring that Disability Support Services are notified of any new entrants who have a disability
- There needs to be a system in place for the dissemination and sharing of confidential information between admissions staff and other departments

Example

A student with a specific learning disability experienced some difficulty in understanding his college's policy document on admissions. The Admissions Office is legally obliged to produce this information in formats which can be easily understood by all students, including those with disabilities. This extends to information which is displayed on websites



Conclusion

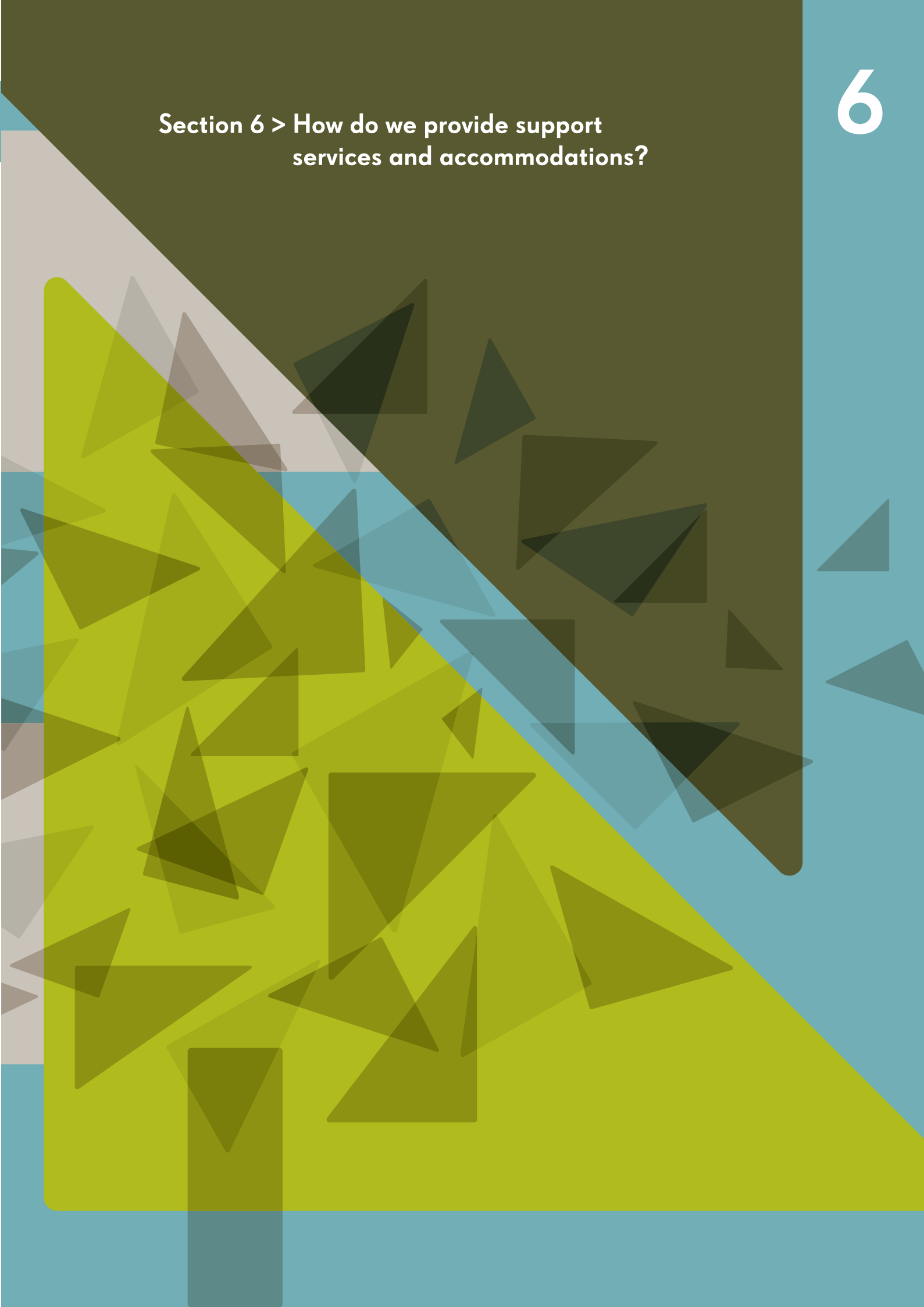
Accessibility of access to third level education is crucial in creating equality of opportunity for all students. Transparency in the admission of students to higher education is essential and admissions procedures, materials and locations need to be accessible to all candidates. Third level institutions need to support students with disabilities as a positive discrimination measure. Many colleges include the provision of alternative forms of entry for those who have the capacity to successfully complete a course but who are unable to meet the entry requirements in a conventional way. Alternative forms of entry requirements recognise that some students may not be able to attain the required points for entry to the course of their choice at third level. These initiatives enable candidates to access courses below the strict points restrictions and progress in their educational attainments along with other students.



Section 5 >
Guidelines for Good Practice >
Admissions >
5.2 >



Section 6 > How do we provide support services and accommodations?



Section 6: How do we provide support services and accommodations?

6.0 How can we best meet the support needs of students with disabilities?

Students with disabilities will have contact with a variety of institutional staff throughout their stay in college. Initial contact will usually be with administrative and admissions staff. Disability support services will be involved in the identification of individual needs and the ongoing support of students. There will also be a high level of interaction between students and academic, library, career guidance and administrative staff. Each has a role to play in ensuring that students receive the accommodations they need in whichever department they need them.



A multi-disciplinary approach works best and ongoing communication is needed between the various staff involved

Example

CHART (Centre for Helping, Access, Retention and Training) based in Waterford Institute of Technology

The Centre for Helping, Access, Retention and Training is primarily concerned with improving the retention of students within the Institute by assisting them to complete their course. CHART also works towards making the Institute more accessible for those who traditionally may not have considered third level education as an option; mature students, those from

disadvantaged backgrounds, people with disabilities and those from ethnic minority groups.

The college's Disability Officer is located within the CHART office together with the access officer, an Educational Psychologist, an Assistive Technology Officer and a number of other staff whose remit it is to support students for the duration of their course. The CHART office is a mainstream service that provides a 'one stop shop' where students may be using two or three different services. This enables the services to work together effectively as a team and to share resources so as to best support students with a range of special needs within the college.

6.1 Disability Support Services

The development of Disability Support Services varies across universities and institutes of technology and there is a wide range of practices and resources available across different colleges. A Disability Support Service is typically comprised of a team of people with different skills, which can include a Disability Officer, an Assistive Technology Officer, an Educational Psychologist and Learning Support Tutors. All Universities now have Disability Officers in place, whereas the majority of the Institutes of Technology have Access Officers whose role it is to look after all non-traditional students. The range of services delivered to students can vary widely throughout the country and this remains a significant gap.



A consistent standard of service is needed across all institutions so that students have the same level of support in whichever college they choose to attend.

What are the functions of Disability Support Services?

Disability support services have a wide remit and fulfil a number of important functions:

- Management and co-ordination of support services and personnel
- Delivery of support services to students and staff
- Management of assistive technology and learning support services
- Supporting the college in the development of policies and guidelines in relation to students with disabilities
- Organisation and implementation of needs assessments
- Addressing staff training and development needs in relation to disability awareness
- Application to the Fund for Students with Disabilities (the Fund) and the sourcing of suitable supports
- Administration and monitoring of Fund expenditure
- Development and maintenance of records and systems for the tracking and co-ordination of the various activities
- Developing and maintaining the services website
- Staff training and development
- Development of partnerships with specialist agencies, employers, schools, Colleges of Further Education and other institutions
- Production of promotional materials and guidelines for staff



Section 6 >

Guidelines for Good Practice >

Supports & Accommodations >

6.0 – 6.1 >

Example

The Disability Advisors Working Network (DAWN) collectively produced guidelines for Educational Support Workers in assisting students with disabilities in higher education



It is good practice to have designated staff available in various departments to fulfil a specific role in supporting students with disabilities

Example – Educational Support Worker Co-Ordination



There are currently 160 support workers registered in the Disability Support Services in Trinity College Dublin. Most of the Educational Support Workers providing note-taking and additional tuition are post-graduate students with subject expertise. All Educational Support Workers receive induction and training which includes disability awareness and specific skills such as note-taking. Guidelines for Educational Support Workers have just been published by DAWN and are available to all new workers.

The role of the co-ordinator is key to the management of the support function and of the large number of support staff involved. Problems are addressed as they arise, ensuring a continuity of service to all students.

The administration of support workers is carried out by a full time co-ordinator whose role and responsibilities

are broken into three distinct, interdependent areas.

1. Setting up and maintaining a database of Educational Support Workers

The database comprises details of the support workers and is vital to the management of the service. Following a needs assessment, the Disability Officer sends a referral form to the co-ordinator who matches the student with an Educational Support Worker. The Educational Support Worker then contacts the student to discuss the impact of their disability and agree a support plan. The co-ordinator is available by telephone or in the office to answer specific questions or address any problems that may arise.

2. Timetabling

The Disability Support Office is open from 8.00am through to 4.00pm to allow for emergencies to be dealt with before the start of the academic day. If a note-taker is unable to turn up, there is sufficient time to contact a substitute. This is an important element to the smooth running of the service and in ensuring that all students with disabilities have the same quality of teaching and learning at all lectures, tutorials and lab classes.

3. Financial Arrangements

An accounts financial package is used as part of the system to track and maintain administrative and financial records in relation to laboratory assistants, personal assistants, examination scribes, library assistants and specific subject tutors. This includes issuing timesheets, making and recording all payments and producing end of term and end of year reports.



The following are some indicators of good practice in the management of the disability services function:

- There needs to be a clear system for the management and co-ordination of student information to enable the disability office to track all support activities
- Clear guidelines need to be established and made available to disability support staff and students. These guidelines should cover all aspects of the disability support function, including areas and lines of responsibility, recruitment and training.
- There need to be systems in place for the management of student funding and the co-ordination of funded supports
- All disability support staff should receive induction and disability awareness training
- There need to be clear systems in place for the referral of students between functions and departments



It is good practice for disability services to use databases to monitor and evaluate the delivery of services to students and to disseminate support information to staff



Did you know?

In a recent AHEAD (2006), survey on participation rates of student with disabilities in higher education, institutes of technology identified a clear need for Disability Officers as a priority for service improvement.

6.2 What is the role of the Disability Officer?

The Disability Act 2005 requires that all colleges have a designated person who has responsibility for students with disabilities and it is good practice that all higher education



Section 6 >

Guidelines for Good Practice >

Supports & Accommodations >

6.1 – 6.2 >

institutions have a Disability Officer available to students. The presence of a Disability Officer will automatically raise the profile of students with disabilities within the institution and there is evidence to show that there is an increase in the number of students registered with the service where a Disability Officer has been appointed.

Example

'Appointing a disability coordinator is perhaps the single most important step an institution can take towards developing good provision for disabled students. A good co-ordinator provides a focus and a force for change and a first point of call for students and staff alike'
(Skill, 1997)



- Co-ordinate the disability service in the assessment of students' needs and the delivery of individual support to those students.

Example

"In secondary school, my disability was almost ignored and when I needed special equipment such as a personal recorder for my oral exams, they were of low standard and quality. I felt myself almost a burden on the school. Whereas, here in third level, the quality of computers and other equipment is fantastic. The help and resources from disability support services has been invaluable and I have not been made feel self conscious about asking for help".



The presence of a Disability Officer on campus will:

- Allow for the development of clear systems, procedures and policies for identifying and supporting students with disabilities
- Raise awareness amongst students and staff and increase the profile of support services within the college and the community
- Create a more inclusive environment and provide a system of advocacy within the college
- Provide internal consultation to staff by providing guidance and advice on how best to support and include students with disabilities



Case Study – NUI Maynooth

One example of how a disability service has tapped into new technologies is the use of the virtual learning environment, 'Moodle' operating at NUI Maynooth. Each NUI department, including the disability office, has virtual space on Moodle where they can set up lecture notes and tutorials and also provide information and resources for students. Students who are registered with the disability service have access, through Moodle, to up to date information on available supports and services in addition to academic information. Staff collaborated in ensuring the accessibility of Moodle and the use of universal design principles enables it to be used by a diverse range of students. This collaboration resulted in a guide for all staff and a website outlining good practice in the creation of digital documents. This is available on: <http://digidocs.nuim.ie>

6.3 What supports are available for students?

The primary aim of the disability services team is to support students for the duration of their course and enable them to achieve their educational goals and objectives. Getting it right in the first year is critical for students' success in becoming independent learners.

Under equality legislation, institutions are responsible for identifying and providing accommodations and services to assist students with disabilities during their time at college. Disability Services have a key role to play in identifying individual needs and disseminating information on accommodation requirements to relevant departments throughout the campus.



Did you know?

In January 2008, a comprehensive and user friendly website on the range of financial support schemes available in further and higher education was launched. The website, which was developed by the National Access Office, contains valuable information on the various types of funding and financial assistance available to students.

www.studentfinance.ie



The aim of providing accommodations and supports is to enable students to compensate for the impact of a disability so that are better able to access the learning environment and compete on an equal level with their peers

These are some of the key supports available to students:

- The majority of students with disabilities in higher education are those with specific learning difficulties. Learning support is essential for these students and a learning support or dyslexia tutor will have the expertise and knowledge to screen students for dyslexia and to provide appropriate tuition.



Section 6 >

Guidelines for Good Practice >

Supports & Accommodations >

6.2 – 6.3 >

- Assistive technology can be a key support in enabling many students to access a much greater range of learning materials and learning opportunities. An Assistive Technology Officer can provide the expertise to assess students' assistive technology needs and provide them with assistive technology training. Assistive technology is essential for many students and those who cannot see, hear or access course materials would be unable to participate without it.
- Examination and assessment accommodations are essential requirements for many students in enabling them to demonstrate, in alternative ways, that they meet the academic standards of their course. Supports such as the use of a scribe, extra time or rest breaks can make a great difference to student's success in examinations.

In which areas are accommodations and supports usually needed?

All college personnel have a role to play in supporting students, including those with disabilities. Once the impact of a student's disability has been identified, accommodations need to be made available to minimise that impact through access to information, equipment or learning support.

Accommodations may be needed in a variety of areas, depending on individual needs:

- Library, where students rely on access to learning materials and library services
- Faculty, where style of delivery, methods of communication and course materials may need to be adjusted in laboratories, lecture theatres or during fieldwork

- Careers services, which need to provide accessible information and practical support
- Information and assistive technology services which are an important source of assistance to learners with disabilities



Did you know?

Over 2,500 full time students with disabilities in higher and further education receive funding every year through the Fund for Students with Disabilities. The Fund recognises the impact of disability in education and is designed to provide students with the supports and accommodations to enable them to deal with that impact and to successfully complete their course.

This Fund is managed by the National Office for Equity of Access to higher education (NAO) on behalf of the Department of Education and Science. All institutions approved for funding are obliged to submit quarterly and yearly financial returns to the NAO.



Here are examples of disability support services to students:

- Pre-entry support and guidance for new students
- Assisting students in making the transfer to higher education, including orientation to the college and induction delivery
- Needs assessment and screening for specific learning difficulties

- Referral to other professionals such as an Educational Psychologist for further assessment
- Application to the Fund for Students with Disabilities and recommendations on appropriate accommodations
- Management of funding for the provision of student accommodations
- Liaison with other staff to ensure continuity of service



Case study – Ahead 2007

Mary is a mature student who had a successful career as a senior childcare worker. New regulations meant that everyone involved in childcare had to have a formal qualification, so Mary returned to education on a part-time basis to study for a degree in Social Care. Mary found college a daunting experience and her tutor spoke to her after she had failed her first assignment. The tutor explained that her work lacked structure and was difficult to understand because of inconsistent spelling, grammar and syntax. As a result of this discussion, the tutor referred Mary to the college's disability support service.

Mary met with a learning support tutor and explained that she had struggled to read and write at school. She had never been assessed for dyslexia and assumed that she was just not very bright. She dropped out of school early and used her excellent interpersonal skills in a job she loved, working with troubled kids and quickly gained promotion and recognition in this area. Although she was anxious to identify the nature of her written language difficulties, Mary was also very upset by memories of her failure at school.

Mary was referred to an educational psychologist and an assessment revealed that her written language difficulties were due to dyslexia. Following her assessment, Mary was able to access accommodations for assignments and examinations. Mary was also provided with a learning support tutor who taught her strategies to help with her language difficulties and build on her learning style and strengths.



Section 6 >

Guidelines for Good Practice >

Supports & Accommodations >

6.3 >

6.4 What supports are available for staff?

The disability support team has a key role to play in advising and supporting staff in their work with students with disabilities and acting as internal consultants within the college to academic and administrative staff.

Here are examples of some of the services provided to teaching and administrative staff:



- Disability awareness training and seminars
- Liaison between students and staff in various departments
- Dissemination of relevant information in relation to students' support requirements
- Development of training manuals and guidelines for staff
- Guidance on inclusive teaching strategies and reasonable accommodations
- Advice on alternative forms of assessment and examination
- Assistive technology demonstrations
- Guidance on access issues

Example

Disability Awareness Training

One Disability Officer described the importance of disability awareness training in making staff aware of the needs of students in their classroom. He described one example of a



student who is deaf and experiencing difficulty with the frequent changes in timetabling at the beginning of her course.

As a consequence, her sign language interpreter was unsure when to come to the department to work with the student. This issue highlighted the sort of difficulty faced by the student and those trying to support her. The student's lecturers were also unaware of the role of the sign language interpreter in the classroom setting.

The Disability Officer organised disability awareness training with departmental staff which highlighted the key issues in supporting students who are deaf in the classroom. The training also focused on the importance of good channels of communication between teaching staff and sign language interpreters.



Here are some tips for the delivery of disability support services which need to:

- Have a range of policies and procedures in place which are known throughout the college
- Develop and maintain links and partnerships with other departments and functions
- Monitor and evaluate the service on an ongoing basis and obtain feedback from students as part of the evaluation process
- Be available in a central location and integrated within the campus

- Be delivered through inclusive, mainstream services where possible
- Use a website which acts as a resource, outlining relevant information, such as staff contact details and supports available
- Provide practical guidance and support to staff and share expertise with other personnel and departments
- Have access to a private space for conducting student interviews
- Utilise a database for monitoring and tracking students and their use of supports
- Involve direct contact by Disability/Access Officers in setting up appointments with incoming students which can help ensure that they do not slip through the service net
- Include the use of a referral form from the Disability Officer to the AT Officer or Learning Support Tutor which can provide useful background information on incoming students. This information can form the basis for an initial interview and assessment and can help avoid the possibility of repeated interviews with different support staff
- Include the use of databases, spreadsheets, online diaries and calendars which can help track students and manage the overall delivery of the service
- Involve close liaison between all stakeholders; disability services, IT departments, tutors and students
- Ensure that all materials used by the service are available in accessible formats
- Have a system in place for the dissemination of information to relevant staff
- Work towards embedding the disability agenda across the whole campus
- Maintain contact with students using e-mail or text messaging
- Make drop-in times available to students
- Promote the service and raise awareness through the use of promotional materials and poster campaigns
- Provide information and guidelines relating to relevant



Section 6 >
 Guidelines for Good Practice >
 Supports & Accommodations >
 6.4 >

issues, such as funding for student accommodations and alternative forms of assessment and examination

- Encourage student representation through committees and forums. Student with disabilities can act as mentors to new students and represent the service at talks and seminars
- Develop links and partnerships with other institutions to ensure that information and best practice is shared and developed

Example – Embedding the disability agenda



As part of its strategic plan, the Disability Office at National University of Ireland Maynooth is working towards embedding the disability agenda across the campus so that it becomes an institution-wide concern. The aim is to mainstream support services throughout the campus rather than delivering a segregated, specialised service for students with disabilities. This would mean for example, that any new developments on campus would be disability proofed at the planning stage. This approach involves forming partnerships and links within the college and incorporating universal design principals in all new developments. This sharing of expertise has been beneficial for all and raises awareness of the fact that with minor adjustments, the needs of a diverse set of learners can be met.

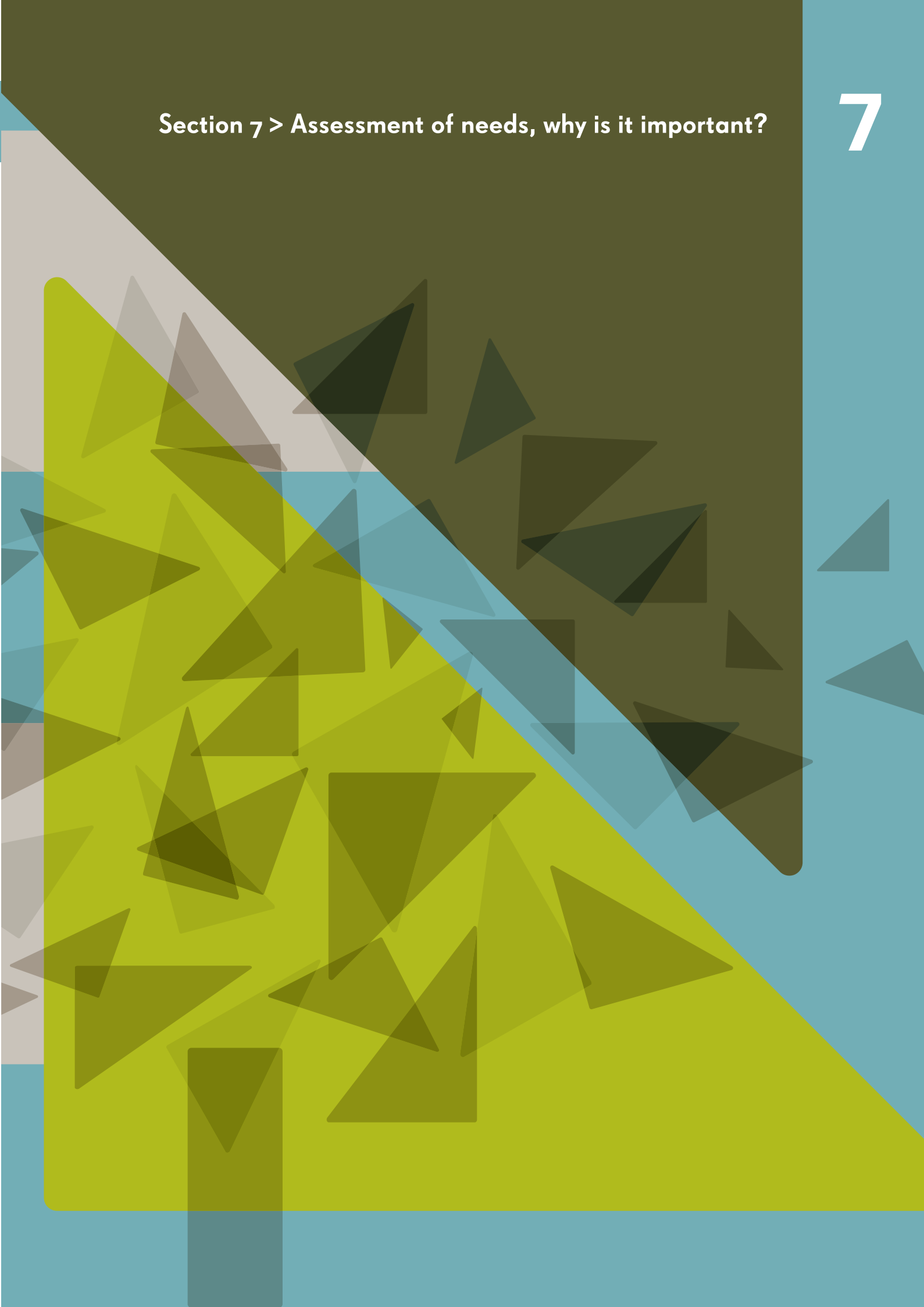
Conclusion

Disability support services fulfil a vital function in colleges throughout Ireland. In a recent AHEAD (2006), survey on participation rates of student with disabilities in higher education institutions, institutes of technology identified a clear need for Disability Officers as a priority for service improvement.

Higher education institutions provide a range of services for the student population to support them for the duration of their time at college. The traditional practice has been to provide specialised, support services for students with disabilities in isolation from the rest of the college.

More recently, there has been a growing and more inclusive trend towards providing support services to all students, including those with disabilities. This practice reduces the stigma previously associated with attending specialised services and ensures that all new students have access to the supports they need when making the transition to higher education. Specialised support services can also be available to students with disabilities if required, but where possible, the needs of those students should be met through inclusive, mainstream services.

Disability support services are increasingly being integrated into the mainstream of college life so that all students can easily access information and services.



Section 7: Assessment of needs, why is it important?

7.0 Needs Assessment – why is it important?

Discovering what students need is the beginning of the process of understanding how they can best be supported. Time spent in carrying out needs assessments 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 students.



It is good practice that a needs assessment is a collaborative process between students and assessors.

A needs assessment can be described as 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. This process of gathering information in an objective and comprehensive way is important, as it forms the basis for planning the provision of reasonable accommodations and supports for students. There are wide variations in how institutions conduct needs assessments and there is no standardisation of assessment methodologies or tools. A recent development has been the introduction of a post graduate Diploma in Educational Studies, at Trinity College Dublin. The Diploma is offered as an in-service qualification for staff, particularly those working in higher education, who are involved in carrying out educational needs assessments for people with disabilities. The aim of this course is to provide comprehensive

training in needs assessment methodologies so as to increase the skills and expertise of professionals working in the sector. This type of professional course will help to streamline and standardise the needs assessment process across higher education institutions in Ireland.

Carrying out a needs assessment helps to:

- Clarify what supports and accommodations are needed
- Identify learning gaps
- Identify resources and accommodations needed
- Form a basis for planning and reviewing student's progress
- Provide evidence when applying for student support funding



Did you know?

People with disabilities now have a statutory right under the Disability Act (2005) to have an assessment of their educational needs and the provision of resources to meet those needs.

The assessment process needs to involve:

- Team work and communication between the various personnel involved
- Inputs from a multidisciplinary team as appropriate, including academic staff
- A sharing of information with relevant staff
- A system for the dissemination of assessment information to key participants
- Clear referral pathways

What steps are involved?

It is currently the general practice across institutions to prepare a list of incoming students who have been identified through the CAO process as having high support needs.

This process helps in the planning of support resources and the management of the intake of a large number of students at the beginning of the academic year.

A key task prior to meeting with a student is to gather as much relevant information as possible. This information could include the student's CAO Supplementary Information Form and supporting documentation, such as a psychological or medical report. This preparatory work can provide useful background information and speed up the assessment process.



It is good practice to have in place a referral form to pass on student information from one assessor to another when there are a number of different people involved in the assessment process

Example – Early intervention

One of the practices employed by Learning Support Tutors at Dublin Institute of Technology is that they examine the psychological reports of new applicants before the beginning of the academic year. This enables them to identify and familiarise themselves with the learning needs of incoming students with specific learning difficulties. These students are then invited to attend a needs assessment, even though they are not yet officially registered with the college. The aim of this practice is to assess as many students as possible before the start of term so that appropriate supports can be put in place as early as possible.



Section 7 >

Guidelines for Good Practice >

Needs Assessment >

7.0 >

Stages in the assessment process

1. Student registers with Disability Services and provides documentation

2. Assessment Interview to identify needs and steps to reduce impact

3. Action plan produced and disseminated to relevant staff and review date set

4. Assessment signed off by assessor and student, application for funding

7.1 What are the components of a needs assessment?

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

- Identification of course demands; what are the skills and competences needed?
- Identification of student needs: what supports or accommodations are required?
- A statement of needs or an assessment report, outlining the accommodations needed by a student

7.2 Analysing course demands

Identifying the demands a course will place on students is an important first step in discovering what accommodations or supports need to be put in place. Establishing what critical skills a person needs to undertake a particular course means breaking that course down into its component parts.

Here are some examples of the areas you might want to consider:

- Learning skills, such as reading, note-taking, study skills, time management, using the library, completing assignments
- Communication, the ability to be able to communicate or receive communication in its various forms, verbal, written, auditory or visual

- Cognitive skills such as memory, attention, analysing and processing information, problem solving, language processing
- Physical demands; some courses may have more emphasis on movement, co-ordination, dexterity, or fine motor skills, such as using a pen. Transport and access issues also need to be considered

7.3 Assessment of needs – what does it involve?

An assessment of needs will focus on identifying the gaps between what is demanded by a course and the student's actual performance and finding out what sort of accommodations and resources are needed in order for the student to be able to bridge those gaps

Example

"It is hard to write for four hours in an examination. After an hour, my hand is so painful that my writing is illegible. I will lose marks for this which is unfair"



The assessment process is likely to be informed by a number of different sources which can include:

- Dyslexia screening reports
- Psychological assessment reports
- Assistive technology assessment reports
- Literacy and numeracy screening reports
- Self assessment by the student
- Student interview



National Disability Authority Standards for the Assessment of Needs (2005) identifies student involvement throughout the assessment process as being crucial.



Section 7 >

Guidelines for Good Practice >

Needs Assessment >

7.1 – 7.3 >

The assessment process will therefore always involve discussion with the student as to:

- Any difficulties being experienced or anticipated
- The impact of these difficulties on the student's academic work
- Any strategies which have been successful in the past
- The specific accommodations which are required
- The type of resources which are needed

7.4 Student interview – why is it important?

The student interview is an essential part of the needs assessment process. This is the forum where students can present their views, describe the impact of their disability, explain what worked well in the past and describe what they need now that they have progressed to higher education. Students are experts on their own disability so need to be included and facilitated to describe what they need.

Here are some tips to remember when conducting assessment interviews with students:



Do's

- Adopt a user friendly approach and use accessible language and terminology
- Keep it structured. This is a discussion with a purpose, which is to determine students strengths and areas of need

- Adopt a logical, evidence based approach and focus on precisely what is needed by students in order to meet the demands of their course



Don't's

- Avoid leading questions which assume that you already know what the person needs
- Avoid any bias towards a particular course or solution
- Avoid intrusive questions



It is good practice to explain the purpose and content of the assessment to students and to include them throughout the process

7.4.1 How should I structure the interview?

The student interview needs to be structured and remain focused on the demands of the course and on identifying the accommodations the student requires in order to meet those demands.

Here are some examples of the sort of issues which could be discussed during an interview with a student:

- Accessing course materials, do they need to be available in an alternative format?
- Remembering things, is there a need for a laptop, taping of lectures, mind mapping?
- Physical access and transport issues

- Note-taking; can the student listen and take notes at the same time?
- Tuition needs e.g. study skills, producing assignments, dyslexia support
- Understanding of diagrams and other abstract concepts
- Following written instructions and accessing written materials
- Using the library and carrying out research
- Computer literacy and assistive technology
- Examination and/or assessment accommodations.
- Equipment or assistive aids

Example

"I've been in the deaf community all my life and it's a big step for me to be getting involved with the hearing culture at college. I've never lived on my own before and I'm not sure how I'm going to manage with lectures and tutorials".



7.5 The assessment report – what do I need to know?

The outcome of the assessment process should be a statement of the student's needs or an assessment report. This report will be used as a guide for staff in organising student supports and accommodations. It will also be used as part of any application to the Fund for Students with Disabilities. Carrying out an assessment of needs can involve examining and using information relating to student's disabilities. Confidentiality in the management of sensitive information therefore is essential



The quality of an assessment report can make a real difference to the success of an application for funding. The report needs to be accurate, based on evidence and should clearly identify the supports a student needs and explain why they need them.



Section 7 >

Guidelines for Good Practice >

Needs Assessment >

7.3 – 7.5 >

These are some examples of the sort of information which is usually contained in an assessment report:

- Students' requirements and recommendations should form the core of the report. This should be a description of the accommodations and supports needed and a clear explanation as to why they are needed
- Student details, name, date of birth, address, contact details, assessment date, assessor's details
- Educational profile including examination details
- Have attached any additional assessments such as psychological reports, dyslexia screening, literacy or numeracy assessments
- Nature of the presenting disability and it's impact on the students' academic performance
- Indicate how evidence to support assessment recommendations was gathered
- Recommendations which should be specific and bullet pointed in order of priority
- Any supporting evidence to back up recommendations

Example

A student with dyslexia has particular problems with short-term memory and information processing. This makes it difficult for him to consolidate information when preparing assignments. Mind mapping software, such as Inspiration, would enable him to organise relevant information so that it is more accessible.



It is good practice that students give written permission for psychological or medical reports to be passed to another party

Example – Online needs assessment



The Disability Support Service at Trinity College Dublin has developed a new disability database which incorporates an online needs assessment tool. The aim of this project is to develop a standardised disability database for use in disability support services nationwide. Incorporated into the database is an electronic online needs assessment tool which is completed when the student registers with the service. This online inventory allows the assessor to capture the student's academic experience to date and identifies the challenges students face in relation to the academic requirements of their course.

Recommendations for interventions cover three main areas:

1. Requested changes to the learning environment
2. Disability service supports
3. Examination accommodations

A needs assessment report is generated at the end of the process and support requirements disseminated to academic staff. Recommendations are also included on how to support students with different disabilities in the learning environment. (Source: Disability Support Service website www.tcd.ie/disability)

7.6 What are the key features of an assessment report?

According to the Standards on Needs Assessment (2007), an assessment report should be:

‘A comprehensive, evidence based, up to date and accurate record of the findings of the person’s assessment of needs’.



Here are some tips for good practice in the preparation of assessment reports:

- Individualised; the report should reflect the needs of the student being assessed, not those of others with similar disabilities
- Confidentiality; the information contained within the report needs to be restricted to a limited number of people, usually the assessor (s), student and the funding body
- Student ownership; this is the student’s report so it is important that they are fully aware of it’s contents and are given a copy
- The report should be based on evidence and facts and be accurate in it’s detail
- It should have a standardised format which makes it easier to access relevant information
- Be professionally presented and completed on time
- Use appropriate language
- Incorporate feedback to the student on the recommendations made
- Have clear pathways for the dissemination of support requirements to appropriate staff

(Appendix 1 includes an example of an assessment report with the permission of UCC)



Section 7 >
Guidelines for Good Practice >
Needs Assessment >
7.5 – 7.6 >

Example – Standardising practice



The aim of the ASCENT project at Athlone Institute of Technology (AIT) is to support the transition, progression and retention of students with specific learning difficulties in third level education. The project specifically addresses the need for standardisation in policy, procedure and practice across higher education institutions in Ireland in relation to student needs assessments and interventions. ASCENT has established a regional assessment and resource centre, which services other colleges in the region. An Educational Psychologist, based in AIT, carries out on-site assessments of students attending the five other colleges involved in the project. ASCENT services also include screening and diagnostic assessments and individual educational planning for students with specific learning difficulties. It is planned that, by the end of the project, assessment policies and practices across the five participating colleges will be standardised and that the selection and provision of supports for students will be enhanced through the development of evidence based best practice.

7.7 How are support requirements disseminated?

It needs to be ensured that students' needs are effectively communicated to appropriate staff.

Example



'Be it in primary level, second level or third level, I firmly believe that if we don't have an effective communication tool to the actual educator – then any service we are trying to provide is completely ineffective.' (Dyslexic tutor)

It is good practice to have a system in place for the dissemination of students' support requirements to relevant personnel across the college. This could involve, for example, informing the Examination Centre of what examination accommodations are needed or letting lecturers know if a student requires handouts or notes before the lecture.



The following are examples of how some colleges disseminate information:

- A list of students with disabilities is sent to a nominated Disability Officer in each department or faculty. They, in turn are responsible for disseminating the information to relevant staff.
- Some colleges have a system in place where students carry a or letter containing a short profile of their supports needs which they can pass to relevant staff at their discretion. However, feedback is that some students don't pass on the information so lecturers can be unaware that there is a student with a disability in their class. In response to this, one college gives the students a written statement to carry with them, thereby encouraging self-advocacy. However, they also send the information directly to

the heads of departments themselves to ensure they are made aware of the support requirements.

- A number of colleges have introduced documents that are based on the needs assessment which are disseminated to relevant staff.

Examples

- The Individual Educational Plan at National College of Art and Design and Institute of Art, Design and Technology
- The Individual Learning Requirements document at Tralee IT.
- The Learning and Educational Needs, Summary of Assessment Report (LENS) from Trinity College Dublin

(Appendix 2 is a copy of the Individual Learning Requirements document with permission of Institute of Technology Tralee)

Conclusion

Students with disabilities have a statutory right under the Disability Act (2005) to have an assessment of their educational needs and the provision of resources to meet those needs. The process of identifying student's needs through a comprehensive needs assessment, should result in a clear picture of what accommodations students need during the course of their study. The quality of an assessment and an assessment report can be critical to the success or failure of an application to the Fund for Students with Disabilities. Standardisation of assessment methodologies and reporting will provide greater clarity for those needing to understand and use assessment information. 'The person's contribution to the assessment of need is central' (Standards for assessment of needs, 2007) and it is important that there are clear structures in place for the management and dissemination of confidential information in relation to students.



Section 7 >
Guidelines for Good Practice >
Needs Assessment >
7.6 – 7.7 >



Section 8 > Assistive Technology – What are the benefits?



Section 8: Assistive Technology – What are the benefits?

8.0 What is Assistive Technology?

Assistive technology (AT) refers to any item or piece of equipment that can be used to increase a person's independence and make the environment more accessible. Assistive technology does not replace teaching support but rather complements it by providing students with tools which enable them to perform tasks more easily. There is now an extensive range of hi-tech and lo-tech equipment available to students in educational settings. Much of this equipment is now lighter, faster and more affordable than in the past.

Example

Assistive technology tools can range from the very simple, such as a calculator or magnifying glass, to sophisticated pieces of equipment or software

Why is assistive technology important for students with disabilities?

The last decade has seen huge advances in the development of a range of assistive technology devices that can be used to enable students to compete in an educational environment. New and developing technologies, especially in computer software, enable many students to learn through a wide range of media. The use of assistive technology in education can greatly increase student's standard of performance, gives a much greater range of choices for learning and enables them to compete on an equal footing with their peers.

Example

An Australian study on AT use found that students felt a greater sense of empowerment, independence and control over their learning as a result of using assistive technology. (Leung 1999)

Many of the functional problems experienced by people with disabilities in the past are now readily solved by simple technological solutions.

Example

A student with a visual impairment who needs large print copies of written materials can now obtain them by simply enlarging the font on the computer screen before printing.

Who can benefit from the use of assistive technology?

All students can benefit from the use of technological devices and tools which improve their learning skills. Alternative learners who experience functional gaps in their learning capacity because of a disability, can significantly bridge those gaps through the use of carefully selected assistive technological devices.

Students who have a physical disability

A wide range of physical conditions can limit mobility and/or dexterity. Some of these conditions can also impair strength, speed, endurance, balance or coordination. Those with hand coordination problems can experience difficulty with tasks requiring the use of fine motor skills, for example, holding a pen or manoeuvring a mouse.

Example

Some students may need adapted workstations or ergonomic chairs and desks. Others may need to use page-turners or wrist rests or may need to have a personal assistant available.



Students who have specific learning difficulties or dyslexia

Students with dyslexia are likely to be slow readers and can have particular difficulty with low frequency words and word recognition. Most people with dyslexia spell words as they sound and almost all of the characteristics associated with dyslexia are associated with poor short-term memory. As a consequence, students may experience problems in organising their work and taking notes whilst listening to lectures.

Example

Students with dyslexia can really benefit from using reading and mind mapping software to improve their language and problem solving skills.



Students who are deaf

The inability to communicate with ease is one of the most notable functions which are significantly affected by hearing loss. People who are deaf must function in an environment which is largely geared to sound. Access to information, which is communicated through sound, can therefore be greatly restricted.

Example

The availability of hearing loops in classrooms can be really helpful for students with hearing loss



Students who are blind or have a visual impairment

Some of the most significant effects of vision loss are a person's ability to perform everyday tasks such as reading and writing. Sight is one of the most used senses in learning and difficulties with reading can substantially affect a student's ability to absorb and manage complex information.



Section 8 >
Guidelines for Good Practice >
Assistive Technology >
8.o >

Example

Assistive tools such as screen readers and scanners can really benefit students who are blind or visually impaired.



Example – assistive technology resource area

A range of facilities are provided in the assistive technology service area within the library at National University of Ireland Galway. This space has been designed to offer a variety of study options and the aim is to provide an accessible environment to suit the needs of all students. The area is designed to be as user-friendly as possible. For example, wrist rests, adjustable footrests and desk lamps are all provided. Students also have the option of using a tracker-ball or joystick as an alternative to a mouse.

There are computers and scanners in each of the service's three sound-proof booths. In addition, five computers are located on height-adjustable desks in the open access area. All computers are linked to the university's network and some have specialist software. Scanners and a networked printer are also located in the open area. Users can borrow a Quicktionary Reading Pen, which will scan a word, spell, pronounce and define it. There are magnifiers available in the area and users have access to daylight reading lamps.



8.1 How are student's assistive technology needs assessed?

It is good practice that all students should undergo an assessment in order to determine their AT needs. Carrying out an assessment of AT needs will help identify what equipment is suitable for the student and will ensure a good match between the user and the assistive tool.

Deciding on the most appropriate technology can involve:

- A team approach to include input from technology, teaching and disability experts
- Training in the use of the selected technology
- A trial period of use for the student
- Consideration of the portability, cost and practicality of the equipment
- Examination of the skills required to operate the equipment
- A long-term focus on the AT skills the student will need to develop for use after college



Tips for carrying out an assistive technology assessment

An AT assessment needs to:

- Be based on the specific demands of the course to be undertaken
- Identify any difficulties being experienced and the impact of these difficulties on the student's learning

- Recognise that some students may not have the necessary IT skills. Knowledge gaps need to be identified and skills upgraded to the required standard
- Consider what strategies have or have not worked in the past
- Look at what resources are currently available
- Identify what new resources need to be put in place
- Identify what training needs to be provided
- Be carried out as soon as possible so that appropriate supports can be put in place at an early stage

What is involved in carrying out an AT needs assessment?

The following are some of the areas usually included in an AT assessment:

- A functional assessment of AT requirements
- An assessment of student's IT literacy
- An interview with the student
- A self assessment by the student
- A review of any existing assessment reports (with student's permission)
- Discussion with other team members
- Production of an assessment report or statement of AT needs



Case Study

Jane, a first year student with dyslexia, was referred to her college's Assistive Technology Officer for an assessment. Jane had poor writing and spelling skills and had difficulty articulating what she needed to say in written form. The Assistive Technology Officer completed a needs assessment with Jane and it was decided firstly, that she would need to improve her IT skills before being trained in using the software 'Dragon Naturally Speaking'

Jane was very happy with Dragon and gradually gained confidence in using it. As a result of her training, she has become proficient in using her laptop with the software when writing



Section 8 >

Guidelines for Good Practice >

Assistive Technology >

8.0 – 8.1 >

assignments and was the first person in her college to use this type of software during examinations. Jane feels that she has really benefited from using assistive technology

8.2 How are assistive technology services delivered?

There is a wide range of practice and models of service delivery in operation throughout institutions in Ireland. There are also different levels of staffing and resources available which has an impact on how the AT service is delivered.

Colleges currently deliver AT services in a variety of locations:

- Dedicated AT classrooms
- Libraries
- IT classrooms
- Mainstreamed throughout the campus
- Incorporated into classroom work
- On individual laptops

There are various combinations of staff involved in the delivery of AT services including information technology, library and technical staff.

The minimum level of support staff available usually comprises:

- Disability Officer
- Assistive Technology Officer
- Learning Support Tutor

The AT Officer is usually involved in the delivery of training, the sourcing and maintenance of equipment and the day to day maintenance and management of AT services to students.



These are some of the important components of an assistive technology service.

An AT service needs to involve:

- A multidisciplinary approach
- Input from the student
- Ongoing liaison between the various staff involved
- A student centred approach
- Ongoing evaluation of the service
- Systems for the dissemination of information
- Keeping up to date with new developments
- Mainstreaming where possible
- Systems for tracking students' use of the service

Example – Mainstreaming of assistive technology



Disability Support Services at University College Dublin have mainstreamed software such as Zoom text, Text Help and Mind Genius across the campus. Although this type of software was initially aimed at helping students with visual impairments or dyslexia, it has been found to also benefit the general student population. The mind mapping software Mind Genius, in particular, helps students to plan and organise their course work.

Mainstreaming the software has meant that students can now sit down anywhere on campus and access the network.

‘Mainstreaming is the key. The more students with disabilities you have sitting in the lecture hall, computer lab, library or common areas the better. It means that they are not isolated and are as much a part of university life as anyone else. That’s the key, that’s the goal’.
(AT officer, UCD)

8.3 What is the student’s role?

When students are actively involved in their learning, they are more likely to ‘buy into’ the process. This includes learning with the assistance of accommodations such as assistive technology. Currently, a significant percentage of students abandon the use of technological devices for a variety of reasons. Access to training and support is essential whilst learning to adapt to the complexity of a new piece of equipment or software.

Students also have certain responsibilities and an active role to play in optimising the success of AT interventions.



In order to maximise the success of AT accommodations, students need to:

- Actively participate in their needs assessment
- Avail of and attend relevant training
- Care for and return equipment
- Provide feedback to staff on any problems being experienced so that they can be addressed
- Participate in the development of strategies to resolve such difficulties



Section 8 >
Guidelines for Good Practice >
Assistive Technology >
8.2 – 8.3 >

Example – Service evaluation



As part of the evaluation process at the Institute of Art, Design and Technology, the Assistive Technology Officer carries out a short survey of student users of assistive technology. The aim of this survey is to evaluate how successful the technology has been in assisting students and to provide feedback on improving the service.

Information from this type of evaluation provides essential feedback for the future development of the service and also enables staff to monitor and track students' progress.

'You need to know what people are using and what is working well. There is an issue in AT called 'abandonment' where students stop using the equipment. A lot of effort goes into procuring and making diagnosis and less effort into following up, training, checking and testing how much the AT is being used' (Assistive Technology Officer)



Here are some tips for the delivery of an assistive technology service:

- It is considered good practice within the sector to have a nominated person who has responsibility for the assistive technology function on campus
- Training for students in the use of selected devices is essential in ensuring they are used most effectively

- Teaching staff would also benefit from training in the use of AT
- The effectiveness of AT interventions needs to be evaluated with the student so that adjustments can be made if required and abandonment of use avoided
- AT services need to be situated in accessible locations which, ideally, have flexible opening hours
- Mainstreaming of software throughout the campus makes it accessible to all students. It also ensures that the AT service is integrated into existing college structures rather than segregated in specialised classrooms
- Strategic planning and the implementation of an AT policy will assist the service to be delivered in a planned and systematic way

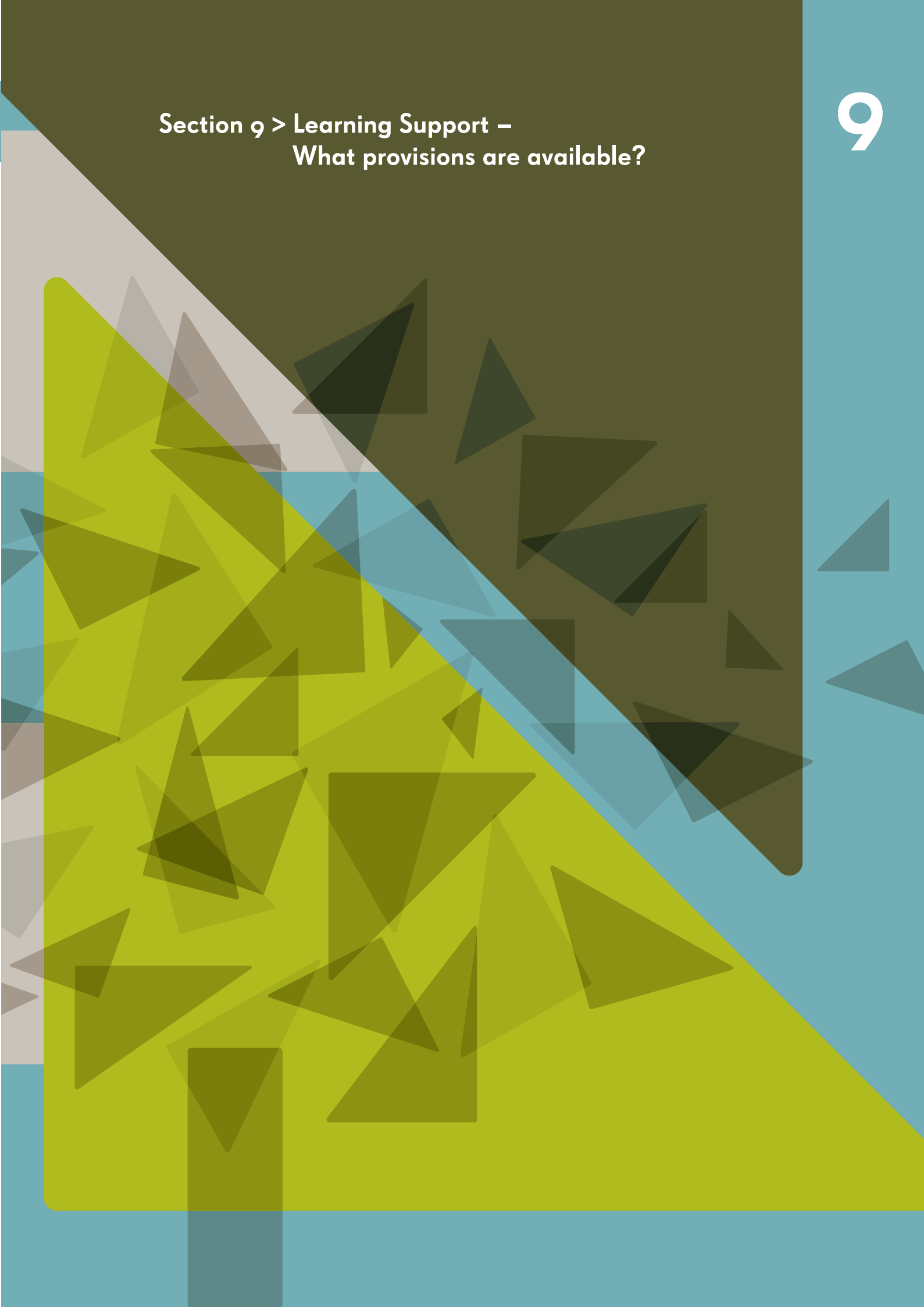
Conclusion

Developments in assistive technology have been rapid and life changing. Many students now have access to a wide range of systems and supports which makes it possible for them to learn and achieve at the same level as other students. Many of the systems which were developed for people with specific disabilities have been found to have applications for other users so are beneficial for all learners. Mainstreaming of AT services will help ensure that all students will benefit from AT resources.

(Appendix 2 includes examples of the various types of assistive technology devices available.)

(Appendix 3 gives details of assistive technology resources and suppliers)

**Section 9 > Learning Support –
What provisions are available?**



Section 9: Learning Support – What provisions are available?

9.0 Why do students need learning support?

The aim of learning support is to assist students with any difficulties they may encounter in the learning environment due to the impact of their particular disability. Learning support is about improving students' underlying learning skills and equipping them with the learning strategies they need to assist them through their course of study.

Learning support can benefit all students and is particularly important for new students who frequently struggle during their first year at college. This can be the case whether students have a disability or not. A practical approach works best and learning support works particularly well when it is relevant to the student's coursework. The needs assessment process is crucial in identifying student's learning support needs so that appropriate interventions can be put in place.

Learning support is not subject specific but rather focuses on the development of the sort of problem solving, organisational and study skills that all students need, particularly in their first year at college. Some students may need extra support in developing these skills because of the impact of their disability,

Example

"A total lack of knowledge of the academic requirements and demands at third level caused me great anxiety. I didn't know anything about referencing or how to go about finding the books and articles that I needed."

These are some of the skill areas typically covered through learning support:

- Study Skills
- Learning styles
- Note taking techniques
- Memory strategies
- Mind mapping
- Research skills
- Essay writing
- Task analysis
- Project planning and report writing
- Grammar and punctuation
- Referencing
- Revision techniques and examination strategies
- Time management
- Organisational skills and goal setting
- Problem solving skills and analytical thinking

Example – Screening for dyslexia

The National Learning Network at Institute of Technology Blanchardstown offers all first year students the opportunity to undergo a screening process aimed at identifying their individual learning style. Identifying whether students are visual, auditory or kinaesthetic learners enables staff to adapt their teaching strategies to suit the learning needs of individual students. This screening process also helps to identify students with specific learning disabilities who may not

have been identified in the past, thus ensuring that appropriate supports can be quickly put in place.

Students who have already indicated their disability on their CAO application and who have a psychological report are automatically referred for a needs assessment. Based on the findings of this assessment, the Institute co-ordinates a range of supports for the student, such as assistive technology, examination accommodations and tutorial support.

Learning support works best when it has a holistic and practical approach and Learning Support Tutors frequently work with students on developing self-help strategies such as:

- Stress management
- Relaxation techniques
- Improving concentration
- Motivation
- Referral to counselling

One of the main objectives of learning support is that students becoming independent learners. The first year is crucial therefore in the development of learning strategies and techniques which will benefit students throughout their course.

Example

'A lot of students with dyslexia receive their psychological assessment report, they know they have dyslexia but they are not aware of their learning strengths. A big part of the learning support role is to have the student focused in on their learning strengths' (Educational Psychologist)

Example – First year students learning support programme

University College Cork delivers a learning support programme to all first years students with disabilities registered with the college's Disability Support service.



Section 9 >

Guidelines for Good Practice >

Learning Support >

9.0 >

The programme includes briefing sessions and workshops on:

- Organisational skills
- Study methods and practices
- Learning strategies
- Essay and report writing guidelines
- Revision skills
- Library/research skills
- Examination techniques

The Academic Skills Development Programme is delivered in the first term of every academic year in a fully accessible location and it is mandatory for all first year students with disabilities to attend.

9.1 How do students access learning support?

Learning support is provided in a variety of ways in higher education institutions by Learning Support Tutors/Officers or by Dyslexia Tutors. Learning support is typically provided through the Disability or Access Office and is funded by the Fund for Students with Disabilities. In order to receive learning support, a student must be registered with the Disability or Access Officer although, in some cases, students will self refer during the year, or will be referred by a lecturer or tutor where a learning difficulty is identified.

The identification of learning difficulties process can be divided into three stages:

- **Pre-assessment and screening:** This is usually carried out by an experienced Learning Support Tutor or by a counsellor. A pre-assessment interview will be carried out and pre-screening counselling will be offered, if required. The screening process usually involves an interview to gather a case history and the administration of a screening test such as DAST or LADS.
- **A psychological assessment,** which should be carried out by qualified psychologist. Current regulations from the National Access Office require an external Educational Psychologist to undertake assessments so that there is no conflict of interest.
- **Individual needs assessment:** this can be carried out by a Learning Support/Dyslexia tutor with specialist knowledge and training in working with students with dyslexia and other learning difficulties. This will identify supports required by the student in order to fully access their course (Loftus, AHEAD, 2007)

Example – Learning Support Service at UCD

Disability Support Services at University College Dublin provide two forms of assessment for students, a preliminary screening and a needs assessment. Students identified as having a learning difficulty through the preliminary screening are offered group learning support sessions whilst waiting for a full diagnostic assessment. Preliminary screening is carried out by the learning support service.



The head of learning support services has developed a training manual for staff involved in the screening of students for learning difficulties.

The manual establishes:

- A timeframe for screening procedures covering six stages
- A code of practice for those carrying out screening assessments
- Includes a screening intake form to be completed by the student, giving background information on the nature of the learning difficulty



It is good practice to make students aware of the procedures to be undertaken during screening and assessment and to explain how the resulting information is to be used

Example – Learning support at Trinity College Dublin



At Trinity College Dublin, learning support is provided through the Academic Support Service, which is staffed by three tutors. The service, which was initially set up by the Disability Office to meet the needs of students with specific learning difficulties, deals with incoming, first year students.

Students are referred to the service by the Disability Officer and are required to have three compulsory sessions with a support tutor. The aim is to focus on building the learning skills of new students through their first year and to engage them with the service.

An evaluation of the service in 2006/7 showed that higher numbers of students were attending the service during the first term than in previous years due to the compulsory attendance requirement.



Section 9 >
Guidelines for Good Practice >
Learning Support >
9.0 – 9.1 >



It is good practice that learning support is provided through the mainstream of college activities so that all students can benefit

Example – mainstreaming of learning support

At Athlone Institute of Technology, an Academic Support Tutor is available to students on courses which contain large elements of Mathematics and Software Engineering. The tutor is available to all students but focuses mainly on first year students who are experiencing difficulty with these subject areas and are at risk of dropping out. Support is offered in the form of additional tuition which can be accessed on an individual or group basis. This support is also available over the summer to students who are repeating examinations in the tutor's subject area.

Part of the tutor's role is to attend student induction at the beginning of the academic year to explain the tutorial services available. The tutor is based in the Engineering Department but works closely with the Disability Officer and the Learning Support Tutor. The Disability Officer notes that there is no stigma attached to seeing the support tutor as many students attend the tutor for help. The support programme has been so successful that the college has implemented similar tutorial support in other departments.



The availability of learning support as part of the college's mainstream student service helps remove the stigma often associated with identifying oneself as needing help and demonstrates a greater degree of equality for students.

The provision of appropriate learning supports, when they are needed, can make a tremendous difference in building student's confidence and skills. Having these supports in place during the first year is an investment of time, which frequently results in students becoming independent and confident learners.

Example of a mainstream learning support service

The Writing and Research Support Service (WRSS) is a dedicated student support service based in the Institute of Art Design and Technology, Dun Laoghaire. A similar service operates in the National College of Art & Design. WRSS is a free on-campus service open to all students attending both colleges.

The aim of the service is to give support to students who are experiencing text related difficulties. The service therefore focuses on developing students' skills in areas such as essay writing, exam techniques, research skills and the writing of theses. Tuition is provided through group work and/or individual tutorials. The service is mainstreamed and available to ALL students although it provides tailored support for students who have a disability.



The service operates by offering three levels of support to students:

- 1) Individually tailored support for students with specific learning difficulties
- 2) Individual support sessions on a specific area of difficulty, such as essays, theses, or examinations
- 3) Group seminars focusing on basic study skills such as essay writing, time management, note taking and exam techniques

The WRSS service provides practical, hands on support which focuses on what is relevant to a student's course. Assistive technology training is included in the learning support tutorials and Learning Support Tutors work closely with teaching staff.

Conclusion

The provision of learning support is an example of the sort of accommodation that can make a real difference to students by providing them with the basic learning skills they need in order to succeed in higher education.

The availability of learning support as part of the college's mainstream student service helps remove the stigma often associated with identifying oneself as needing help and demonstrates a greater degree of equality for students.



[Section 9 >](#)

[Guidelines for Good Practice >](#)

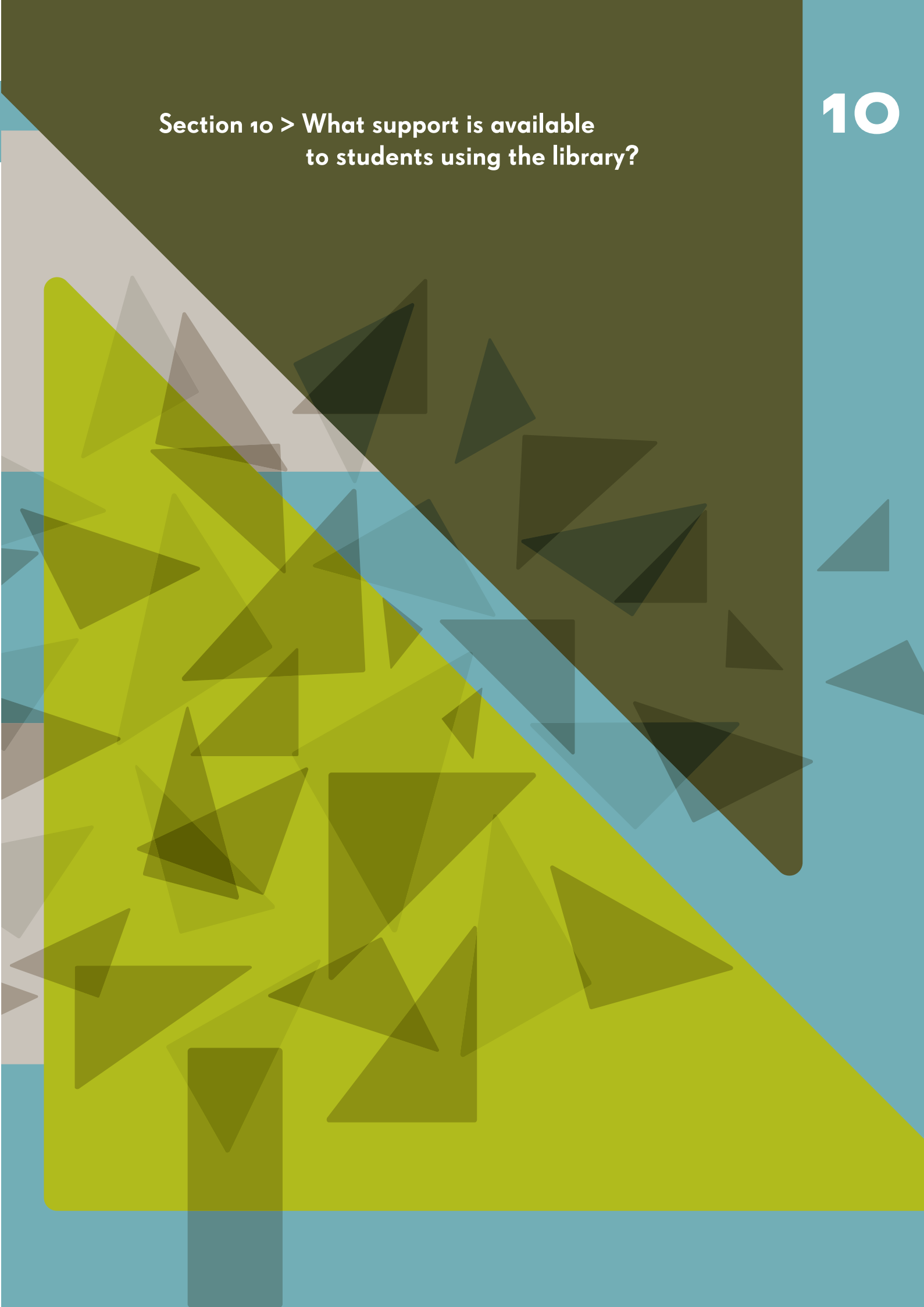
[Learning Support >](#)

[9.1 >](#)



**Section 10 > What support is available
to students using the library?**

10




Section 10: What support is available to students using the library?

10.0 Using the library – What do students need?

Using the library and its facilities is an essential part of student life. Having access to reading materials, photocopying and other services is a necessary part of preparing for assignments, assessments and examinations. Not being able to access library facilities or equipment can cause real problems and some students will need assistance and support from library staff.

Example



“Computer availability is a real problem. I have my own computer but it is very difficult to download blackboard notes from home. So this means having to go into college and queuing for long periods in the library. I would like to see a photocopier available for students in Disability Support Services as I find queuing in the library very difficult”...

Students with specific disability related requirements need to make themselves known to a member of the library staff to discuss appropriate accommodations to ensure maximum use of the facilities.



Did you know about Text Access?

Text Access is an AHEAD initiative, in collaboration with the Consortium of National and University Libraries, to deliver a centralised and comprehensive catalogue of resources for students with print disabilities at third level in Ireland.

The aim of this initiative is to provide a pool of resources and information for staff and students in higher education. It consists of three parts – the Union Catalogue, the Resource Guide and the Discussion List. The resources guide contains a range of useful information around alternative media and assistive technology, as well as links to key sites and external resources. The search engine enables students and staff to explore the catalogue of resources for all Irish institutions or to narrow the search to those resources held individually by each institution.

The search facility allows students to look for materials in alternative media such as:

- Tactile – Braille
- Electronic text
- Audio CD/cassette
- Large print

www.textaccess.ie

10.1 How can staff help?

The support provided for students with disabilities varies across different college libraries.



The following library facilities are provided in some, but not all, third level institutions in Ireland:

- **Reader service:** some of the larger institutions provide this service for students

- with disabilities. Texts are read and recorded on audio tape and kept in a catalogue to be used by students
- Some libraries provide a **specific room** where specialised equipment such as voice synthesisers, scanners and CCTVs are stored. This room can also be used for study purposes.
- **Extended lending:** some libraries offer extended lending time to students with disabilities. This provision needs to be negotiated on an individual basis with the library head.
- **Photocopying:** some libraries provide assistance with photocopying, freeing students with disabilities from queuing for this service. Students with disabilities may also receive reduced rates on photocopying cards.
- **Named member of library staff:** some libraries provide a support person for students with disabilities. This person can assist in locating books and journals and can also issue books to students. This service is offered where the library shelves or aisles are not accessible and is particularly useful for students with mobility limitations.



It is good practice for college libraries to have a designated person available to assist students with disabilities

Example – National University of Ireland, Maynooth Library

Margaret came to the attention of library staff as a first year student in 2006 when she made enquiries at the information desk. She was feeling frustrated about some aspects of the library service and with exams approaching, she needed to sort out these difficulties. Margaret has multiple sclerosis and since her balance is affected, she cannot stand for long periods. Queuing for the photocopier, reaching for books and walking therefore posed difficulties. For example, Margaret could not visit the library regularly enough to borrow and return short-term loan material on time.



Section 10 >
Guidelines for Good Practice >
Library Supports >
10.0 – 10.1 >

Margaret met with the Assistant Librarian to discuss her long-term needs and it was agreed that the library would facilitate Margaret by:

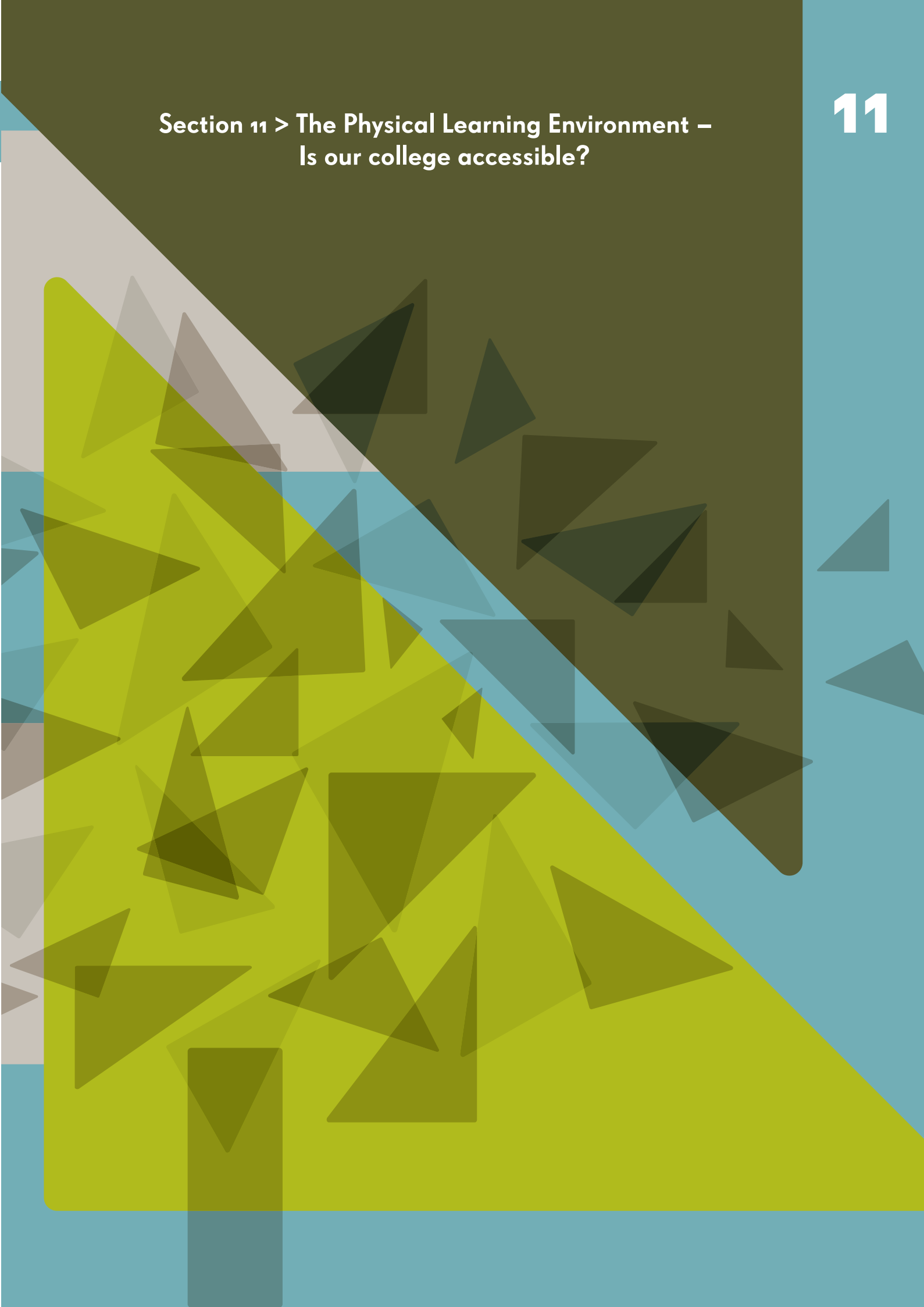
1. Providing assistance in getting books from the higher and lower shelves. Margaret was introduced to the shelving supervisor so that she knew who to contact.
2. Providing extended loans and waiving fines
3. Providing access to the assistive technology room where computer facilities are located

These reasonable accommodations enabled Margaret to deal with the disadvantage caused by her physical disability and allowed her to operate on a more equal basis with other students in accessing the library.

Conclusion

Using library facilities is an essential part of study and accessibility is an important issue. Aisles which are too narrow, books which are out of reach and long queues for services can present real obstacles to students with disabilities. Library staff are therefore an important source of assistance for students and can help ensure that they are able to access all the same services as other students.

**Section 11 > The Physical Learning Environment –
Is our college accessible?**



Section 11: The Physical Learning Environment – Is our college accessible?

11.0 The Physical Learning Environment – What are the issues?

The physical environment can present many challenges to students with disabilities. This is particularly the case in older buildings, which were not designed with accessibility in mind. The application of Universal Design principles in planning or refurbishing the built environment will ensure that buildings are accessible to all users.

Example

Universal Design refers to the design and composition of an environment so that it can be accessed, understood and used to the greatest extent possible by all people, regardless of their age, size or disability. (Disability Act, 2005)



Including students with disabilities in the day to day activities of student life is now considered to be good practice in education

The Disability Act (2005) now makes it a statutory requirement that people with disabilities have access to mainstream public buildings, facilities, information and services such as educational establishments. Colleges need to ensure that students with disabilities have access to the same physical learning environment as other students. This includes all buildings and facilities in which students study, live or socialise.



Here are some tips on physical access in institutions:

Institutions need to have:

- Designated car parking spaces for disabled drivers
- Ramps or level entrances into buildings
- Wheelchair accessible doors throughout premises, including lifts, toilets and emergency exits
- Lifts to all floors
- Clear and accessible signage throughout the campus
- Adapted toilets and showers
- Accessible classrooms, laboratories and lecture theatres
- Tables, sinks and laboratory benches at a height suitable for all users
- Flashing as well as auditory alarm systems

(Adapted from Building for Everyone, National Disability Authority, 2002)

Example

‘Its so frustrating and tiring trying to get to lectures on time. The building is so old and there are miles of corridors, all with doors which need to be opened. Having doors which open automatically would make such a difference’.



11.1 How do we ensure that classrooms are accessible?



The following tips may be helpful in ensuring that the classroom environment is as accessible as possible to all learners:

- Plan timetables so that students with mobility problems have time to get from one class to another
- Provide adequate lighting in classrooms, particularly where there are students who need to lip read or when sign language interpreters are present
- Arrange seating so that all students can hear and see the presenter and other students
- Provide loop systems in classrooms and laboratories
- Minimise background noise from fans, equipment, heating and ventilation systems
- Ensure that students who need to use assistive technology during classes are seated close to power points
- Leave adequate space for wheelchair users and guide dogs
- Remember that some students may not be able to use stairs
- Be flexible around the location of classes and be prepared to relocate if the existing location proves to be inaccessible
- Ensure that emergency evacuation procedures include students who are not mobile
- Provide alternative fire alarms for students who are deaf

Example – Improving campus accessibility

Disability Support Services at University College Cork have been working with various partners, within the college and in the community, to make the campus as accessible as possible to all users. This type of collaboration has resulted in a number of positive developments.



Section 11 >

Guidelines for Good Practice >

Physical Learning Environment >

11.0 – 11.1 >

1. A joint project between UCC and the Irish Wheelchair Association involves a service to transport students from their accommodation to various sites around the campus. In 2004/05, more than sixty students with physical and sensory disabilities used the service which operated an average of twenty trips daily
2. Electronic guiding systems have been installed in a number of buildings to guide visitors to entrance areas.
3. Alert systems for students who are deaf have been installed in campus accommodation



The following are some good practice guidelines in relation to physical access

Institutions need to:

- Have procedures in place for identifying the access needs of individual students
- Have policies and procedures for ensuring that access requirements are incorporated into the planning of new buildings or the refurbishment of existing ones
- Carry out an access audit of all buildings and identify areas for remedial action
- Include physical access improvement in strategic planning and budgeting
- Incorporate Universal Design principles in any building or refurbishment developments

Example – Access Audit



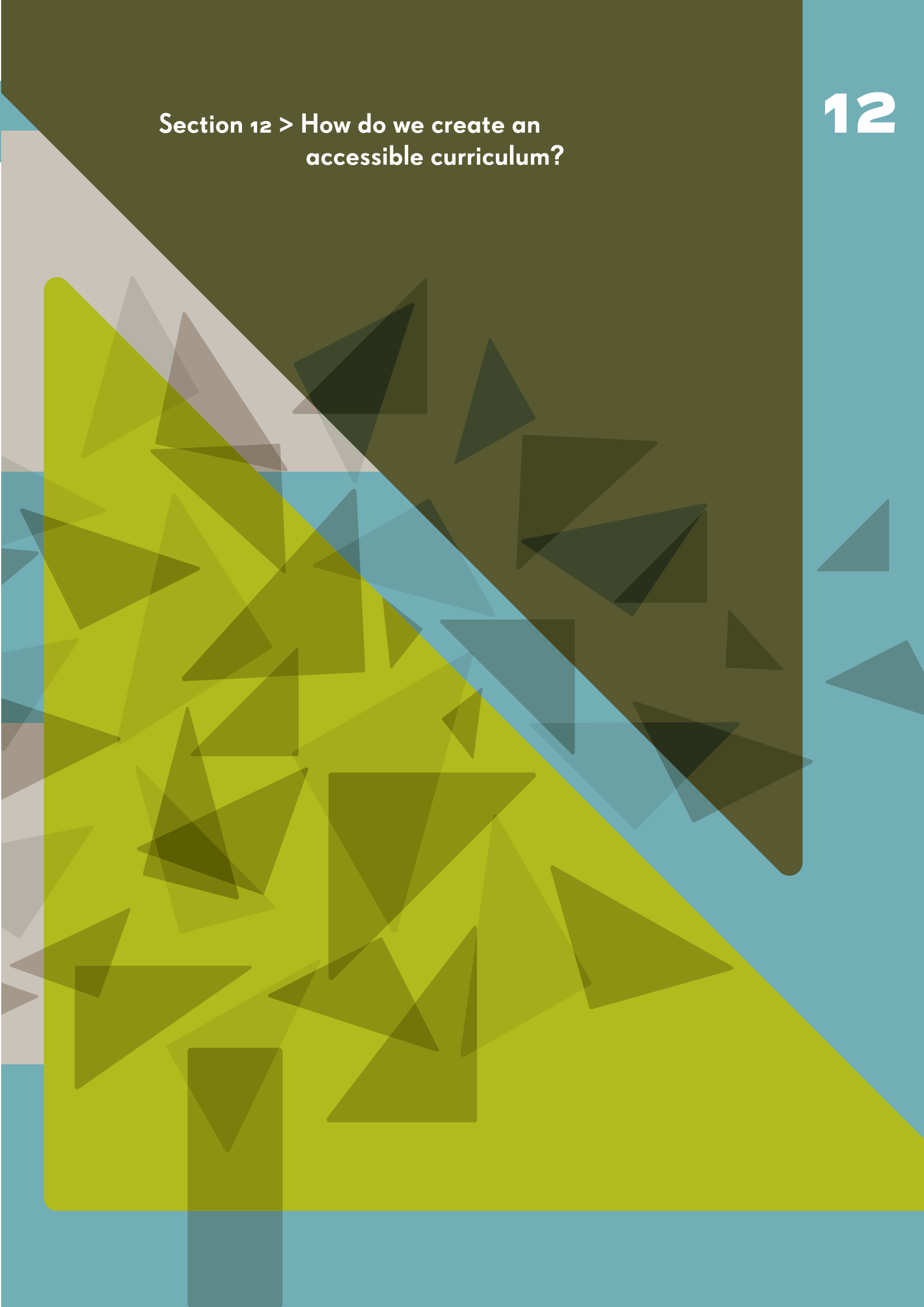
The disability support website at Trinity College Dublin includes an accessibility checklist as a result of a campus wide access audit. The purpose of this checklist is to establish the accessibility of each room and building on the campus, and looks at factors such as equipment, seating, space and lighting. This provides information for students and lecturers on how accessible a venue is.

(Source: www.tcd.ie/disability/accessibility/building)

Conclusion

Physical access to the educational environment is a key requirement for students with disabilities. Inaccessible buildings, classrooms, laboratories and other facilities make it difficult for these students to avail of the complete range of educational opportunities. The Disability Act (2005) has placed this issue firmly on the agenda by its requirement that all public buildings become accessible by the year 2015. This gives institutions adequate time to incorporate the use of Universal Design principles in the planning of any new developments or the refurbishment of existing buildings.

Section 12 > How do we create an
accessible curriculum?



Section 12: How do we create an accessible curriculum?

12.0 How do we create an accessible curriculum?

It has become increasingly common that student groups participating in higher education will now include people with a range of disabilities and a variety of learning needs. In addition, there has been a growth in the number of students participating in science based courses involving laboratory work and field trips. The challenge now is to offer a curriculum which is accessible and relevant for individuals with different learning styles and abilities in a variety of locations and environments. This means ensuring that accessibility and inclusive practices become embedded into the delivery of courses to all students in line with the requirements of the Disability Act (2005).



It is good practice and a requirement of the Disability Act to provide essential information in alternative formats:

This extends to:

- Promotional materials, college prospectus and syllabi
- Information packs and induction materials
- Information on supports and technical services available
- Health and safety information, including emergency evacuation procedures
- Website material
- Reading lists
- Course materials

- Examination papers
- Policies and procedures

Planning and adjustments may be needed in the following areas:

- Course design
- Course delivery
- Assessment methods
- Examinations

12.1 How do we design course materials which are accessible?

Making the curriculum accessible often requires only minor adjustments and the results can benefit all students.

Keeping presentations simple and presenting information in small 'chunks' can make it easier for many students to access and absorb.



Employing Universal Design principles and inclusive strategies in the design of courses will ensure that the curriculum is barrier free.

The following tips may be helpful when designing course materials:

- Meet with students to identify what accessible formats are required and what technology is being used
- Make lecture notes and handouts available on website or electronically

- When using Power point slides or overhead transparencies, use a minimum font size of 18
- Fonts such as Arial or Comic Sans are easier to read for some students
- Limit the amount of information used on overheads to a maximum of six points
- Break continuous text up by using paragraphs and bullet points
- Use 'bold' to highlight points rather than underlining them
- Keep text to a minimum, use bullet points rather than sentences
- Use simple diagrams or visual cues 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 the presentation
- Use dark text on a light background for bright rooms and light text on a dark background for dark rooms

What factors do we need to consider when planning a course?

'The key element in curriculum planning is to forge strong links between planned educational intentions, course content, teaching and learning methods and the assessment of student learning while taking full account of student characteristics.'
(UniAbility, 1993)



[Section 12 >](#)

[Guidelines for Good Practice >](#)

[An Accessible Curriculum >](#)

[12.0 – 12.1 >](#)



The following tips may be useful when planning the delivery of a course:

- Identify the core learning requirements and demands of the course
- Ensure that students are aware of these key learning requirements
- Identify any inherent barriers in the course to students with disabilities
- Identify any adaptations to teaching practice which would make the course more accessible
- Consider how flexible the course is in terms of attendance, time extensions and transfer to alternative programmes

(Teachability 2000)

How do we include new students?

Going to college involves having to negotiate new environments and adjusting to new practices and people. Some students may have difficulty understanding what is required in terms of their standard of work and in adjusting to the demands of becoming an independent learner.



Providing the following accommodations can make all the difference to new students:

- Orientation to the college and the classrooms is good practice and can help minimise student's anxiety
- Course induction will ensure that students are aware of the demands of the course and the standards upon which their work will be assessed

- Ensure that reading lists and course syllabi are made available as early as possible
- Identify student needs at an early stage so that accommodations can be put in place
- Ensure that new students are aware of the supports available to them and know how to access them

Example

'I thought that I would be prepared for university but now feel that I am out of my depth. I don't know what I am supposed to be aiming for, let alone how to get there'.



Example – Transferring to higher education

In transferring to higher education, students with a disability are supported by NUI Galway's Disability Support Service which offers pre-entry advice, one-to-one interviews at the point of entry and a targeted introductory course which includes an induction pack, information on the Fund for Students with Disabilities, an introduction to PC suites and instruction on the use of assistive technology. This is complemented by an intensive induction programme which is run in conjunction with the Mature Students Office, combining seminars on study skills, applied writing, creative visualisation and memory techniques, in addition to familiarisation sessions with various college services. Top up courses in areas such as IT and study skills are also available.



12.2 Course delivery – How do we make learning accessible?

The learning environment can sometimes be difficult to access, particularly for those students who do not learn in conventional ways. Some preparation and adjustments to teaching practice may be needed and staff may, at times, need to think 'outside the box'. Presenting materials and classes in ways which are user friendly and accessible will benefit all students, not just those with disabilities.

Making a course accessible to all students can be as simple as remembering to always face the class when speaking. Other, more complex adjustments may also be required and these will be identified through the needs assessment. Organising accommodations can take time so this needs to be planned for.

Example

John is a blind student in his first year of study on an Arts degree course. At the beginning of term, John's lecturer e-mailed him the course reading list, indicating which core texts he should focus on. He also e-mails John before each lecture, attaching the handouts or lecture notes, which are to be used in class. John uses the reading software Dragon Naturally Speaking to access visual materials used in class and to prepare for lectures. These accommodations mean that John is able to keep up with his coursework and compete on an equal level with other students in his class.



Here are some tips on making learning accessible:

- Make reading lists available well in advance. This will be beneficial for students with dyslexia and will also allow time for required reading to be translated into Braille or copied onto disc or tape for students who are blind



Section 12 >

Guidelines for Good Practice >

An Accessible Curriculum >

12.1 – 12.2 >

- Keep reading lists focused and direct students to key texts and online documents
- Ensure that core texts are available in alternative formats
- Give instructions both orally and in written form for the benefit of students who are blind or deaf
- Write down any new terminology, unfamiliar technical terms or key concepts
- Make class notes and handouts available in advance and/or electronically
- Face the class and avoid walking around whilst speaking
- Keep communication simple, use demonstration and give concrete examples whenever possible
- Classroom seating needs to be arranged in order to maximise students' ability to see and hear
- Encourage the use of laptops, tape recorders or other assistive technology
- Ensure that there is designated space available for students who need to sit at the front of the class

How can we make learning accessible for students who are deaf or hearing impaired?

People who are deaf are likely to miss out on a lot of everyday opportunities to learn and absorb information. The main difficulty experienced by students who are deaf, therefore is likely to be related to language. Since most courses are taught through the spoken word, lectures and tutorials can pose particular problems.

Example

Students who are deaf will find it difficult to lip read and take notes at the same time.



Here are some tips for the classroom:

- Explain unfamiliar terminology or technical terms. Interpreters may need to work with students in devising signs for new vocabulary or concepts
- Write new words down and use examples to explain new ideas
- Summarise information frequently to reinforce learning
- Allow students more time to absorb new information and to take notes. Students who lip read can miss a lot of what is being said
- Remember that sign language interpreters need time to translate what is being said
- Make it clear when you are moving on to a new topic to avoid confusion
- Write down important information and key points
- Use visual cues such as charts and diagrams wherever possible
- Make sure that the lighting in the classroom is adequate and arrange seating so that students can see other people's faces
- Reduce background noise as much as possible
- Use audio loops wherever possible

- Speak clearly and use Plain English
- Invite regular feedback from students to ensure that they are following what is going on

How can we make learning accessible for students who are blind or visually impaired?

Since sight is one of the most used senses in learning, its absence can have a significant impact on a person's education. Some of the effects of vision loss include the person's ability to perform such everyday tasks as reading and writing. These difficulties, in turn, can influence the student's capacity to manage and absorb large amounts of detailed or complex information.



Here are some tips for the classroom:

- Convey information orally as well as in written form
- Encourage the use of assistive technology devices for recording lectures
- Provide large print copies of classroom materials if needed
- Be flexible with assignment deadlines as it can take a student with a visual impairment up to 50% longer to complete a written assignment
- Front seats may need to be reserved for low-vision students and magnified print may need to be used.
- If a guide dog is being used, it will be highly disciplined but will require some additional space
- Ensure that core learning texts are available in alternative formats such as Braille or audio tape
- Plan field trips or external activities well in advance and alert supervisors as to what arrangements may be needed
- Consider alternative assignments that allow students to demonstrate their knowledge of the subject matter if a specific task is not possible



Section 12 >
 Guidelines for Good Practice >
 An Accessible Curriculum >

12.2 >



Case Study – Making the curriculum accessible for a student with a visual impairment

Mark was a first year student on a music degree course, the first student with a visual impairment in the Music Department. The college's Disability Officer met with the head of the department to discuss how they could accommodate Mark's needs on the course. The main concern was how he was going to access course materials in class and complete assignments. They spent time examining the course modules with Mark to see where he was liable to encounter most difficulty. The Disability Officer was able to advise on the type of resources available through the Fund for Students with Disabilities.

A plan was devised for the coming year to include assistive technology and tutorial support. The software 'Talk Music' was sourced for Mark, which made it possible for him to access the music scores which formed part of the course learning material. The music lecturer entered the scores into Talk Music weekly and e-mailed them to Mark so that he could prepare for his classes and assignments. Mark also had individual preparatory tutorials, which enabled him to keep up with the rest of the class.

Mark is now in his final year, vice president of the college's music society and a successful student in all aspects of college life. Staff believe that the key to success lay in the early preparation and planning which took place with Mark prior to the start of the course and to the expertise of the Disability Office. Finding ways of making the curriculum accessible to a student with a visual impairment proved to be a valuable learning experience for everyone involved.

How can we make learning accessible for students with dyslexia?

Students with dyslexia will be required to do a number of things at once during classes; listen, write, and summarise, all of which they will need to do quickly. It may be difficult for some students to keep up with note taking or to copy written material. All students will benefit from the sort of teaching practice which best suits those with dyslexia, particularly those for whom English is a second language.



Here are some tips for the classroom:

- Use coloured paper rather than white to avoid glare and keep backgrounds plain
- Use a clear, large font such as Ariel or Comic Sans and bold rather than underline text
- Keep text simple and break it down well into paragraphs, using bullet points and clear headings
- Use graphs, flowcharts, diagrams and other visual cues
- Print clearly and avoid writing in red
- Briefly review the previous class and give an overview of the one to be delivered
- Provide copies of notes and overheads and limit the amount of information on each page
- Briefly annotate reading lists
- Break complex topics into smaller, simpler sections
- Avoid unnecessary jargon

- Use a practical, multi sensory approach to cater to the student's learning style by using group projects, video presentations and practical exercises
- Encourage students to use assistive technology devices during lectures
- Highlight patterns or themes in subject matter as this enables students to associate ideas
- Encourage students to use mind mapping techniques when taking notes
- Encourage students to ask questions and if necessary, re-explain complex material using simpler language



Case study – Student with dyslexia

Steven, a third year student with severe dyslexia was required to make a presentation to his class as part of one of his course modules. This was an important assignment as the results were to go towards his final marks. Steven prepared the presentation on his laptop but the information contained on the slides had a lot of incorrect spellings and Steven lost some marks for the assignment. His reading skills are also poor so he had great difficulty in making the presentation in front of his class.

Steven's lecturer was aware of issues surrounding dyslexia as a result of his contact with the college's dyslexia tutor and through training workshops run by Disability Support Services. This increased his knowledge of the impact of dyslexia on a student's work. Rather than fail Steven, the lecturer allowed him to make his presentation again to him in private.

How can we make learning accessible for students with physical disabilities?

A wide range of physical conditions can limit a person's mobility and/or their hand function. Some of these conditions can also impair strength, speed, endurance, coordination and dexterity.



Section 12 >

Guidelines for Good Practice >

An Accessible Curriculum >

12.2 >

Example

Physical access is a major concern for students with a physical disability and some may have difficulty in getting to and from class or managing out of class assignments and tests.



Here are some tips for the classroom:

- Access issues need to be discussed with students at an early stage and suitable arrangements put in place for attending classes
- 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
- Be prepared for a change of classroom or building if no other solution is possible
- Staff need to be familiar with the building's emergency evacuation plan for students who have problems with mobility
- Space needs to be reserved at the front of the classroom for wheelchair users
- Some students may need to be accompanied to class by a personal assistant
- Work stations which are too high or which have insufficient room for knee clearance need to be modified or replaced with portable work stations.
- Students with hand-function impairments may find it difficult to use

the library for reading or research. Arrangements for assistance may need to be made with library staff for access to card indexes, bookshelves, microfiche and other equipment

- Some students may need assistance with the manipulation of documents or note taking so page-turners or wrist rests may be needed
- Encourage students to use assistive technology devices for recording lectures. Some students may need to use a note taker
- Make copies of lecture notes and handouts available
- Allow extra time for written assignments to be completed if necessary

How can we make learning accessible for students with cognitive difficulties?

Some students may experience cognitive difficulties as a result of a brain injury, intellectual disability or dyslexia. Some individuals can experience problems associated with memory, abstract thinking, attention or the processing of complex information. People with cognitive difficulties can find it difficult to adjust to new settings, such as moving to college.



Here are some tips for the classroom:

- Restructure tasks or assignments so that they include only the essential functions
- Break down large or difficult assignments into smaller steps
- Keep the classroom environment simple and reduce distractions such

as noise, harsh lighting and clutter

- Plan to reduce interruptions when working on new concepts or material with the student
- Use short, simple sentences in Plain English where possible
- Present information in a sequence
- Avoid words with double meanings and double negatives
- Use active rather than passive constructions
- Break down tasks into sub-tasks and present them one at a time
- Teach students how to analyse and break down tasks themselves so that they can learn independently
- Provide ongoing feedback for positive reinforcement
- Use practical, hands on demonstrations where possible
- Give instructions one step at a time and frequently check the student's understanding of the subject matter
- Work with students in developing memorising strategies and encourage them to use mind-mapping techniques
- Gradually build up the amounts of information you give in order to increase the student's attention span
- Provide repetition, demonstrate new tasks and give concrete examples to explain
- Give the student more time to complete assignments and examinations
- Allow the student to tape record lectures or use a laptop computer
- Break down information and present it in 'chunks', e.g., AB CD EF rather than ABCDEF
- Use visual cues, colour coding and labels where appropriate
- Point out associations, links and connections



Section 12 >

Guidelines for Good Practice >

An Accessible Curriculum >

12.2 >

How can we make learning accessible for students with mental health difficulties?

The provision of appropriate accommodations in the learning environment can help students with mental health problems to stay motivated and to seek help when they need it. Some students may find it difficult to cope with the demands of study but most problems can be resolved or at least minimised so as to enable students to remain on their course.

Example

I found getting assignments completed on time very difficult, particularly at the end of term when everything came together at once. I can only concentrate on one thing at a time and found it difficult to focus on three or four assignments at the same time.'



Here are some tips for the classroom:

- Spread the workload so that there are not too many deadlines occurring at the same time
- Some flexibility around deadlines for assignments may be required. This needs to be negotiated and agreed with individual students
- Large groups can be daunting, but working in pairs may help reduce isolation
- Agree work to be carried out at home if the student needs to discontinue the course for a period of time
- Allow students to record lectures if needed

- Negotiate targets if timekeeping or attendance is a problem
- Discuss with students what strategies worked well for them in the past
- Make the student aware of the available supports, such as counselling services

Example

'I sometimes find it very hard to motivate myself to do my assignments. I find the responsibility of having to get things done in a tight timeframe very daunting'.



12.3 What about courses delivered through virtual learning?

Advances in educational technologies have brought new media for learning. Examples are e-learning or distance learning which have become popular alternative ways of delivering courses. This type of delivery has the potential to give students with disabilities access to a greater range of educational opportunities.

Online learning can be used to:

- Deliver course content
- Publish course content such as lecture notes, handouts and timetables
- Facilitate communication and provide a forum for student discussion
- Assess students work

Here are some of the advantages of virtual learning

- Students can become more independent learners
- There is less reliance on the assistance of helpers such as library staff or note takers.
- Being able to submit work electronically is much more efficient for many students
- Communication can be improved through the use of e-mail and discussion forums
- Materials can be adapted to the student's preferred format through changing font size, background or colour
- Course material such as lecture notes and reading lists can be accessed online by students who have difficulty accessing print material. Making lecture notes available will also benefit those students who find it difficult to listen and take notes at the same time.
- The ability to work from home through, for example, distance learning, provides opportunities to people who would otherwise find it difficult to attend higher education courses.

(Adapted from Guidelines for Accessible Online Courses, UNSW 2001)

How can I ensure accessibility when using online learning?

As online delivery becomes more common, so too does the need to design and deliver electronic materials which are accessible to all users. Websites need to be designed for accessibility and the web content must also conform to certain accessibility specifications.



Here are some tips on accessible website design:

- Make appropriate but not excessive use of images, graphics, icons and other visual cues to illustrate points
- Ensure that all graphics, figures, and other illustrations include a text equivalent



Section 12 >

Guidelines for Good Practice >

An Accessible Curriculum >

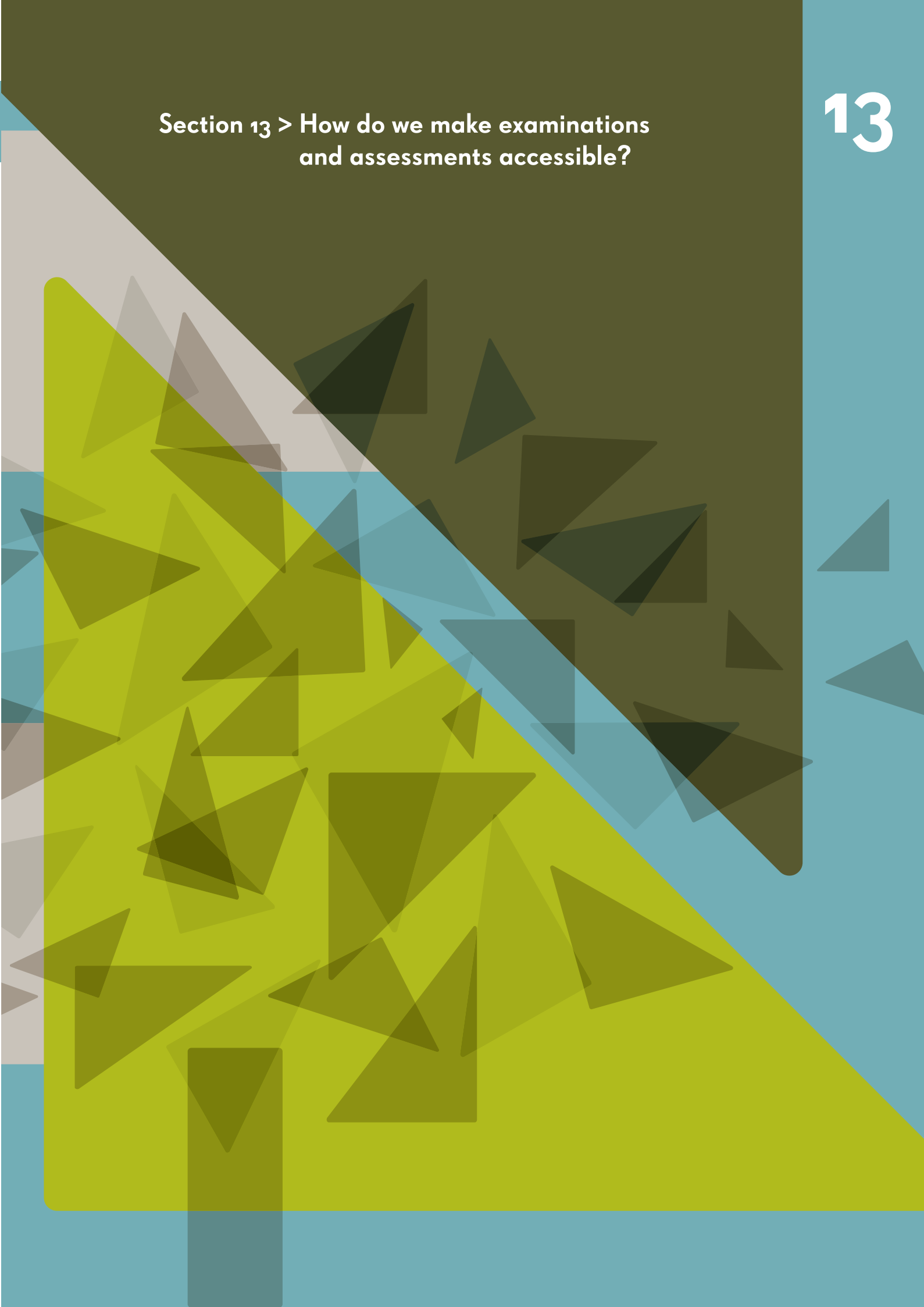
12.2 – 12.3 >

- Organise the content to take account of the transition to an online environment
- Use the features provided by WebCT to organise and structure course content.
- Use headings, lists and summaries
- Make PDF and other 'read only' file formats accessible.
- Be aware of the limitations of screen readers in interpreting unusual text, characters and abbreviations.
- Ensure appropriate use of colours and contrasts in screen design
- Provide alternative sources of information for video or audio

Conclusion

Making the curriculum accessible for all students can involve thinking in alternative ways and examining current practices. The challenge is to find ways of enabling students to demonstrate their competence without compromising academic standards. This may require focusing on the essential competences required by courses and considering using practical rather than theoretical demonstration of ability. Flexibility is all important in creating learning environments and curricula which are accessible to all students.

**Section 13 > How do we make examinations
and assessments accessible?**



Section 13: How do we make examinations and assessments accessible?

13.0 How can we make assessments and examinations accessible?

Assessments and examinations are stressful events as their results can have a significant impact on a student's future direction. The purpose of assessing or examining students' course work is to measure their progress against the academic standards and objectives of their chosen course. Methods of assessing and examining students' learning outcomes are generally in traditional formats. Should these formats prevent students from accurately demonstrating their skills and knowledge, they could be viewed as being discriminatory.

Some students, for example, may be unable to demonstrate their ability through conventional methods of assessment and reasonable accommodations will need to be made. Institutions need to adopt inclusive practices such as alternative means of assessing and examining students' work against the objectives of the course so as to minimise the impact of disability on their performance.



"Assessment and examination policies, practices and procedures should provide disabled students with the same opportunity as their peers to demonstrate the achievement of learning outcomes"

(QAA Code of Practice, 1999)

Alternative assessment and examination strategies, which take into account individual learning considerations, will remove many of the barriers to enable students to perform at their best and demonstrate their true ability.

Example

Students, who are unable to write need to have access to a scribe to write on their behalf.



What steps do we need to take?

- Identify areas for accommodation through a needs assessment
- Plan the assessment process in advance
- Provide students with a description of the assessment process so that they know what is expected of them
- Inform students of the total marks attached to the course and how they are allocated

13.1 What alternative forms of assessment are available?

Students can demonstrate their competence in a variety of ways and there are numerous strategies available for assessing a students' progress.



Some of the alternative methods of assessing learning outcomes identified by the QAA Subject Benchmark include:

- Continuous assessment
- Multiple choice tests
- Electronic presentations on CD or Website
- Design tasks
- Portfolios, workbooks or learning logs
- Analytical exercises
- Video presentations
- Practical projects
- Documented evidence
- Laboratory or fieldwork reports
- Classroom presentations
- Research projects
- Data interpretation
- On-line assessments
- Work experience reports
- Peer assessment
- Viva voce
- Cloze exercises
- Audio tapes
- Scoring grids



Section 13 >
Guidelines for Good Practice >
Accessible Examinations >
13.0 – 13.1 >



Here are some tips to bear in mind when assessing student's work:

- Consider alternative assignments that allow students to demonstrate their knowledge of the subject matter if a specific task is impossible for them to carry out
- Students who are deaf may need to have questions and answers interpreted by a sign language interpreter
- Students who are blind may need to be assessed orally or may need to use screen reading software
- Some blind students may need to use a reader during assessment
- Some students may need to be assessed in a separate location from other students

13.2 Examinations – How do we prepare students?

Examinations are stressful events for all students and being prepared is the key to examination success. Some students may have difficulty in understanding examination questions and formats and will need assistance. Students need to be focused in their revision and need to have a plan in place for the management of the examination itself.



What sort of strategies are useful?

- Establishing a schedule for short-term, mid-term and long-term planning goals
- Reviewing past examination papers, together with course handouts and overviews
- Rehearsing the reading and interpretation of questions, for example, by using the SCORER acronym (Scheduling time, searching for Clue words, Omitting difficult questions, Reading carefully, Estimating time for answers and Reviewing work)
- Helping students to plan possible examination answers, using past papers as a guide
- Encouraging students to use highlighter pens to pick out key words in questions as they read them
- Introducing students to mind-mapping concepts, which can be used to help them organise key information in a visual format
- Encouraging students to proof-read their answers critically, using a checklist of 'personal errors'
- Giving students the opportunity to rehearse sticking to a strict timeframe by answering past exam questions under timed conditions
- Agreeing an emergency plan, such as using bullet points, if time management fails

13.3 How can we accommodate students during examinations?

The need to examine academic achievement is an integral part of the educational experience. Some students may need accommodations such as alternative examination venues, time allowances or examination papers presented in alternative formats so that they are not disadvantaged in examination settings.

Example

Students who require the use of assistive technology in the classroom will need the same support in an examination situation.



Examinations are central to the academic process and students with disabilities are encouraged to request appropriate supports and accommodations for examinations at the beginning of each academic year.

Example: Limerick Institute of Technology

The Access Office at Limerick Institute of Technology has integrated the responsibility for examination accommodations for students with disabilities within the Examinations Department. After needs assessments have been completed by the Access Service, examination accommodations will be entered onto the student information system – Banner.

Banner includes a specific form for recording individual students' accommodation requirements. The Examinations Department coordinates the implementation of all examination accommodations and there is a designated person within the department who is responsible for making these arrangements.



Section 13 >
Guidelines for Good Practice >
Accessible Examinations >
13.1 – 13.3 >



Here are some tips on
alternative methods of
presenting examinations:

Accommodating students who are blind or visually impaired

These students may require:

- Examination papers in Braille formats
- Laptop computer with screen reading software
- Closed circuit television where the examination paper is placed under a monitor and an enlarged version appears on screen
- Provision of a reader
- Examination papers on audiotape
- Examination papers through personal computer in large font format
- Dictation of answers to audiotape or scribe
- Examination papers in electronic format

Accommodating students with dyslexia

Whereas certain examination features cannot be eliminated, institutions can help minimise the impact of dyslexia on examination performance by:

- Avoiding complex language in examination questions and clearly separating questions on the examination paper
- Offering some extra time – on average 10 minutes for every exam hour – to compensate for the additional effort students with dyslexia need to put into reading, writing and recalling memorised information

- Opting for multiple choice or short answer questions rather than questions which require essay type answers
- Avoiding answer sheets, particularly computer forms, which pose particular difficulties for students with perceptual difficulties
- Allowing students to use a dictionary, hand-held spelling checker or personalised list of spellings
- Printing examination questions in enlarged font and on shaded paper, such as light blue or pink, to eliminate the glare that can arise from traditional black text on a white background
- Enabling students to use a quiet room to minimise the risk of distractions
- Allowing students to record their answers orally while still providing skeletal notes to show planning and structure
- Permitting the use of examination questions on audio tape
- Allowing students the use of a computer, ideally one with voice recognition software, so that they can explain their answers orally and edit them on screen
- Permitting students to use a scribe to write down answers
- Allowing students to view examination papers in advance and have unfamiliar words explained to them
- Giving a grammar allowance to compensate for the student's specific learning disability in relation to spelling and grammar

Accommodating students who are deaf or hard of hearing

The provision of adequate communication channels for students who are deaf or hard of hearing is fundamental to ensuring equality of access to examination procedures.

Invigilation

Instructions given by invigilators during examinations can be made accessible by:

- The use of a sign language interpreter (if the student uses sign language or is being examined orally)
- Facing the students and speaking clearly (if the student lip reads)
- Producing all examination instructions in writing and in Plain English
- The use of an FM hearing system or induction loops



Case Study – student with hearing impairment

Dave is a first year Mechanical Engineering student who has a profound hearing impairment. His first language is Irish Sign Language (ISL). The college facilitated access to sign language interpretation for Dave in classes and tutorials and this system enabled him to effectively access the curriculum. Dave did not have an interpreter during his first exams and the examination supervisor was unaware of his communication requirements. When Dave told the supervisor that he needed assistance, he was provided with examination instructions in written form.

The college has since agreed to provide either an interpreter or clear written examination instructions for Dave. The supervisor will also communicate in writing with Dave during examinations if required. Examination supervisors are now always made aware of the presence of a student with a disability, and of their specific accommodation needs, in advance of examinations.

Examination in conventional formats will present particular difficulties for students who are deaf or hard of hearing.



Section 13 >

Guidelines for Good Practice >

Accessible Examinations >

13:3 >

The granting of extra time to these students may be fundamental to bringing fairness to examination procedures

Here are examples of some of the accommodations which may be required:

- Access to an interpreter who will translate the examination questions into sign language
- Provision of a dictionary and thesaurus
- Simplification of complex language in examination questions and access to a tutor to clarify comprehension of questions
- Completion of examinations through a personal computer with spelling and grammar checks, dictionaries and thesauruses
- Presentation of examination answers through sign language or a scribe
- Extra time to complete each paper
- Spelling and grammar allowance to compensate for the educational disadvantage associated with deafness

Example – Examination Modification



Many students who are deaf communicate through Irish Sign Language (ISL) and English is their second language. This places these students at an educational disadvantage as many of the technical terms used in lectures have no existing signs in the Irish Sign Language.

Examination papers are also written in English and can sometimes be difficult to translate.

To eliminate this disadvantage, two accommodations have been adopted by the National College of Ireland for students undertaking assessments and examinations.

1. Examination questions and assessments are now reviewed by an appointed sign language interpreter and translated into an accessible format. Examination questions are adjusted and the papers returned to lecturers who review them to ensure integrity between the original and the modified questions.
2. Students who are deaf are now allowed to sign examinations, projects and continuous assessments to video, and this information is later transcribed. These transcriptions are then forwarded to relevant lecturers for correction.



Did you know?

The Centre for Deaf Studies in Trinity College Dublin has developed guidelines for the completion of signed examinations and National College of Ireland now follow these guidelines. Students who are deaf also receive training on how to structure a signed examination to video. These guidelines are available from the Centre for Deaf Studies at www.tcd.ie/slscs/cds



Accommodating students with mental health difficulties

Examinations are stressful for all students and individuals with mental health difficulties may need some accommodations in order to be successful.

Some of the following accommodations may be appropriate:

- Time extensions and rest breaks
- Examinations in a separate room or quiet area
- Designated seating close to the door
- Flexibility in time arrangements including split sessions on the same or successive days
- Allowing the student to have drinks during examinations
- Provision of an alternative task or assignment rather than a set examination



Accommodating students with physical disabilities

Students with physical disabilities may need additional time to organise their space before examinations.

Some of the following accommodations may be needed:

- Extra time to complete examination papers
- Separate examination centre: this facility may be useful if the student is using assistive technology, special furniture or aids
- Some students may require breaks or rest periods
- Dictation to a scribe or audio tape for students who have difficulty with writing
- A reader who will read the examination paper
- Some students may need to have a personal assistant present during examinations



Section 13 >

Guidelines for Good Practice >

Accessible Examinations >

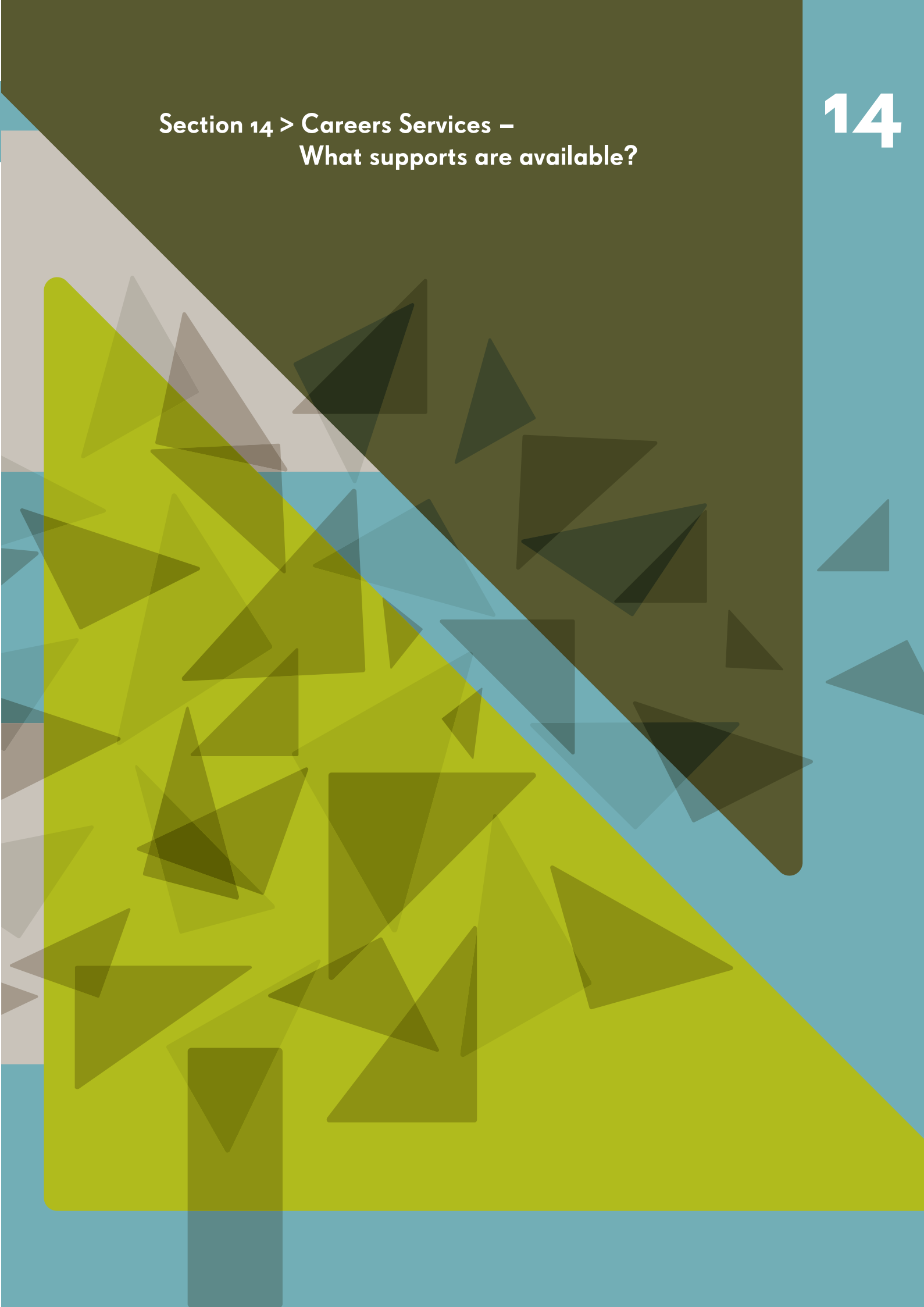
13:3 >

- Chairs with back supports will help students who find it difficult to sit for extended periods
- Chest high desks are particularly useful for students who use wheelchairs
- Architect style table are an alternative for students who have difficulty sitting at a conventional desk
- Good circulation space is needed for wheelchair users

Conclusion

The Disability Act (2005) now places an onus on institutions to make essential information available in accessible formats for students with disabilities. In addition, flexibility is needed in relation to the methods for assessing and examining students' work. Alternative forms of assessment and examination of academic achievement will remove many of the barriers to enable students to perform at their best.

**Section 14 > Careers Services –
What supports are available?**



Section 14: Careers Services – What supports are available?

14.0 Why do students with disabilities need additional Careers Services support?

Research has consistently shown that graduates with disabilities are much more likely to be unemployed than their non-disabled counterparts. (Get Ahead). Even graduates with First and Second Class Honours degrees face additional barriers and challenges when trying to obtain employment. Many employers still have a tendency to focus on the person's disability rather than on their skills and aptitudes.

With increasing numbers of students with disabilities participating in higher education, there is a corresponding increase in the number of students seeking employment once they have graduated. Many lack work experience however, so have not gained the sort of transferable, soft skills most employers seek. Careers Services can be a significant source of support and can also act as an important bridge between institutions and employers.

Careers Services need to support students with disabilities in dealing with specific issues such as:

- **Disclosure** – when and how to disclose a disability to an employer
- **Seeking reasonable accommodations** – what is the best approach
- **Advocacy skills** – how to be positive in an interview situation
- **Work experience** – how to find suitable placements

14.1 Recent research

AHEAD recently completed the first national survey of graduates with disabilities (AHEAD 2008 unpublished) which highlighted a number of key issues regarding Careers Services in Ireland.

Here are some of the findings:

- Only 23% of the graduates surveyed had participated in any form of job preparation training. Over half of the sample indicated that they would benefit from this type of job preparation training at this stage.
- 83% of respondents were unaware of the full range of employment supports and grants available. Only a minority of respondents (11.9%) had actually applied for a grant.
- One of main barriers affecting graduates' search for employment was a lack of work experience.



Here are some of the recommendations which emerged from the research findings:

- Higher education institutions need to monitor the exit of students with disabilities from third level. This information would provide important data on the employment status of graduates with disabilities and would help identify key factors in accessing employment.
- There is a need for Careers Services in higher education institutions to focus on specific job preparation training for students with

disabilities. This training needs to address issues such as disclosure, technical supports, accommodations and benefits. Information regarding disclosure and the loss of disability or social welfare benefits is essential.

- Graduates with disabilities experience great difficulty in accessing work experience, a factor which limits their understanding and knowledge of the workplace. Human resources departments, in collaboration with careers advisors in third level institutions, could provide crucial work experience opportunities.
- Increased emphasis is needed on the promotion and dissemination of information regarding the range of employment grants and supports available to employers of graduates with disabilities

Similar findings emerged from a small survey of graduates with disabilities carried out by UCC Disability Support Services, which also highlighted the need for increasing employers' awareness of Workplace Adaptations Grants and incentives for the employment of graduates with disabilities.

14.2 Making the transition to employment

The last decade has seen dramatic changes to the workplace and the labour market in Ireland. The employment market is increasingly being led by the information technology sector and career patterns have become less established and more unpredictable. Competition from abroad, particularly in certain job sectors, has made it more difficult for graduates with disabilities to get the crucial work experience they need. These graduates face an increasingly volatile and complex labour market so they need to be prepared for making effective decisions about their futures.

All graduates face challenges and obstacles when making the transition from higher education to employment. The process of making career choices can be challenging and confusing. Career guidance can make a tremendous difference to students by providing them with an awareness of their strengths and



Section 14 >

Guidelines for Good Practice >

Careers Services >

14.0 – 14.2 >

abilities and the range of opportunities available to them. Careers guidance services can be an invaluable support to students in guiding them through the process of exploration and decision-making involved in finding suitable career options.



Did you know?

Research has consistently shown that unemployment rates for graduates with disabilities are far greater than for their non-disabled colleagues



Careers guidance professionals need to be increasingly aware of changes and opportunities in the labour market and be proactive in developing relationships with employers and employment organisations.

Example – Dublin City University (DCU)

Between 2002 and 2006, DCU operated a Careers Service for students with disabilities. The role of the careers advisor was to provide targeted careers information, advice and guidance for students with disabilities. The objectives of the service were, to improve student access and promote progression into post graduate study or employment.

The following services were offered:

1. Basic careers advice and information on postgraduate courses, job search techniques and the completion of application forms, covering letters and CVs

2. Mock interviews, advice and guidance on disclosure of a disability, work shadowing schemes, internships and work experience placements
3. Individual personal development planning and goal setting, aptitude and personality testing

During the four- year period of its existence, there was an increase in the number of students and graduates with disabilities using the services, from 15.7% in 2002 to 70% in 2006.

14.3 How can we ensure good practice in Careers Services?

Career Services have a key role to fulfil in supporting students with disabilities to access the labour market. It is essential, in today's changing employment market, that graduates are prepared to meet the demands of the workplace. Graduates need to be able to take responsibility for managing their careers and need to develop relevant skills in problem solving, planning, decision-making and lifelong learning.

Example – University College Cork (UCC)

The Disability Support Service at UCC operates a careers support programme which targets students with disabilities. A specialist careers advisor, based in Disability Support Services, works specifically with students and graduates with disabilities. The aim of the programme is to support students

in making the transition from education to their chosen career area.

Services offered to students include:

- Career guidance interviews and career action planning
- Curriculum Vitae, job applications and interview preparation
- Advice on disclosing a disability to an employer
- Advice on current employment legislation.

The careers advisor's role involves offering guidance to students on course and career choice, advising employers on the employment supports and financial incentives available to them and the provision of disability awareness training



Here are a number of good practice tips:

- Institutions need to develop policies and strategies to ensure that Careers Services are delivered in a coherent and effective manner to students with disabilities
- Knowledge of the range of reasonable accommodations required by students in education and the workplace is a key requirement
- There needs to be close liaison between all staff and departments involved in preparing students for the transition to employment
- Institutions and Careers Services need to promote and develop links and partnerships with employers and ensure that employers are aware of legislative requirements and available grants and incentives
- Staff need to ensure that they keep in touch with labour market trends and developments as well as employment opportunities so as to maximise benefits for students
- Specific information is needed by students in relation to the management of disclosure
- Career Services need to have clear systems in place for the referral of students to other departments or services



Section 14 >
Guidelines for Good Practice >
Careers Services >
14.2 – 14.3 >

- Institutions need systems in place for the evaluation of the service, including feedback from students
- Institutions need to record employment or other outcomes for graduates who exit the institution
- Careers Service and employment information needs to be available in formats which are accessible to all students
- There need to be systems in place for the dissemination, management, storage and disposal of confidential information
- The Careers Service needs to be situated in a location that is accessible to all users
- Careers information provided on college websites needs to be presented in accessible formats
- Careers workshops and seminars need to be delivered in accessible locations
- Staff working with students with disabilities need to be trained in disability awareness
- Careers Services need to develop a network of links and partnerships in the community with other institutions, agencies and disability organisations

Example – Mainstreaming

The University of Limerick has, within its Careers Service, a specialist advisor who is available to students who may have additional needs. This specialist service complements the core programme of careers services available to students and graduates.

Services offered to students with disabilities include an accessible website, a designated resource area,

workshops on interview techniques and individual CV clinics.

In addition, the following range of programmes is provided for students:

1. Co-operative advice and support service including an eight month work placement programme for all students
2. A core work skills programme to prepare students for their work placement
3. 'Interact' employment mentoring programme which links students with relevant employers
4. Disability awareness training for a network of local employers
5. Job shadowing programme where students observe relevant work practices and learn about the work area

Conclusion

Research has consistently shown that graduates with disabilities are significantly disadvantaged when it comes to accessing the labour market. A lack of relevant work experience and employers' lack of knowledge about the supports available to them, add to the problem. Careers Services need to be proactive in forming relationships with employers and providing them with guidance and advice. Students need training in all aspects of job seeking and job preparation. In particular, they need work experience, without which, it is difficult to gain access to the workplace.





Appendix 1: Example of Assessment Report from UCC

ID/ CAO Number:

Personal Details

Name:

Date of Birth: / /

Date of Registration: / /

Home Address:

Term Address:

Home Telephone:

Term Telephone:

Mobile:

Email:

Disability Details

Nature Of Disability: (Please tick box)

Mental Health Difficulties ☐

Blind / Vision Impairment ☐

Physical Disability ☐

Significant Ongoing Illness ☐

Deaf/ Hard of Hearing ☐

Specific Learning Difficulties ☐

Verification Of Disability

Have you supplied the DSS with verification of your disability?

Yes ☐ No ☐

Date received: / /

Checked by:

Previous Supports

Scribe ☐

Spelling and Grammar waiver ☐

Use of tape ☐

Braille or electronic texts ☐

Use of Computer ☐

Personal assistant ☐

Use of Assistive Technology ☐

Magnified texts ☐

ISL Interpreter ☐

Other ☐

Entry to UCC

Year of Entry:

Points:

Route of Entry:

CAO ☐

FETAC ☐

Direct Entry ☐

Postgrad ☐

Mature Student entry ☐

Access Programme ☐

Other ☐

Degree / Diploma Programme / Course Code and Title:

List of Subjects being studied:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

10.

11.

12.



Appendix 1 >

Guidelines for Good Practice >

Assessment Report from UCC >

Additional demands of the course:
e.g. field trips, practical laboratory
work, work placement etc.

Impact of the student's specific disability on
his/her academic performance, e.g. course
participation and study requirements.

Educational Support Requirements

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Notetaking | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ISL Interpreter | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Tutor Support | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Academic Skills Development | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Dyslexia/ Specific Learning Support | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Photocopying /Printing | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Educational Resource Assistant | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Texts in Alternative Formats | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Reader/Scribe/Library Assistant | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Reasons for support in context of Educational
demands and course participation:

Personal Support Requirements

Transport Services ☐

Personal Assistant ☐

Reasons for support in context of Educational demands and course participation:

Alternative Examination Arrangements

Separate Room ☐

Extra Time (10 mins per hour) ☐

Reader ☐

Use of Computer ☐

Shared Room ☐

Use of Scribe ☐

Exam paper in Alternative Format ☐

Additional Extra time (20 mins per hour) ☐

Use of Assistive Technology ☐

Specialised Furniture ☐

Spelling and Grammar waiver ☐



[Appendix 1 >](#)
[Guidelines for Good Practice >](#)
[Assessment Report from UCC >](#)

Assistive Technology and Study Software

Existing Computer Hardware:	Funding Required for:	Cost:
-----------------------------	-----------------------	-------

Existing Computer Software:	Funding Required for:	Cost:
-----------------------------	-----------------------	-------

AT/IT Training Required	Other Technology Requested:	Funding Required for:	Cost:
-------------------------	-----------------------------	-----------------------	-------

Reasons for support in context of Educational demands and course participation:

Costing of Supports

	Hours per Week	Weeks per year	Rate per hour	Total
--	----------------	----------------	---------------	-------

Educational Supports

Note-taker

Subject Specific Tutor

Dyslexia/Learning Support

ISL Interpreter

Educational Support Assistant

Alternative Media Formats

Reader/Scribe/ Library Assistant

Personal Supports

Personal Assistant

Transport	Miles per Week	Weeks per year	Rate per mile	Total
Services				
Own Car				
Taxi				
On-Campus (Bus)				
	Allocation for year	Total		
Photocopying /Printing				
Confirmation of Assessment				
Signature of Student:				
Date: / /				
Signature of Assessor:				
Date: / /				

Responsibilities of Students Registered with the Disability Support Service

You must provide documentation from a medical consultant that verifies the nature of the disability and the functional limitations resulting from the disability. Students with specific learning difficulties must provide a recent copy of an Educational Psychologist's Report(i.e. within the last 5 years)

You must take responsibility for your own learning by:

- Attending all lectures/tutorials
- Fulfilling all course requirements
- Attending the Disability Support Service Study Skills Programme



Appendix 1 >
[Guidelines for Good Practice >](#)
[Assessment Report from UCC >](#)

You must follow specific procedures for obtaining reasonable and appropriate accommodations. Contact your Disability Advisor for more information

You must comply with regulations set by the Disability Support Service with regard to use of equipment funded through the Fund for Students with Disabilities. Full details of the regulations can be read on our website at www.ucc.ie/services/dss

You must notify the DSS if unable to keep appointments

You must treat staff at all times with Courtesy, Dignity and Respect.

Student Contract

I have read the above information pertaining to my responsibilities as a student registered with the DSS and I agree to comply with the regulations.

☐

I understand that the supports outlined in the Needs Assessment Form may be withdrawn if they are not used appropriately.

☐

Consent to release information

Please sign and date the line above if you agree with the above and disclosure of your information on these conditions:

I:

do / do not consent to information relating to my personal details e.g. name, student number, nature of disability, and academic and support requirements being forwarded from the Disability Support Service to the following departments if necessary:

- ☐ Examinations Office
- ☐ Academic Department
- ☐ ESF/ National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education

I understand that my personal details will be retained for the duration of my time as a student in UCC.

Student Signature:

Date: / /

Witnessed By:

Notes



Appendix 1 >
Guidelines for Good Practice >
Assessment Report from UCC >

Appendix 2: Individual Learning Requirements Document from Institute of Technology Tralee

Individual Learning Requirements

Private & Confidential

Date: / /

Student Name:

Student ID Number:

Class Group:

Disability/Learning Difficulty:

This document is designed to inform appropriate staff that this student is requesting the following support. Additional supports may be put in place as they are identified by staff and student during the academic year and a revised learning requirements document will then be circulated.

Details / Support Needs:

Learning Accommodations

Assessment Accommodations

Examination Accommodations

Student Responsibilities:

The student will make the relevant Institute staff aware of any difficulties s/he may encounter during the academic year which might compromise her/his academic performance or attendance at the Institute. The student will bring these issues to our attention at the time that they occur.

ITT Responsibilities:

The Institute will endeavour to provide, wherever possible, necessary student supports as they are identified by the Student or by the Staff. Institute Staff will treat as confidential all information and correspondence relating to this student.

N.B. At the students insistence, this information is not to be disclosed to classmates and other students

Staff Circulation:

Name:

Subject:

Issued to staff on: / /

I agree that the above information is accurate and I accept that this Individual Learning Requirements (ILR) document be circulated to all relevant staff at the Institute of Technology, Tralee. I undertake to notify the Access Officer of any changes to the Lecturing or School staff delivering my course so that an ILR will be forwarded to these staff members.

Student Signature:

Date: / /

Access Officer:

Date: / /

Useful website: <http://questforlearning.org/html/teachers.html>



Appendix 2 >
Guidelines for Good Practice >
Learning Requirements ITT >

Appendix 3: Examples of Assistive Technology devices

Software solutions

Many students now use laptop computers, which brings a whole new level of independence to their learning. There is a wide range of powerful learning software available today, which can really make a difference in levelling the academic playing field for all students.

The following are some examples of assistive software:

- Voice recognition systems, such as Dragon Naturally Speaking, enable the user to dictate information into a computer using a microphone instead of a mouse and keyboard. These systems are suitable for people with visual impairments, dyslexia or manual dexterity difficulties
- Reading and scanning tools, such as Kurzweil 3000, enable the user to scan paper documents into a computer which then reads the text. These are suitable for people with visual impairments and those with dyslexia. Users need to already be computer literate.
- Screen magnification software, such as ZoomText Extra, magnifies information on a computer screen to enable students with visual impairments to read more easily.
- Screen readers, such as JAWS, enable information on a computer screen to be 'spoken' so that a student who is blind can hear and edit the text.
- Reading and writing software, such as Text Help Read and Write Gold, enables students with dyslexia to enhance their language processing skills. These packages offer word prediction, corrections and

spelling options. Other examples of reading and writing software include: Wordsmith, WYNN 3.0, Text Help 2, Write:OutLoud

- Mind mapping software, such as Inspiration, enables students to plan and organise assignments and can be a great help when revising and sitting examinations. This type of software is useful for students with dyslexia, intellectual disability or memory problems. Some other examples of mind mapping software include, Mind Genius and Mind Manager Pro

Hardware solutions

Some students may need assistance with the physical negotiation of the learning environment.

These are some examples:

- Alternative keyboards: Large print keyboards and keyboards which are specially designed for students with manual dexterity difficulties. Some include wrist rests. Single-handed models and Touch screen keyboards are also available
- Alternative mice such as tracker balls for students who have difficulty with motor control. Some examples of alternative mice include, Micro speed tracker ball, Traxsys Roller Plus, Big track and EasiTrax
- CCTVs and scanners which are used to magnify and scan written materials for students who are visually impaired. Some examples are, Chroma CCD, Smart view CCD, Poet Compact scanner, Perkins Braille note taker

Lo-Tech Solutions

Hi-tech solutions are not always necessary and in some cases, simple is often best.

There are numerous lo-tech and simple solutions which can easily be applied in a learning situation. For example, handheld aids such as spellcheckers and Thesaurus are simple and affordable but can be really useful for students with dyslexia.

Some other simple devices include:

- Looky handheld magnifier
- Tape recorders and Dictaphones
- Diaries and personal organisers
- Ergonomic furniture, wrist and back rests
- Antiglare screens
- Highlighting and colour coding , Post its as reminders
- Calculators
- Page turners and copyholders



Appendix 3 >

Guidelines for Good Practice >

Examples of Assistive Technology >

Appendix 4: Assistive Technology Supports and Suppliers

- **Abledata** US site provides objective information about assistive technology products and product listings.
Web: www.abledata.com
- **AbilityNet** is a UK based charity which helps children and adults with disabilities to use computers and the internet by adapting and adjusting their technology. Solutions for home, work and education.
Email: enquiries@abilitynet.org.uk
Web: www.abilitynet.org.uk
- **Andrews Awards Systems** offers a wide range of educational software on a variety of subjects for further education and adult learning.
Address: 38 Pine Valley Park
Grange Road, Dublin 12
Tel: 00 353 1 493 0011
Fax: 00 353 1 493 0010
Email: info@awards.net
Web: www.awards.net
- **Apple Accessibility** Mackintosh site for users with physical, hearing, visual, literacy and communication difficulties.
Web: www.apple.com/accessibility
- **Assist Ireland**, an online resource providing information on assistive technology and a directory of products available from Irish suppliers.
Address: Assist Ireland, Comhairle, 7th Floor, Hume House, Ballsbridge, Dublin
LoCall: 1890 277 478
SMS : 087 3837 644
Email: support@assistireland.ie
Web: www.assistireland.ie
- **Central Remedial Clinic** provides a range of training, therapeutic and technological services for people with physical disabilities in addition to an

assistive technology database.

Address: Vernon Avenue, Clontarf, Dublin 3

Tel: 00 353 1 805 7400

Fax: 00 353 1 833 6633

Web: www.crc.ie

- **Diskcovery Educational Software** for primary and secondary school levels and special needs.
Address: Unit 2, Waveney House, Harbour Road, Howth, Co. Dublin
Tel: 00 353 1 806 3910
Fax: 00 353 1 806 3944
Web: www.diskcovery.ie
- **EdTech Software Ltd.**
Address: Murrisk, Westport, Co. Mayo
Tel: 00 353 98 64 886
LoCall: 1850 9234 59
Fax: 00 353 98 64842
Web: www.edtech.ie
- **Enabletech** gives an overview of assistive technology and offers guidelines on the use of assistive technology in education.
www.enabletech.ie
- **National Council for the Blind** aims to ensure that IT products and services are designed to be accessible.
Web: www.cfit.ie
- **Jackson Technology** has a website dealing specifically with literacy and dyslexia products. They offer a wide range of software and assistive technology to help with dyslexia or literacy difficulties, from early learners to adults. Software available for scanning and reading, voice recognition, mind mapping, Lexicon assessment. Portable spell checkers and note takers and Wordshark3 s are also available.
Address: 24 Kiltipper Avenue, Aylsbury,

Dublin 24

Tel: 00 353 1 462 4793

Fax: 00 353 1 462 4793

Email: sales@dyslexia-ireland.com

Web: www.dyslexia-ireland.com

- **Gateway** (Guidance for Assistive Technology in Education and Workplace). This is an excellent resource for young people with disabilities, educators, guidance counsellors and employers. The site contains information on assistive technology tools for students with disabilities in accessing education, low-tech solutions, funding information and advice for employers. Gateway provides both hardware and software solutions including alternative keyboards and mice, Braille note takers and displays, induction loops and magnifying software.
Email: info@gateway2at.org
Web: www.gateway2.org
- **Work Wise** provides an online guide to assistive technology and ergonomics in the workplace.
Web: www.irishjobs.ie
- **Microsoft Accessibility** designs accessibility products for people with physical and cognitive disabilities. Assistive technology for learning difficulties includes word prediction and reading comprehension programs, reading tools and learning disability programs, speech synthesizers and speech recognition systems.
Web: www.microsoft.com/enable
- **National Centre for Technology in Education (NCGE)** provides information on information technology and matching the student to the technology.
Web: www.ncge.ie
- **Techdis**, UK information and advice resource for technology related to inclusion.
Email: helpdesk@techdis.ac.uk
Web: www.techdis.ac.uk
- **Rehabtool** provides assistive technology and adaptive technology products including alternative communication devices for people with speech difficulties.
Web: www.rehabtool.com



Appendix 4 >

Guidelines for Good Practice >

Supports & Suppliers >

Appendix 5: AHEAD Resources and Publications

Charting Your Course

A handbook for Guidance Counsellors and Information Officers working with Disability Issues in Adult Education (2008)

Supporting Students with Dyslexia

– Practical guidelines for Institutions of Further and Higher Education (2007)

DAWN (2007) The Educational Support Worker Handbook Participation of and services for students with disabilities in Institutes of Technology 2004–2005 (2006)

An Accessible Curriculum – A Learning Resource Pack for Academic Staff in Third Level on Making Curriculum Accessible for Students with Disabilities or Specific Learning Difficulties (2005)

Great Expectations

A Handbook for Guidance Counsellors when working with students with disabilities (2005)

The Disability Act, 2005 – A Guide for Students and Staff with Disabilities in Higher Education Institutions

Examination Arrangements for Students with Disabilities – A Guide for Institutions of Higher Education (2001)

Equal Opportunity in Recruitment and Selection for Graduates with Disabilities “An Employer’s Guide” (2000)

The Equal Status Act, 2000 – Students with Disabilities and Higher Education – A Brief Guide

Available at www.ahead.ie

Bibliography

Action on Access, Guidelines for Admissions (2007)

Available from www.actiononaccess.org

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

AHEAD, Charting your Course – A Handbook for Guidance Counsellors and Information Officers working with Disability Issues in Adult Education (2008)

AHEAD (2005) Participation of and services for students with disabilities in Institutes of Technology 2004-2005

Board of the Interim Health Information Quality Authority (IHIQA), Standards for the Assessment of Need (2007)

DAWN (2007) The Educational Support Worker Handbook, AHEAD

Disability Support Service, UCC: Where are they now? A review of the First Destinations of UCC Graduates with Disabilities (2005)

DSS/UCC (2006) Review of Supplementary Admission Procedures for Students with Disabilities in Ten Higher Education Institutions in Ireland

Leung, P. et al Effective use of assistive technology for students with disabilities in Higher Education, Deakin University, Australia (1999)

Loftus, Trudy (2007) Supporting Students with Dyslexia: Practical guidelines for institutions of further and higher education, AHEAD

Higher Education Authority (2006) Towards the Best Practice for All: An Evaluation of Access Programmes in Higher Education in Ireland. HEA: Dublin

National Disability Authority Standards for the Assessment of Needs (2005)



Appendix 5
Guidelines for Good Practice >
Bibliography

**National Disability Authority,
Building for Everyone, National
Disability Authority (2002)**

O'Leary, E., **Policy and Practice in
the use of Assistive Technologies
for students with Specific Learning
Difficulty: A Review of Current Practice
in AIT, GMIT, I.T. Sligo, LYIT &
NUIG (Partners in the
Ascent Project) (2007)**

Skill, The Coordinator's Handbook.
Skill: London (1997)

**SENDA – Compliance in Higher
Education - An audit and guidance
tool for accessible practice within the
framework of teaching and learning,
South West Academic Network for
Disability Support (SWANDS),
University of Plymouth (2002)**

Scottish Higher Education Funding
Council, **Teachability: Creating
an Accessible Curriculum for
Students with Disabilities (2000)**

Student Services, Centre for Learning
and Teaching, NATFHE and UNISON
at the University of Gloucestershire,
**Working Towards an Inclusive
Educational Experience for Disabled
Students, legal requirements and
examples of good practice (2006)**

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher
Education, **Code of practice for the
assurance of academic quality and
standards in higher education, Section
3: Students with disabilities (1999)**

University of South Australia, Adelaide,
**Uniability – Students with Disabilities in
Higher Education: A Resource Guide for
Staff, Hartmann, R. and Redden (1993)**

University of Strathclyde (2000) **Teachability:
Creating an Accessible Curriculum
for Students with Disabilities.** Scottish
Higher Education Funding Council

University of Wales Institute, Cardiff
(UWIC), **Accessible Curricula –
Good Practice for All (2002)**

Websites

www.ahead.ie

www.edtec.unsw.edu.au

www.equality.ie

www.nda.ie

www.studentfinance.ie

www.tcd.ie/disability/accessibility/building

www.tcd.ie/slscs/cds