

Charter for Inclusive Teaching and Learning



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Higher Education Authority
An tÚdarás um Ard-Oideachas

Introduction

Charter for Inclusive Teaching and Learning

– enhancing teaching and learning practices so that students with disabilities can fully participate and succeed in higher education

Foreword

I would like to warmly welcome this Charter for inclusive teaching and learning which has been developed by AHEAD, with input from higher education teachers/lecturers, students, access and disability officers and other interested partners in Ireland and Europe. The Charter aims to further enhance the richness and quality of learning experienced by students and to support and guide teachers in their work. Students with a disability are a particular focus, but the outcomes will benefit all groups.

A positive outcome of our collective work on educational equality is the increasing diversity of students participating in higher education. This means, however, that practices in teaching and learning must continue to adapt and be inclusive of a range of student needs and learning styles, and so enable students to reach their full potential as graduates, post graduates, workers and members of society.

The Charter is designed to fit into established quality assurance processes in higher education institutions and also to support other inclusive teaching, learning and curriculum development initiatives that are underway, not just in Ireland but also in the European Union via the **Bologna process**. All involved in the development work hope that the Charter makes a constructive and empowering contribution to the teaching and learning experience in higher education.

Dr Mary-Liz Trant
National Access Office, Higher Education Authority
Dublin, Ireland

The National Access Plan

A high quality learning experience for all students is key to achieving equality and wider participation in higher education. The National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2008-2013 states that “good practice for access becomes good practice for all learners throughout the institution.”

The plan acknowledges that mainstreaming the access agenda in higher education will mean changing practices and implementing new and innovative teaching and learning practice on an institution-wide basis. There is considerable work already underway in this area, and a priority of the National Access Plan is to extend this good practice through sharing information and experience.

The Legislation

The university is required, by legislation (Disability Act 2005, Equality Act 2004, Universities Act 1997) to ensure that appropriate adjustments to the learning environment are made to enable a student with a disability to participate in education on the same basis as a student without a disability. This applies not only to physical access barriers and the provision of support services, but also to teaching and learning strategies, assessment methods and administrative policies. The principles of universal design, contained in Appendix 1, are identified in the Disability Act 2005 as the paradigm to be used when making an environment barrier-free and accessible.

INTRODUCTION

Role of the Charter

Unique attributes of the charter

This Charter for Inclusive Teaching and Learning will promote good practice by presenting inclusive strategies that support all students, including students with 'hidden disabilities' (such as students with learning disabilities and mental health conditions), so they have equitable access to the learning environment. This charter is timely – it is being developed as part of initiatives to modernise higher education, as in the Bologna process, by making academic degree standards and quality assurance standards more comparable and compatible.

The charter is a resource that will contribute to the quality of an institution's educational programmes for students with disabilities, while also playing a positive role in change and improvement in higher education.

Relevance

The charter seeks to contribute to the work on strategies to deal with the complex environment in which higher education now operates. The subject matter of the charter will therefore serve a number of objectives. It aims to:

- Reflect best practice
- Inspire and encourage debate
- Influence and determine policy and practice

The charter aims to have a positive impact on the accessibility, affordability, and quality challenges that currently confront education (teachers and learners).

The Role of the Charter in Quality Assurance

Quality assurance in higher education considers all aspects of teaching, learning, assessment and examinations. The charter will be most successful when implemented in a quality assured system that encourages collaboration among staff and students.

Why is the Charter required?

More and more students with a disability are entering higher education; they now represent 3.8% of the student population across the sector. Students with disabilities have the same rights and responsibilities as other students and increasingly, they are seeking the best quality learning experience during their time in college. It is not the disability itself, but the impact the disability has on the student's ability to access, learn and demonstrate knowledge and skills which is relevant. The aim of the charter is to support institutions in ensuring that students with disabilities have learning opportunities and experiences comparable to that of other students.

ROLE OF THE CHARTER

Contributors

The charter has been formed with the benefit of feedback, knowledge and good practice of a number of stakeholders, including AHEAD, Irish higher education institutions, European higher education institutions, students with disabilities, the Disability Advisors Working Network, Access Officers, the LINK network, the Irish Universities Association, the Higher Education Authority, the Department of Education and Science, the National Learning Network, HETAC, the Irish Universities Quality Board and the NQAI. The consultation process included:

- A conference with input from experts with extensive national and international experience
- A series of focus group meetings with stakeholders from the sector
- Feedback from other interested parties

Key audiences for the Charter

- Lecturers and academic staff
- Teaching and learning staff
- Quality assurance teams
- Students
- Library and management information staff
- Strategic managers of universities and higher education colleges
- Administration and support staff in higher education



LINK
Learning Inclusively
Network + Know-how



CONTRIBUTORS

The Seven Principles of Universal Design

Principle One: Equitable Use

The design is useful and marketable to people with diverse abilities

GUIDELINES

- Provide the same means of use for all users: identical whenever possible; equivalent when not.
- Avoid segregating or stigmatizing any users.
- Provisions for privacy, security, and safety should be equally available to all users.
- Make the design appealing to all users.

Principle Two: Flexibility in Use

The design accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities.

GUIDELINES

- Provide choice in methods of use.
- Accommodate right- or left-handed access and use.
- Facilitate the user's accuracy and precision.
- Provide adaptability to the user's pace.

Principle Three: simple and intuitive

Use of the design is easy to understand, regardless of the user's experience, knowledge, language skills, or current concentration level.

GUIDELINES

- Eliminate unnecessary complexity.
- Be consistent with user expectations and intuition.
- Accommodate a wide range of literacy and skills.
- Arrange information consistent with its importance.
- Provide effective prompting and feedback during and after task completion.

Principle Four: Perceptible Information

The design communicates necessary information effectively to the user, regardless of ambient conditions or the user's sensory abilities.

GUIDELINES

- Use different modes (pictorial, verbal, tactile) for redundant presentation of essential information.
- Provide adequate contrast between essential information and its surroundings.
- Maximize "legibility" of essential information.

- Differentiate elements in ways that can be described (i.e., make it easy to give instructions or directions).
- Provide compatibility with a variety of techniques or devices used by people with sensory limitations.

Principle Five: Tolerance for Error

The design minimizes hazards and the adverse consequences of accidental or unintended actions.

GUIDELINES

- Arrange elements to minimize hazards and errors: most used elements, most accessible; hazardous elements eliminated, isolated, or shielded.
- Provide warnings of hazards and errors.
- Provide fail safe features.
- Discourage unconscious action in tasks that require vigilance.

Principle Six: Low Physical Effort

The design can be used efficiently and comfortably and with a minimum of fatigue.

GUIDELINES

- Allow user to maintain a neutral body position.
- Use reasonable operating forces.
- Minimize repetitive actions.
- Minimize sustained physical effort

Principle Seven: Size and Space for Approach and Use

Appropriate size and space is provided for approach, reach, manipulation, and use regardless of user's body size, posture, or mobility.

GUIDELINES

- Provide a clear line of sight to important elements for any seated or standing user.
- Make reach to all components comfortable for any seated or standing user.
- Accommodate variations in hand and grip size.
- Provide adequate space for the use of assistive devices or personal assistance.

The Centre for Universal Design (CUD) Ref:
<http://www.design.ncsu.edu/cud/index.htm>

APPENDIX

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Quality Assurance

Institutions have quality assurance procedures that capture the voice of all students including students with disabilities and those from other minority groups.

At a minimum:

- The inclusion of students with disabilities is embedded within existing quality assurance procedures, with a code of good practice to guide implementation.
- Each institution captures the voice of the student with a disability and actively uses that voice to effect improvements.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

"The main hope of a nation lies in the proper education of its youth".
Erasmus

Teaching

Teaching is implemented in a manner that allows all students to fully take part in all activities and minimises the need for additional adjustments.

Staff use information and communication technologies to meet the learning needs of students.

At a minimum:

- The institution provides students with access to course materials, including on-line, before the lecture where possible, so students can fully engage with the lecture.
- Staff use creative and innovative teaching methods and integrate, where required, the 7 principles of universal design.
- Learning outcomes and assessment approaches are clearly stated for all student courses/programmes.
- All academic staff teach in accessible formats. This may require some professional development in consultation with learning support and disability support services.
- The institution provides training and support to staff to further develop expertise in teaching and learning.

TEACHING

"Teaching is the highest form of understanding".
Aristotle

Learning

Active learning is an integral part of all course provision.

Standards of learning are improved through formative assessment and continuous feedback on performance.

The curriculum is designed and delivered in a manner that respects that everyone learns in different ways and that learning outcomes can be achieved in many ways.

At a minimum:

- Study skills are a clearly articulated part of the curriculum for all students, including students with disabilities, and are expressed in course/programme as learning outcomes.
- Students and staff make maximum use of timely, constructive and relevant feedback in the learning process, given that it is a key component of student achievement.
- Students, for their part, engage as partners in the learning process.

LEARNING

"I never teach my pupils; I only attempt to provide the conditions in which they can learn".
Albert Einstein

Assessment and Examinations

Assessment and examinations are student-centred, flexible, transparent and fair.

The assessment methodologies match the stated learning outcomes.

At a minimum:

- The institution considers the most appropriate and balanced methods to assess learning outcomes.
- When assessing students' learning, whether through continuous assessment or end-of-year assessment, a range of approaches, where practical, are offered.
- The institution offers a choice of assessment, thus reducing the need for reasonable accommodations. (This does not exclude reasonable accommodations identified in an assessment of need).
- The institution provides clear information to students on the assessment methodologies used and the marking schemes employed.
- The institution provides students with timely information on assessment, when and how, and in an accessible format. This also provides for any extraordinary accommodations to be put in place.

ASSESSMENT AND EXAMINATIONS

"Nothing builds self-esteem and self confidence like accomplishment".
Thomas Carlyle