



# UCD Access Symposium Proceedings 2018

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Marking 30 Years of Services for Students  
with Disabilities in UCD





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with Disabilities in UCD

# Introduction

Dr Anna M. Kelly, Director UCD Access & Lifelong Learning

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This publication contains a series of papers presented at the third Access Symposium held in University College Dublin (UCD) to mark and celebrate thirty years of services for students with disabilities. On a lovely summer day in May, passionate, inspirational and engaging speakers simultaneously whetted our appetites, challenged our view of the world, and propelled us to do more. These speakers gave us both staff and student perspectives on the inclusion of students with disabilities and left us in no doubt as to their commitment, passion and zeal for their subjects.

Thirty years ago, a small group of UCD staff and students displayed similar characteristics. In Ireland of the late eighties, the entitlement of students with disabilities to access higher education and to receive the necessary support was not given. Fortified with a can-do attitude, this small group became the catalysts for change, and through their perseverance, tenacity and foresight started the journey to inclusion and diversity.

Three decades later, this Symposium takes a trip down memory lane and reminds us of the journey and the challenges encountered. A picture of the future also unfolds, where

inclusive and diverse higher education institutions, open and welcoming to all, are the norm.

In his address, **Professor Andrew Deeks, UCD President**, acknowledges the work of the higher education sector, which he says is committed to ensuring that diversity and inclusion is prioritised. He reminds us that this demands institutional change and requires education leaders to demonstrate that a university is a place where diversity and difference are embraced; a place where access and inclusion is everyone's business.

The **Minister for Higher Education, Mary Mitchel O'Connor T.D.** sets out her vision for an all-inclusive Ireland that embraces all and focuses on ability rather than disability, offering opportunities to access and participate fully in education. She acknowledges the staff and student pioneers who began the journey towards inclusion, and highlights the lead taken by UCD in addressing both entry, and building an inclusive institution, and notes that leaner diversity is the 'new normal'.

**Vianne Timmons, Vice-Chancellor, Regina University** writing from the vantage point of a university leader, expresses the view

that inclusion is one of the most critical issues facing society. Focusing on the role of leaders, she advises higher education institutions to build 'bridges for everyone', to create a culture of belonging, where the 'newcomer' is welcomed and institutions reflect the society in which we want to live, and not society as we currently experience it.

In a powerful and moving contribution, **Caroline Casey** reminisces about her upbringing, recounts her time as a student in UCD, outlines her career in business and more recently as an entrepreneur. She eloquently discusses her struggles to 'own' her disability and portrays her heartfelt desire to belong. She urges the disability community to make common cause, to collaborate more, and conveys a sense of urgency to push boundaries to realise the necessary advances in the inclusion of people with disabilities

**Lisa Padden** and **Anna Kelly** give us a flavour of the ways in which UCD's University for All is embedding and mainstreaming access and widening participation. In particular, they outline the campus-wide consultation process, whose goal is to develop understanding of access, widening participation and mainstreaming. This

process tapped into the experience of participants to identify barriers that hinder access, engagement, participation or success for diverse student cohorts. Their findings suggest an agenda for future attention.

**Eleni Mangina's** paper discussed the UCD AHA pilot project, which focusses on the development and integration of existing technologies and digital solutions, to enhance learning. This project is testing how these combined approaches can assist students with ADHD to stay focussed, make fewer mistakes and finish homework assignments. It is anticipated that this research will inform the design of new teaching and learning ecosystems that will promote inclusive access to digital learning.

**Nuala Brady's** research focuses on neurodiversity and dyslexia, which was prompted when she noted that recognition of faces and words present similar challenges. Recent advances in neuroscience show that in learning to read, we 'reuse' parts of the brain that are initially used in facial recognition and object recognition. Brady describes how she used images of the former British Prime Minister, Tony Blair to test the theory on a group of UCD students, half of whom had a diagnosis of dyslexia.

The results point to lessons for students and lecturers alike.

**Amy Hassett** presents the perspective of a university student, highlighting the importance of asking people with disabilities what it is they need. She says that it is often assumed that people with disabilities, particularly wheelchair users, are primarily concerned with ramps, accessible lecture halls, and doors. Not so, says Amy: her greatest worry centred on the social aspects of college life. Necessities such as having sufficient battery power to allow her to participate in events was a constant worry. She urges us to remember that participation in college life transcends academic concerns.

**John Duffy** describes leaving school early, losing his job of 23 years, and making a decision to return to education via the University Access Programme in UCD. Now, as he completes his final BA examinations, he recounts how his dyslexia was only diagnosed in the first year of his degree. He spoke generously of the supports he received that enabled him to fully participate in all aspects of the programme and is eagerly looking forward to beginning a Master's programme in Education with a view to become a secondary school teacher.

**Julie Tonge** poses the question 'whose job is it to support students' mental health?'. In an era of increasing numbers disclosing

mental health difficulties, she advocates a whole-institution approach, encompassing a policy framework, the active involvement of staff and faculty, and the provision of a suite of supports and referral services. To do otherwise, according to Tonge, is a 'sticking plaster' approach.

**Fiona Sweeney** and **Tina Lowe** discuss measures to address the accessibility of the physical infrastructure. Against the backdrop of the Building Regulations, which have shifted from a focus on disability to the wider concept of 'access for all', this paper describes how UCD commissioned an accessibility audit, the approach to prioritising the refurbishment work needed, and the allocation of the necessary capital funding. They advocate a Universal Design approach as a means of future proofing the built environment, and ensuring that access for all becomes a reality.

Many people contributed to the UCD Access Symposium. Firstly, a sincere thank you to all the contributors, without whom this publication would not have been possible. The Symposium was planned and organised

by the UCD Access & Lifelong Learning team; once again their creativity, innovation and generosity was on display. I would especially like to acknowledge the support of Michelle Tracey, who co-ordinated the production of this publication: her expertise, attention to detail, coupled with her graciousness, ensured that this job was realised effectively and efficiently.

To conclude, in UCD, we have set out our ambition to become an inclusive and diverse scholarly community of staff and students. This compendium of papers represents part of our journey to its full realisation. The publication gives voice to a range of perspectives, national and international, student and staff: these viewpoints offer us ideas and insights as we strive for our goal. I hope that you will also draw inspiration from these and hope that they will generate new thinking for you, leading ultimately to new approaches, research and practice.







# Contents

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<b>Welcome</b>	<b>1</b>
Professor Andrew Deeks, President, UCD	
<b>Opening Address</b>	<b>4</b>
Mary Mitchell O'Connor, Minister for Higher Education	
<b>Keynote Address</b>	<b>11</b>
Dr Vianne Timmons	
<b>Keynote Speaker</b>	<b>19</b>
Dr Caroline Casey	
<b>University for All - moving forward through consultation, conversation and collaboration</b>	<b>25</b>
Dr Lisa Padden and Dr Anna Kelly	
<b>AHA – ADHD Augmented</b>	<b>36</b>
Assoc. Professor Eleni Mangina	
<b>Neurodiversity and Dyslexia</b>	<b>43</b>
Nuala Brady	
<b>Asking questions is an effective means of promoting inclusion for people with disabilities</b>	<b>49</b>
Amy Hassett	
<b>Diary of a 49-year-old teenager</b>	<b>52</b>
John Duffy	
<b>Supporting student mental health – whose job is it?</b>	<b>54</b>
Julie Tonge	
<b>Access ALL Areas – UCD progress in campus accessibility</b>	<b>61</b>
Fiona Sweeney and Tina Lowe	



**Minister for Higher Education, Mary Mitchell O'Connor  
and UCD President, Professor Andrew Deeks**

# Welcome

Andrew Deeks, President, UCD

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Minister, Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,  
I am delighted to welcome you all to the third UCD Access Symposium.

I am especially pleased to welcome to Minister Mary Mitchell O' Connor TD - we are honoured that you have joined us this morning.

Céad míle fáilte also to our keynote speakers, Dr Vianne Timmons, President and Vice-Chancellor, University of Regina, Canada; and to UCD Alumna, Dr Caroline Casey, founder of the Ability Awards and Binc.

I am delighted to see so many delegates here today; welcome to UCD colleagues, to friends from across higher education and to delegates from the disability sector.

Today's Symposium is called 'From the Bench to Centre Field: Marking 30 Years of Services for Students with Disabilities in UCD'. We are taking the opportunity to mark this significant milestone in UCD's history and in the history of access to higher education for students with disabilities.

Thirty years ago, a small group of University faculty, staff and students identified that students with disabilities needed additional services and supports to enable them to

undertake their studies. Through their perseverance, tenacity and foresight, they took action and developed solutions.

Their initial work gathered momentum over time and helped to change the perception of access for students with disabilities. Today's Symposium is celebrating and paying tribute to these pioneers.

In 21st century Ireland, an overarching goal of the higher education access policy is that the student population in our institutions will reflect the diversity of the country's population. As a sector, we take this objective seriously. Here at UCD we have placed diversity and inclusion at the centre of what we do. We have set an ambitious access target, whereby 33% of our undergraduate population will be drawn from target under-represented cohorts. I am proud to say that we are well on the way to achieving this: currently, 29% of our undergraduate student population is drawn from these target groups.

This has been made possible because of the commitment and endeavour of colleagues across the university. This success is firmly based in our strategic approach to inclusion and diversity.

Minister, last November you launched the University for All initiative. This initiative challenges us to 'own' inclusion; to weave access, participation and success into the fabric of the university. It requires that we design our programmes, teaching, supports and campus facilities so that they can be accessed, understood and used to the greatest extent possible, removing all barriers.

We believe that students should be able to access and succeed, regardless of background, personal circumstances, age, disability, or pace of study. We think that university should be a place where all students feel that they are welcome, they belong and are valued.

University for All is consistent with our tradition and builds on the legacy of UCD's founder Cardinal John Henry Newman. As many of you know, he established the university in 1854 to provide access to higher education for the Catholic population, and so we like to think that access is in UCD's DNA.

University for All is ambitious and demands change in all facets of campus life. When fully achieved however, it has the power to transform the university, eliminate discrimination, and promote equality. It

requires that we - education leaders - demonstrate to the world that a university is a place where diversity and difference are embraced; a place where access and inclusion is everyone's business. I would like to acknowledge Professor Mark Rogers, Registrar and Deputy President, and Professor Grace Mulcahy, Chair of the UCD Widening Participation Committee for their outstanding leadership and commitment in this regard.

The UCD Access Symposium is a key element of University for All. It offers an opportunity for faculty, professional staff, and students to present new ideas, expand horizons, and provides another forum to discuss and debate new approaches.

I would like to thank and congratulate the organisers of this event; the Access & Lifelong Learning team, led by Dr Anna Kelly. Over the years, we have come to expect a symposium showcasing the latest thinking and innovation. I am always impressed by the level of creativity and imagination that the Access & Lifelong Learning team brings to this event.

Finally, I wish you a productive and enjoyable day. Thank you

University for All  
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campus life





# Opening Address

Mary Mitchell O'Connor, Minister for Higher Education

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The minister took to the stage at an event that was very close to her heart, a factor she raised in the opening emotional moments of her speech:

“Well 30 years ago my brother was here and he subsequently has gone blind. I know I see Caroline here, I’ve talked with Caroline, it’s a few months now Caroline since we have met. But what you did for him and the education that he got set him up for life, you know. And otherwise, he would have found it very hard to access an education. He actually was in another university first, he then changed to this university and that enabled him to get his degree here, which he has built on over the years. So it’s really close to my heart and he probably was one of those people that sat on that bench, so it’s nice to be back. Sorry, I’m getting a bit emotional”.

She aptly mentioned the metaphor of the balloons surrounding the stage on the day and how the leaders of this talk and these programmes lift spirits. She highlighted that today was a really important day for Access, **“marking the start of a recognised movement for change and how students with disabilities are to be and have been supported in UCD”**.

She added:

**“The first students who gathered to the bench formed a community and they supported each other. Today, 30 years on from when the bench was that meeting place for students with disabilities, UCD’s Access programme is now centre field. A 30-year long journey carving out a pathway for equity and in widening participation for students with disabilities. Pioneers, trailblazers, champions, are all words that I would use to describe the visionary and the persistent staff and students within UCD. Who through every initiative help and support students with varying abilities. UCD is a true leader. You have led change internally but you’ve also been instrumental in developing a national landscape for a more inclusive higher education system”**.

She went back to her brother, beautifully tying it into a Stevie Wonder quote, who once said,

**“‘Just because the person lacks the use of their eyes doesn’t mean that they lack vision’. That quote came to mind on Tuesday, as I read about Harry Austin in the Irish Times. A former UCD Science Access**

student who is one of the scientists who has discovered the enzyme that can digest some of our commonly polluting plastics”.

She spoke of the pride that UCD and its students must have in this UCD Alumni, providing a potential solution to one of the biggest environmental problems. She highlighted her wishes going forward for Ireland and inclusion:

“I want Ireland to be all-inclusive, where students’ abilities like Harry’s are not measured but embraced, where we re-frame disabilities especially in the context of education at all levels. Therefore, it is an honour as the first ever Minister for Higher Education, to stand amongst you all this morning where we all share the same goal regarding Ireland’s Higher Education Institutions. It is appropriate that this event comes as we are at the half-way point of implementing the National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2016-2019. The national policy roadmap for increasing access to higher education. Work on a mid-term review of the plan will finish shortly providing a sense of what has been achieved to date and an opportunity to look at where work needs to be focused, moving forward”.

The overall goal of the Access Policy Plan for Higher Education is that the student population in higher education reflects the diversity of the wider population. She advocated that access to higher education should be available to all citizens,

independent of socio-economic background, age, disadvantage, disability, status, ethnic background, or other circumstances:

“The goal is reinforced as a principle for the University for All initiative here in UCD. It echoes the fact that Access is everyone’s business. 2018 is a very significant year for people with disabilities, as Ireland recently ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. As a signatory of this convention, Ireland has agreed to recognise the right to education for persons with disabilities by providing an inclusive education system at all levels and lifelong learning opportunities for people with disabilities also. In building an inclusive society, one of the cornerstones must be equality of opportunity. All members of society must be given the same opportunity to compete on equal terms. All students should be given the same opportunity to study on equal terms, regardless of the ability or needs. Ratifying this convention into Irish law compounds the government’s commitment now to equality of opportunity for all”.

Last year, UCD launched a distinct strategy and an ambitious work programme to achieve the goal of the university becoming a more diverse community.

“29% of UCD’s undergraduates are drawn from target groups including students with disabilities, those from disadvantaged communities, mature students and part-

time students. This is wonderful progress and I am aware that it has not happened by chance and that it has been on foot of an intense programme of work with target groups and an overall institutional strategic approach that is still developing and innovating”.

She spotlighted core elements the UCD approach to Access including, the disability access route to education and the higher education access route, pathways for mature students, routes from further education, and open and lifelong learning programmes, all of which are really important. Outreach and engagement by higher education’s institutions is also a key element of every Access programme.

“I do note with particular interest how UCD has a strong network of collaboration with schools and communities in the Dublin and the Leinster area. Mentoring, is a particularly powerful tool in this context and UCD’s Future You programme is notable for its reach to schools and Universities in Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown and South County Dublin, including the DEIS Schools and the members of the Access target groups. Increasing participation

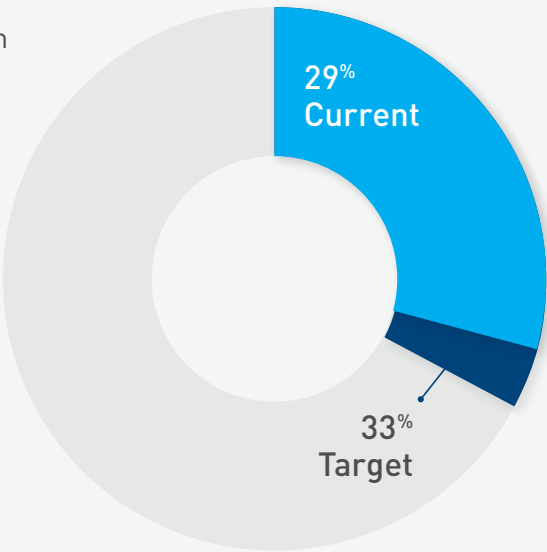
by underrepresented students not only includes outreach work but also post-entry work within the university itself. Equality of Access extends beyond entry to include access to an inclusive learning environment designed for the full range of the learner diversity. Diversity is the new normal in higher education and Universal Design allows higher education institutions to respond to different styles of learning to

empower each student and to provide an equal opportunity to learn, to all students”.

She mentioned that the HEA recently reviewed the fund for students with disabilities and one of the key recommendations of that review is on the need of whole institution joined-up approaches to the leadership and to the

organisation of student services, including those for students with autism and other specific needs.

“This recommendation, very much chimes with the heads advocacy of the need for policies on Universal Design for Learning to be adopted. Professor John Kelly and Elaine Howley are both in the audience this morning and they were instrumental 30 years ago, in establishing the Ahead



% of UCD undergraduates from under-represented groups

**TARGET:**  
undergraduate  
population  
from under-  
represented  
cohorts



33%

initiative. I know from all my university visits since taking up this Ministry, that a more strategic response is required to meet the needs of students with disabilities, including those with autism. It makes sense that planning for diversity be factored in from the start when curricula and services are being developed rather than trying to retrofit supports for each student on a case by case basis. The need for continuity of service for students when making the transition from other levels of education on third level, is also a key factor. Higher education institutions need to facilitate the inclusion of all students and to encourage and support the active participation of all students in college life. Ultimately, it is universal rather than special approach to anticipate the diversity of needs that underpins real quality of opportunity. Essentially, good practice for students with disabilities is good practice for all students”.

Mary Mitchell O’Connor restated that funding for the support infrastructure for students with disabilities is essential.

“It is provided through the HEA’s core funding to higher educational institutions. The funding for students with disabilities managed by the HEA, is a key tool in

growing participation, currently around 12,000 students are supported by the fund for students with disabilities, the FSD fund. Significantly, the profile of students being supported has changed in recent years. For example, the number of students with a mental health condition has risen significantly, as has the number of students with autism. This is indicative of the fact that we are making considerable strides in broadening participation both within and among these target groups”.

The minister spoke of the new HEA managed fund, the programme for access to third level, The PATH Fund, and how it amounts to around €22 million over three years and how it will create many new initiatives.

€22m

The PATH Fund

“These initiatives will include measures to increase access to teacher training and to extend and to deepen the reach of the work that is already being done by the HEIs with disadvantaged communities and students with disabilities in their communities. The Path 2 1916 bursaries fund is aimed at providing targeted financial support to students to encourage access and to enable successful participation. Supporting participation in the part-time and flexible modes of study significantly broadens the opportunities for members of target



groups, so it is really important. In particular students with disabilities or those that cannot participate on a full- time basis”.

In conclusion, she commended UCD for all their work in widening participation in higher education and **“in blazing a trail for the depth of their innovation”** and in supporting students from the target groups, including students with disabilities.

“I believe that a key highlight of today will be the ceremony to honour the UCD visionaries, Professor John Kelly and Elaine Howley, both leaders whose foresight and pioneering spirit led to the development of supports for students with disabilities. I want you Elaine and Professor Kelly to enjoy your moment in the sun today. Unfortunately I will be unable to hear the insights from Dr Vianne Timmons, President and the Vice Chancellor of the University of Regina, Canada. A leading academic in inclusive education and then, our very

own UCD graduate Dr Caroline Casey who with dogged determination - and I’ve seen it - has got us all over the years to do away with limiting labels and challenges. And challenges us every day to simply think in terms of ability and potential. I look forward to hearing about your key note addresses later. Events like today are so important in reminding us to take stock of how far we’ve come. But also to look to the future and the work that lies ahead, to achieve true equality of opportunity in respect of higher education. The will to realise this, is strongly evident today and there is much promise. So if I can sign off as the Minister of Higher Education having seen, and to see all of our students through the prism of ability, not disability”.



**Dr Bairbre Fleming, Deputy Director, UCD Access and Lifelong Learning,  
Dr Anna Kelly, Director, UCD Access and Lifelong Learning,  
Dr Caroline Casey and Dr Vianne Timmons,  
President and Vice-Chancellor, University of Regina**

# Keynote Address

Dr Vianne Timmons

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Dr Vianne Timmons took to the stage with great applause, highlighting at the beginning of her speech, the **“great opportunity and an honour to be here at UCD, at 30 years of focusing on student disability supports”**. She highlighted in particular the pioneering work she carried out with Professor Patricia Noonan Walshe, who she collaborated with on the Long Walk to School together, a book about inclusive practices.

Dr Timmons focused heavily on the necessity and importance of inclusion, adding, **“Leadership must come from the top to have an inclusive campus”**. Dr Timmons shared her journey thus far with us, of her personal and professional experiences. She commended the work carried out by UCD around inclusivity, highlighting again a focus on **“creativity, on innovation, on leadership”**, calling inclusion one **“of the most pressing issues that we face”**:

**“And we need to address them and if we ignore them it is at our peril. It’s a danger for our students, our programmes, our reputation and our communities. We all need to advocate for inclusive practices with our colleagues, with our students, with our parents, with the public and with our Presidents by the way, not just university Presidents, country Presidents”**.

Dr Timmons states that, **“universities should reflect the society we want to live in, not the society we live in”**, spotlighting the work of Jean Vanier, who created the L’Arche movement, a person who influenced her thinking on inclusion. In support of her talk, she mentioned a quote from Vanier: **“What he says, is what he lives”**. The quote is as follows:

**‘To reveal someone’s beauty, is to reveal their value by giving them time, attention and tenderness. To love is not just to do something for them but to reveal to them their own uniqueness, to tell them that they are special and worthy of attention’**.

She talked about her home country of Canada and the history of taking ‘what was unique about people out of people’, adding that we [Canada]:

**“taught a whole generation of people not to feel that they were special. Not to feel that they were unique but that they, there was something very wrong with them. And we created a generation of first nations men and women who hate themselves, who hate us, and with good reason”**.

She highlighted a particularly troubling issues around inclusivity in Canada when she was university president, whereby she received death threats and all manner of derogatory emails and phone calls relating to simply putting in “Muslim footbaths in a prayer room for our 800 Muslim students”. Her resolve on this matter was clear, however: “That’s why we need to persevere, we need to push forward, we need to make sure that we push against that wave of hate that we see coming in our world”.

She spoke of other initiatives and programmes, such as a programme for young women and men with intellectual disabilities at the University of Prince Edward Island. Below, is a quote from a concerned parent of a child with disabilities, which is worth quoting in full:

**“Vice President Timmons, do not do this, do not tell me that my child can have an opportunity to go to university. Do not ignite that dream in me, because I’ve had many dreams for my child, like I had for my other children but every dream I had was smashed. And I had to survive by not dreaming anymore and now, you’re enticing me to dream again and I am terrified that you will smash it, like so many others have”.**

The professors in college were also worried as to how students with a variety of disabilities would fit in:

“So I got some of the professors to just send me examples of assignments, so a

history professor sent me one that was a perfect example. So it was an assignment that they had to do on World War II. And the students were in groups, so there was a film student, a journalist student and a campus for all student (a student with intellectual disabilities). So they went out and the journalist went and wrote a script, the film student filmed a documentary on World War II and the student with down’s syndrome went out and interviewed people who were either knowledgeable about World War II or had experienced families or themselves who were in World War II and they put together a documentary. Now, that was the best assignment that professor got. So professors were easily able to adapt and modify the curriculum with support. That is an example on inclusive classroom”.

She spoke also of a group called Astonished in Regina, a programme for young men and women with very severe physical disabilities, some of which were intellectual, who wanted to know how they could engage with the university:

“So we provided them with an office and then we gave some professor advocates to work with them, these men and women now are called co-researchers and co-participants in education, nursing, social work and kinesiology. They go into the classrooms and they work with the students to help students understand complex physical and intellectual and medical needs, and they work with students to help instruct them. This has been transformational on our

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campus to see these young men and women all over our campus working with our students, teaching and learning at the same time. It's very important that we maintain that creativity, that ownership".

It was clear that Dr Timmons had a wealth of stories to tell around inclusivity and her passion for it. She spoke of her daughter, Kelly, and her troubles with inclusion growing up, some of which escalated into mental and physical abuse in school from her peers. Dr Timmons spoke of Kelly's environment in school, "an inclusive environment that isolated her, that shamed her and that left her feeling that there was something deeply wrong with her". Even though Kelly went to university, and she is independent and happy now, Dr Timmons still spoke of Kelly being "very socially isolated", adding that it all "took a lot of work, a lot of work, a lot of time, to change that since that she was dirty and that she had to stay away from other kids because they could catch what she had".

Inclusion is about one thing, and that is belonging, adds Dr Timmons. She called upon the example of Deloitte and their powerful report called 'Outcomes Over Optics - Building Inclusive Organisations': "It says inclusion is not easy, becoming a truly inclusive organisation requires courage. That's a powerful word 'courage'.

Organisations must choose to fundamentally change their culture, their way of acting, their way of being. It takes effort, it says inclusion is really a verb it's about how we behave, well it's not really a verb and we know that, but that's what this report says. But it is so true in many ways. Inclusion is how we act, in every part of our life. This confirms with me that what you are doing here at UCD is acting inclusively".

She noted that in her university they embedded inclusive practices into their 2015 strategic plan: to recognise and support, "diversity of our students' needs and we

"  
**We named our strategic  
plan the 'peyak aski  
kikawinaw', which is a  
Cree expression for  
Together We are Stronger**

will be inclusive  
for our aboriginal,  
new Canadians,  
international  
students, people  
with disability,  
employees and  
partners. So we  
embedded it right in  
our strategic plan,

"  
we named our strategic plan the 'peyak aski kikawinaw', which is a Cree expression for Together We are Stronger. For a university to become truly inclusive at the highest level, at your strategic plan, at your President's talks you have to say this is something we are proud of, something we are working on, something we are building in every aspect of our campus".

Dr Timmons highlighted other areas to focus on when looking at inclusive practices:

“You have to make your community, the place needs to be inclusive and you see that here with all your accessibility with all the ramps, Braille, all of that is part of being inclusive. But names and pictures and art needs to reflect how diverse our world is”

She added that “we have a lot of work to do to truly be inclusive. We need to reflect the society we want to live in and that includes a campus that’s safe for women and a campus that reflects gender parity and we’re not there now”. She highlighted the #MeToo movement and the strong role of woman in pushing forward on gender equity, though she lamented the lack

of drive as a whole towards that same push. The quote below is worth reproducing in its entirety:

“I’ve apologised so much to my female students on my campus because we didn’t use our

voices to push gender equity. And it is not a woman’s voice you need to hear. We need to hear male voices and we need to hear voices from all levels of our society to say that ‘this is time’, for no longer that we have women that are marginalised. And when the #MeToo movement came out I asked my three daughters had they ever experienced any sexual harassment, or harassment. And my oldest daughter started to cry, and she said ‘I can’t talk about it, mum’, I still don’t know what she experienced. My second

daughter said she didn’t ‘think’ she had, she wasn’t sure, and my baby told me she’d been raped on a university campus and had not disclosed it, because it was a very popular male athlete and that she had been drinking and that she was, in her view, smart enough to know there was no safe place to disclose. That is not acceptable and that is something that if we are truly going to be an inclusive campus we need to tackle all these issues head on. Gender violence cannot happen on our campus. Inclusion is critical. In Canada, women make 31% less on average than men, and in a recent global gender gap report, it said it will take us 217 years to reach gender

parity overall. I’m not ready to wait 217 years, are you? This is time for us to really push hard. People say it’s a marathon, I want to sprint, I want to sprint to an inclusive campus. We can shorten the race through education,

through using our voices, through pushing hard. It’s really critical. Inclusion in women’s leadership is an issue”.

Dr Timmons spoke of “newcomers to our society”, that “we have to support them, we should be a cultural mosaic in universities. We should make sure that we encourage and allow people to hold on to their identity, like indigenous identity and that they still belong. So that cultural mosaic is part of what we need to push for. It’s critical. Right now, we

**We need to reflect the society we want to live in and that includes a campus that’s safe for women and a campus that reflects gender parity and we’re not there now**

need to build bridges, not walls". In lieu of this, Dr Timmons stated that **"universities are the architects of those bridges for everyone"**, adding that racism now is starting to fester among universities in more and more damaging and nefarious ways and that it must be stamped out before it spreads. In conclusion to her speech, Dr Timmons asked several questions of the university and us as people:

**"Are we preparing students for a world of work or a world of maybe work, right? Can we adapt to all of our students needs? Career preparation, are we doing enough? Do we have adequate resources? How can we balance teaching, research and community service?"**

However, she came back to the same point she made earlier, that **"the biggest issues we face in universities is related to inclusion"**, highlighting that

**"it's a reflection of the major issues in society. Respect and opportunities for people with disabilities, racism, indigenous**

**rights and opportunities, violence and sexual violence against women, equality, mental health, respect for others. Universities are great places but they are not perfect. We are not fully inclusive and we cannot stop until we are"**. Finally, Dr Timmons pushed that:

**"we must as a university, it's an imperative, move towards an inclusive campus. Programmes like you have are critical in that path. Your work does so much, to promote inclusion of different types, to help unlock the potential of students with disabilities, to stamp out hatred and prejudice, to educate others on the value of education. So another student who comes from a low socio-economic education, like I did has a chance to change his or her future and to build a more caring society. I'm going to end by saying again university should not reflect the society we live in, but they must reflect the society we want to live in, and this institution is on that path. It's an institution that you should be proud of, the steps you've taken, because you'll be changing the world for one student and one student at a time".**

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## Speaker



### **Dr Vianne Timmons**

Dr Vianne Timmons has, since becoming the seventh President and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Regina on September 1, 2008, taken a leading role in establishing the strategic direction of the university. Under Dr Timmon's leadership, the University of Regina

has made a great deal of progress. After several years of declining enrolment, student numbers have increased considerably, with more than 15,000 students - the highest total in the university's history - now registered at the university and its three federated colleges. Faculty members and students are receiving national and international recognition for their work, and the university is attracting more external research funding than ever before. Just as importantly, the University of Regina is becoming increasingly diverse, with approximately 14% of its students from other countries, and another 13% who have self-declared that they are of Indigenous descent.

“I wanted to do these crazy dreams. I had dreams of freedom, I wanted to be a cowgirl, I wanted to be Mowgli from the Jungle Book, I wanted to race motorbikes, I wanted to do everything about adventure. And I didn’t think that if I went to university that was going to happen”.

# Keynote Speaker

Dr Caroline Casey

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“As I was walking in here, into UCD today, I got really emotional... I came here in 1989 and the first thing that really strikes me is the Indian out of the Indian, the gay out of somebody who is gay. And as I walked into this campus, I was trying to take the disability out of me. So that I could be accepted, so that I could fit in”.

She describes herself as a person “**obsessed with belonging**”:

“The work I do, I’m known as a disability activist campaigner, a social entrepreneur, a whole heap of labels, but actually in reality I am a campaigner for people to belong as who they are. Accepting is fitting in, it’s just pushing us into these boxes or these circles so that we may be accepted by other beings. But actually inclusion for me is to be able to belong equally as uniquely as each of us is. This is what we want for our children, this is what we want for ourselves”.

She spoke of the world of wonder that lay ahead of her, the possibilities of the future and what to do, seeing university as a hindrance to such dreams:

“I wanted to do these crazy dreams. I had dreams of freedom, I wanted to be a cowgirl, I wanted to be Mowgli from the Jungle Book, I wanted to race motorbikes, I wanted to do everything about adventure. And I didn’t think that if I went to university that was going to happen”.

From her talk, she reminisces about her upbringing and the strong support network she had around her, one that fostered her sense of belonging. However, when she got an acceptance letter from UCD, she was

disheartened by the notion of being ‘othered’, as being disabled:

“... it was something like ‘dear student with a disability’, we’d like you to come in for an orientation two days before the university opens. Now when this letter came in, I am not joking you, I won’t even tell you what the language was going on in my head, I was like kick to touch, I don’t want that. I do not want to go to a disability orientation thingamajig, I want to go with my mates, when we start, you know, like everybody else and get drunk in fresher’s week. Now the reason I was having such a reaction to this is actually I only discovered I had a disability or a vision impairment when I was 17”.





She places her reaction down to her parents, who did not label her as disabled:

“My parents genuinely made the decision to treat me or bring me up as a sighted child, send me to a mainstream school to see if I could get by without the label. And for those of you who are parents, that is an extraordinary decision and it’s been quite controversial. And my dad and mum had this thing, and it’s a kind of mantra in our house, it was labels are for jam jars, they are not for people, not one single part of any of us, no one of us is defined by one characteristic, not whether you have a condition, whether you’ve got red hair or you’re brilliant at golf, nothing defines you. It’s not about your role in life, the title you give yourself, the way you’re made up, we are packages of loads of pieces”.

Despite her positive drive at home to not be seen as disabled, Caroline spoke of it being constantly there, hidden away:

“But the part of me that couldn’t see was well hidden away, because that’s how I wanted it. And I could have made my life so much easier if I had just owned it because when you own who you are, you have the greatest chance to fulfil your own power. But when you’re trying to be somebody else, forget it. And listen, dad’s words were not ringing in my ears at that point”.

She also noted the confusion and anger that came with such a label:

“And there was one person who knew that I had a vision impairment because I had gone back from UCD back here, I’m not going to say who. But I was called into their office and was asked, well not that we don’t believe you but we’d like to talk to your eye doctor to verify how we can help you around your sight. It was the first time that I got an understanding of what the concept of disability was in other people’s minds and it’s the first time I became angry. And that anger, which started when I was 26, and I’m being really honest now, people always see me as very positive, and I am, but that was an anger inside me going well what are you talking about”.

This was all particularly relevant when she spoke of her career in business and her first big break with Accenture. Here, she speaks of the interview process and what it meant to be disabled:

“And it was 1997 and back then they were still allowed ask about your disability and disclosure is the big topic, and I’ll talk about it very briefly with business. But at the bottom of that form okay was are you blind, are you deaf or do you have another disability. The form was to be written in blank ink, before the days they sent you email, and I remember looking at this form going how do I sign this because I was brought up to be honest, mind you I was lying every day, but I also had registered blind for the free bus pass so what was I going to do. And I remember standing

there, who goes into a job saying hi, I can't do this. So I did the thing, I wrote it out in black ink and then I got a grey pencil, a very, very light grey tip pencil, and I ticked the visually impaired box. I talked about the Access Society to Elaine [Elaine Howley was the first Student Liaison Officer in UCD] I talked about what we did, a little paragraph about all the things that you do, and I go in for four interviews with Accenture. Now can I tell you, I made an impression, I was wearing a red suit, the only one, because they had given small print saying black and navy and grey, no I didn't see it because I'm in red. I walk in the glass door of one of my interviews, I miss the chair in another one, I was making an impression, but nobody noticed the box, why, because they were looking at my results, they didn't see that box. And I'm great at distracting you from what I don't want you to see, overcompensating, blah, blah, blah, and that's what I was doing all despite my sight, I get offered the job, fantastic".

Eventually, Caroline decided to own her disability:

"I was two and a half years there and at the end of 1999 I came out of the closet and said hello, I want to see my HR person because I was genuinely exhausted trying to be somebody I'm not. And I went in and I said listen, I just can't see you yet, I can't see you right now and the HR person said it's okay, we can reschedule and I'm like no, the thing is, I've been lying and that began my career to why I stand here today".

It wasn't long then before she decided to pursue other ventures, always remembering that drive for adventure she had from a young age. She went on to a variety of different roles and positions, raising awareness of those who are disabled:

**"Disability is not about charity, we don't need it, we need to be empowered. It is not about CSR, it's about a great opportunity within business, as anything is around brand opportunity, and that was my obsession, I was obsessed with it ... The reason disability has not had its day in business is because we still have fear, we term it in CSR, we still don't see the extraordinary business case but, most importantly, you can't eradicate disability, you can't fix it and, secondly, we didn't have leadership".**

Above all else, the concept of leadership was clear in Caroline's speech:

"For all of you in the education field, I don't want your students to fall off the cliff because there are so many educated students that can't get access into the economy of business. We need the leadership to say we welcome you as customers, suppliers, members of the community, talent so we needed the leaders to stand ... Because this generation, disabled or not, cares about inclusion in a way that nobody has before and business cares about it because it's their talent".

She concluded her speech with her usual resounding positivity, once again highlighting transparency and honesty and really owning disability:

“Because actually for all of us to achieve, we need a hand on our back, whether it’s the institutions we go to, the companies we’re in, the friends that are around us, our mothers, our fathers. Be very careful the way we speak to each other, with kindness, and try and not judge because none of us ever have a clue what’s going on in somebody else’s life. So to believe in other people, to believe in yourself but to ensure that we create cultures that actually genuinely listen to the things that aren’t said, the things that we all hide, because we all carry fear of being accepted and to belong. But the other thing that I want is to honestly say to all of you, regardless with a disability or not, please don’t waste your time like I did being somebody that I wasn’t, I’m so proud of how I am now. And don’t think it’s easy days or good days or bad days, I have screwed up more times than you’d ever know. And it’s really hard to sometimes stand on a stage and go I do not have it all sorted but I am incredibly proud. And actually when I stepped into my fullness of Caroline and owned my sight, by God my life was more interesting than sitting at an Accenture desk. I have travelled around the world, met some incredible people, been part of change, been part of solutions and if



I hadn’t, what would I have just stayed being small, so frightened for messing up. So my invitation to all of us is, whether for your kids or your grandkids, for your siblings, for your partners, your lovers, everything, just let them be who they need to be because it is good enough”.

Collaboration and respect were, as always, key:

“And the last thing is, and this is what today is absolutely about, is celebrating the success that we do, stop always pointing out to why we can’t do it and to what’s wrong and to where all the problems are, can we not focus on what we can do and stop competing against each other, collaborating together. The disability community by its nature, because of the resources and the lack of, have fought against each other, we need to work together, education, business, disability community, humanity”.

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## Speaker



### **Dr Caroline Casey**

Dr Caroline Casey, a UCD alumnus, is founder of the Ability Awards and Binc, which launched in 2017. Its mission is to create a movement in the global business community to recognise, embrace and cater for the 1.3 billion people - currently classified as disabled - as valuable employees, customers and members of the community. A persuasive, uplifting and energetic communicator, Caroline speaks at prestigious forums including the Global Competitiveness Forum, the Clinton Global Initiative, Davos and TED.





**Professor Grace Mulcahy, Chair UCD Widening Participation Committee,  
Professor Mark Rogers, UCD Registrar and Deputy President, Mary Mitchell  
O'Connor, Minister for Higher Education, Dr Anna Kelly, Director, UCD Access and  
Lifelong Learning and Professor Andrew Deeks, UCD President**

# University for All

Moving forward through consultation, conversation and collaboration

Dr Lisa Padden and Dr Anna Kelly

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## Abstract

This paper outlines the ways in which UCD is working to embed and mainstream access and widening participation, through the University for All initiative, a whole-institutional approach. A detailed description of the work carried out to date is provided, as well as an outline of the proposed project areas that have emerged during the consultation process. Methodology for the consultation process is provided which can be followed by those working to roll out such an initiative in their own institution. Finally, this paper provides some insight in to the next steps for the University for All initiative.

## What is University for All?

The University for All initiative seeks to mainstream access and widening participation, weaving it in to the fabric of the institution at every level. University for All was officially launched by Minister for Higher Education Mary Mitchell O' Connor, T.D. on 30th November 2017. An Inclusive Higher Education Institution (HEI) seeks to provide programmes, teaching, supports and campus facilities that can be accessed,

understood and used to the greatest extent possible by all people. The University for All initiative is concerned with removing barriers, and ensuring that UCD provides all students with equal opportunity to access, progress and succeed within their chosen programme of study, regardless of background, personal circumstances, age, disability, or pace of study.



## University for All Principles

Mainstreaming inclusion is the job of the entire  
University community and is responsibility of all

Everyone has the right  
to equal participation  
and engagement

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We must reflect the diversity  
of the Irish population

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All students should be able to  
access, progress and succeed

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We must engage all  
stakeholders

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Excellence is achieved  
through diversity

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The University for All principles are a set of statements which reflect the values of UCD and align with the UCD mission and goals set out in its Strategic Plan 2015-2020 (UCD, 2015). This strategy's vision explicitly commits the university to becoming **“a pre-eminent diverse and inclusive scholarly community of students, faculty and staff”** (UCD, 2015, p. 9). The overarching University for All principle states that mainstreaming and inclusion is the job of the entire university community and is the responsibility of all. This is the key value which underpins this project and provides the basis for consultation and collaboration with as many key stakeholders and colleagues as possible.

The principles reflect our movement away from the assumption that access and widening participation are focused only on entry to programmes. Opening the door to a diverse group of students with alternative entry routes and supported pathways, is only the beginning of the work of inclusion and access. The final principle, **“excellence is achieved through diversity”**, demonstrates our commitment to mainstreaming and access as not simply an exercise in social justice, but an affirmation that we believe that diversity provides the university with a variety of views and outlooks that enhance research, scholarship, and the quality of our graduates. This is in line with objective 5 as

set out in our Strategic Plan which commits UCD to **“attract and retain an excellent and diverse cohort of students, faculty and staff”** (ibid, p. 10).

## Consultation Process

UCD, like other HEIs in Ireland and beyond, operates within a complex and structured environment. The organisational structure allows for clear lines of communication, responsibility and accountability across the institution. As University for All is a whole-institutional project, it is vital that implementation takes account of these structures, and in so doing, establishes the most effective and efficient way to communicate with as many key stakeholders and colleagues as possible.

The implementation of the University for All initiative requires both a top-down and bottom-up approach. Inherent in this approach is an acknowledgement of the key roles of colleagues at all levels. Colleagues across campus, persuaded by the message, are key allies on this journey. Their ability to influence, to effect change, and showcase good practice is limitless.

Prior to the launch of this initiative, it was endorsed by senior management following a presentation to the Governing Authority of UCD<sup>1</sup>. This endorsement, demonstrating

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<sup>1</sup> Membership of UCD's Governing Authority includes the UCD President, Chief Academic Officer, members elected by the Professorial Staff, members elected by the Non-Professorial Academic Staff, members elected by the Non-Academic Staff, elected officers of the Students' Union, nominations from Organisations, members nominated by the Minister for Education and Skills, members elected by the UCD Graduates of NUI, The Lord Mayor of the City of Dublin, members nominated by the National University of Ireland and members elected by the Association of County and City Councils. "The primary responsibility of the Governing Authority is to guide the strategic direction of the university, with particular emphasis on overseeing policy, monitoring the performance of top management and working with the President to set UCD's strategic aims." <https://www.ucd.ie/governance/governanceandmanagementcommittees/governingauthority/>

the support of senior management of the university, was vital to moving the project forward.

UCD's University Widening Participation Committee comprises members of UCD's Programme Boards<sup>2</sup>. UCD Programme Boards review approve and monitor the design, delivery, assessment and quality of the academic programmes within their area. As part of their terms of reference, these boards also have responsibility for access and widening participation. This addition was an important step in the progression of our whole-institutional approach. Through the representatives on the University Widening Participation Committee, invitations were forthcoming to address the Programme Boards. Key support and policy units within the university were also identified and meetings sought.

For these meetings, a presentation was prepared, which outlined the initiative and the work thus far. The purpose of the meetings was to ensure that all those present had a good understanding of access, widening participation and mainstreaming in the context of UCD, and to ask participants to reflect on potential barriers to access, engagement, participation or success for diverse students in their own experience or area of work. An outline of the work done to date was also included. The content of the presentation is as follows:

- What is University for All?

- Definition of access and mainstreaming
- Outlining the under-represented student groups
- Data on participation rates
- Policy and research context
- Student perspectives
- University for All principles
- What would an inclusive HEI look like?
- Work carried out thus far or in progress in the areas of:
  - Institutional foundation and scaffolding
  - Programme & Curriculum Design, Teaching & Learning
  - Student Supports and Services
  - Physical Campus and the Built Environment
  - Information Technology Systems and Infrastructure.
- Invitation to ask questions and present ideas for future projects or areas of development within their own area.

As the meetings progressed, a list of suggestions from each meeting emerged, which when compiled would be presented at the end of the session: this was a useful way of encouraging other boards and units to come on board, and it also served to inspire them to think creatively about their own areas of need or interest for access and widening participation. As this list grew, so too did the discussion which became increasingly fruitful and engaging.

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<sup>2</sup> For a detailed description of the role of the University Widening Participation Committee in the University for All project please see Kelly & Padden (2018a).

## Interim Results and Project Ideas

As of the 29th of May 2018, 18 University for All meetings were held – with nine programme boards and nine policy or support units. Ideas and suggestions to emerge included:

### Institutional foundation and scaffolding

- **Expansion of the data** currently provided to include institutional and programme level information on entry, progression, completion. The process of providing programme-level entry data has begun: this shows the numbers of students in each of the target groups as compared to the wider programme-level population. This data also shows the numbers of students who fall in to more than one of the target categories e.g. mature students who also have a disability. Institutional data is also available on first year progression and completion of programme for the under-represented student groups as compared to their peers. The next step will be to disaggregate this data on a programme-level as well, to allow for greater insight in to how well students from each of the target groups are progressing and succeeding when compared to their programme peers.
- **Data visualisation.** It was suggested that with simpler visualisation of data, it would be easier to analyse the progress of the institution and each programme area in relation to widening participation. MicroStrategy, a business intelligence tool, is being tested to visualise the programme-level data mentioned above. Feedback on these visualisations is being gathered to enable further development of the data presentation
- **Single integrated data portal.** UCD provides a wealth of data and analytics to faculty and professional staff. It was suggested that this should all be provided through an integrated portal, thus eliminating the need to seek data in numerous locations and programmes. This portal could include data on module feedback, learning analytics, widening participation (entry, progression, completion) and institutional enrolment statistics.
- **Training on the Customer Communications Toolkit for the Public Service– A Universal Design Approach.** Training was highlighted in most of the consultations, as necessary and welcome. UCD ALL has developed a one-hour practical session on written, verbal and digital communication based on this toolkit. This session has now been delivered twice with further sessions scheduled for the 2018-19 academic year. It is also planned to develop online resources, which can be used by those unable to attend a training session.

## **Programme & Curriculum Design, Teaching & Learning**

### **— Outreach, engagement & mentoring.**

There was great enthusiasm from Programme Boards to expand work their outreach and mentoring to the under-represented groups. It was suggested that mentoring for students, particularly those in professional programmes, be formalised and consistent. It was also suggested that community outreach be expanded to increase participation, particularly those programmes which may have a perception of being elitist or unattainable for some groups of students. The Widening Participation Committee has established a University Outreach Network, which is co-ordinated by UCD ALL; this Network will provide an opportunity to share good practice and develop a coherent institution-wide approach. An expanded mentoring programme to include potential students, undergraduate students, graduate students and professionals is also being explored: this would build on the successful Future You Mentoring programme which is now in its seventh cycle (McNally & Downes, 2016). UCD will also be working with other HEIs in the Leinster Pillar on a mentoring initiative as part of the HEA's Programme for Access to Higher Education (PATH) initiative.

**— Inclusive assessment.** UCD has identified assessment as a key area for development following the curriculum review process, which highlighted the issue of over-assessment of many students. UCD Teaching & Learning is currently engaged in an extensive project to examine programmatic approaches. Inclusive assessment practices are those designed to engage all students, allowing equity of opportunity to succeed and demonstrate learning, reducing the need for individual adaptations for specific students. UCD ALL, in collaboration with UCD Teaching & Learning and IADT, have launched a call for submissions to a collection of inclusive assessment case studies, the second in a series of inclusive teaching and learning case studies (Padden, O'Connor & Barrett, 2017). This publication will demonstrate the work already happening in this area, and inspire others to re-imagine their assessment and feedback practices through the lens of inclusivity.

**— Professional development.** Many faculty asked for additional opportunities to engage in professional development in the area of access, inclusivity, Universal Design and widening participation. UCD ALL have developed a number of resources on inclusive teaching & learning, with a focus on embedding Universal Design in higher education practice (Padden, 2016). These opportunities have been expanded

with the roll out of the digital badge in Universal Design for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education . This is now embedded in the professional qualifications in university teaching and learning and the professional Masters in Nurse Education in UCD. It will also be offered to any interested member of faculty or professional staff who support learning in semester two of each academic year.

- **Reward and recognition.** The absence of a formal scheme to recognise the work of widening participation was highlighted. UCD ALL in collaboration with the University Widening Participation Committee, intend to consider this issue and in particular the existing models of good practice in other Higher Education Institutions . We are seeking to reward those engaged in this work as well as offering encouragement to other faculty, professional staff and students to develop their work in this area.

## Student Supports and Services

- **Seamless services.** Students ask their question once. It was noted that while there is a large amount of support available for students in UCD, it can be very difficult to navigate for students who may be unfamiliar with specialist areas or referral structures. The development of mechanisms to promote greater collaboration between those supporting students was proposed. Ensuring that a facility to hold a meeting where a student is in difficulty and is engaged with multiple services will be considered as this would ensure a consistent and comprehensive response.
- **Student resilience.** Student resilience, well-being and mental health were widely discussed at our consultations. A widespread concern for the welfare of students was expressed. UCD Student Advisers have already done considerable work in this area. It was suggested that the Student Advisers and UCD ALL work to develop further responses and initiatives.
- **Scholarships/support for refugees, asylum seekers and those given leave to remain.** This issue was raised multiple times: in May 2018 UCD received designation as a University of Sanctuary. UCD ALL, acting as the first point of contact for this student cohort, co-ordinates an institution-wide approach to ensure coherent implementation. The guiding principle is to mainstream using existing mechanisms and processes to support these students wherever possible. In 2017/18, the university introduced a fee-remission scheme. Four students successfully applied - two undertook the University Access programme and two began undergraduate degree programmes. All four students (three of whom live



in Direct Provision) received personal, financial and academic support. An increase in the numbers of such students is anticipated and work is underway to secure a comprehensive package of financial supports.

- **Consistency of take up for Erasmus, study abroad, internships, placements.**

It was highlighted that such placements are increasingly becoming an essential component of study in UCD. However, many access students are unable to avail of these opportunities due to financial constraints, caring commitments and other issues, such as availability of disability supports. It was also noted that some access students also have difficulty securing an internship or placement, as often they do not have professional networks or connections

- **Graduate funding and support.** While under-represented student groups are supported extensively at undergraduate level, this support does not always continue when the student reaches graduate study, with the exception of students with a disability. However, the financial supports available to graduate students are very limited. UCD ALL and UCD Foundation, are seeking ways to support these students

## **Physical Campus and the Built Environment**

- **Linking UCD Richview to the rest of the Belfield Campus.** The issue of

isolation felt by those on the Richview and Newstead campus was raised. Accessibility difficulties were highlighted, such as wayfinding, paths and especially the buildings on the Richview campus. A project brief has been developed to address these, in addition to the proposal to develop a sensory garden space in Richview. This would provide a safe, health-promoting space, while encouraging users of the campus to visit Richview and Newstead. The UCD School of Architecture, Planning & Environmental Policy in collaboration with UCD Estates are developing the project, which will now incorporate two sensory gardens at either end of the university campus and some outdoor recreational spaces. As the Richview area is due to undergo redevelopment to incorporate the new running track, plans will focus initially to the development of a sensory garden at UCD Residences

- **Audit of student amenity spaces.** UCD is a large and busy campus and the issue of space was raised in a number of consultations. It was suggested that many students feel they have nowhere to sit and take a moment to relax or think in the middle of a hectic day. An audit of student spaces is currently planned. We will seek to work with UCD Estates to further promote the recreation spaces on campus including the zen garden, outdoor chess and other spaces developed as part of the project outlined above.

- **Training of Residential Assistants.** It was suggested by UCD Estates that the provision of training for Residential Assistants would be helpful. This has recently been provided by UCD ALL. The 1.5-hour session covered disability awareness, Universal Design of communications and a scenario-based discussion on supporting students with disabilities living in on-campus accommodation. The session was well-received, and it has been suggested that the full training session on Universal Design of customer communications be provided at a later date.

#### **Information Technology Systems and Infrastructure.**

- **Lecture capture.** In UCD over 1000 students with disabilities have permission to record their classes, in order to remove the barrier that note-taking can present. During the consultation process, it was suggested that wider use be made of the lecture capture system on campus. Providing recordings of lectures to all students is an example of mainstreaming in practice. Were it to be used widely, it would eliminate the need for many students to use a Reasonable Accommodation: all students would be supported in their learning. Discussions with IT Services will explore this issue further.
- **Accessibility of the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE).** UCD has recently

procured a new VLE following an extensive testing process. Accessibility was an important consideration in this procurement and Brightspace, the system purchased, was the most accessible of those considered. It was suggested at consultations that accessible templates be developed with resources provided on Brightspace for student and staff on disability support and accessibility. It was also suggested that developmental material be provided for students via the VLE, particularly on essay writing, presentations and other core skills.

- **Laptop loan scheme.** While a very successful laptop loan scheme is operated by UCD Library, it was noted that some students report difficulties caused by being unable to remove these laptops from the library and bring these to classes or use elsewhere on campus or at home. This is especially a difficulty for students from low-income households, where they have been unable to purchase a laptop, and don't have a PC at home. It was proposed that an additional laptop loan scheme be investigated to address such issues. UCD ALL will work with UCD IT Services to scope out this project over the next academic year.
- **Website reviews.** A number of consultations highlighted the accessibility of UCD websites. The template developed by IT Services allows for full accessibility of websites; however, many schools and

units have developed their own websites, which have led to inconsistencies, and a lack of predictability for those looking for information. The provision of training was recommended, and this is part of the customer communications training now offered, as outlined above. UCD IT Services highlighted accessibility and recommended that training be made available to all of those content creators, who attend for training with them on the content management system.

## Conclusion and Next Steps

The odyssey towards a University for All continues: the consultation process is an important staging post. It affords an opportunity to hear from colleagues, to listen to their suggestions, concerns and hopes. The ideas generated are essential elements that need to be addressed in order to continue to weave access and widening participation into the fabric of the institution. The outputs from this process

will be considered by the UCD Widening Participation Committee, and the next steps planned.

During this consultation exercise, colleagues across the university reinforced their commitment to removing barriers to education: however, they were unsure how this might be achieved in their daily work. This has been a recurrent theme since the University for All initiative began. There is an absence of practical know-how in regard to the implementation of inclusive practice in higher education. In order to fill this gap, UCD Access & Lifelong Learning has developed a Toolkit for Inclusive Higher Education (Kelly & Padden, 2018b). The next phase of implementation of this initiative will use this Toolkit to build confidence, foster inclusion, and so develop a body of good practice that demonstrates the contribution of the entire university community to mainstream access and widening participation.

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## Authors



### Dr Anna M. Kelly

Dr Anna Kelly is Director of Access & Lifelong Learning at University College Dublin. Dr Kelly leads a team of access professionals who support the university to realise its strategic objective to become a diverse and inclusive scholarly community. She is Chair of the Steering Group for HEAR/DARE Alternative Admissions Routes to Higher Education, and is Ireland's representative on the European Access Network. In addition, Dr Kelly has extensive experience of the further education sector, including St Michael's House, the National Rehabilitation Board, and FÁS.



### Dr Lisa Padden

Dr Lisa Padden has worked at UCD for almost six years and her current role is as Inclusive Education Coordinator with UCD Access & Lifelong Learning. Lisa works directly with students with disabilities to coordinate their supports as well as working with faculty and professional services colleagues around the university to embed inclusive practice and Universal Design in all parts of the institution. She also collaborates with colleagues in other Universities and Colleges on the wider implementation of inclusivity in Higher Education.

# AHA – ADHD Augmented

Eleni Mangina

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## Abstract

AHA focuses in particular on the development and integration of existing technologies (online literacy programme and augmented reality development) to enhance learning and investigate whether the combination of such technologies can assist students with ADHD to stay focused, make fewer mistakes and to finish assignments at school as well as homework.

## Introduction

AHA pilot project focuses in particular on the implementation and integration of existing technologies (such as online literacy programme and augmented reality development) to enhance learning for students with ADHD, assist their parents and educators during the teaching and assessment process, and investigate whether the combination of such technologies can assist students with ADHD to stay focused, make fewer mistakes, and finish assignments at school as well as homework. The proposed integrated solution follows an appropriate pedagogical approach on literacy for primary school students in Ireland (although it is applicable to post primary education), developed by a speech and language therapist and has already proven that it leads to improved learning outcomes. This proposal is focusing on the learning difficulties of ADHD students in Ireland where:

- 3-5% children have ADHD
- 30-40% children ref to CAMHS ADHD
- Co-Morbid conditions: anxiety (34%), learning difficulties (70%), oppositional defiant disorder (40%), conduct disorder (14%), tics (11%), mood disorder (4%)
- Outcome is poor if early intervention does not take place e.g. early school leaving, RTA, substance abuse etc.
- 50% of children with ADHD not receiving treatment

AHA is funded for two years (November 2017 - November 2019) from the European Commission for Pilot Project: Technologies and Tools for Children and Young People with Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), under Grant Agreement No. 30-CE-0885096/00-34 (ADHD2016-13). AHA will deliver an Augmented Reality (AR) solution for an existing online literacy programme developed from WordsWorthLearning, which integrates a set of specific technologies and

supports interactive educational content, services, assessment, and feedback. Development of AHA will focus on the cooperation with academia, ADHD experts, schools, and providers of existing digital solutions that will define the framework and interoperability requirements of such a data-driven, data-intensive, and innovative digital learning ecosystem. Although Ireland has been chosen as the “test-bed”, AHA will leverage the multidisciplinary and international consortium of the consortium partners involved (UCD, HADD Ireland, WWL and CNR ITD) with the prospect the digital solution to be expanded to other EU countries and worldwide. AHA includes researchers and technologists with expertise in cognitive-behavioural techniques, computer based education and skills in the development of web learning environments for ADHD students.

## Objectives

Development of AHA requires a close cooperation with academia, ADHD experts, schools and providers of existing digital solutions that will define the framework and interoperability requirements of such a data-driven intensive and innovative digital learning ecosystem. Efforts will ensure that the system maintains the anonymity of all user information and data. Deployed within school settings and aimed exclusively – for purposes of this study – at the community of ADHD students and their parents and teachers, the system will utilise state-of-the-art methods and technologies for effective formal and informal educational settings. The objectives of AHA project are in alignment with the call for proposals’ objectives as shown in Table 1:

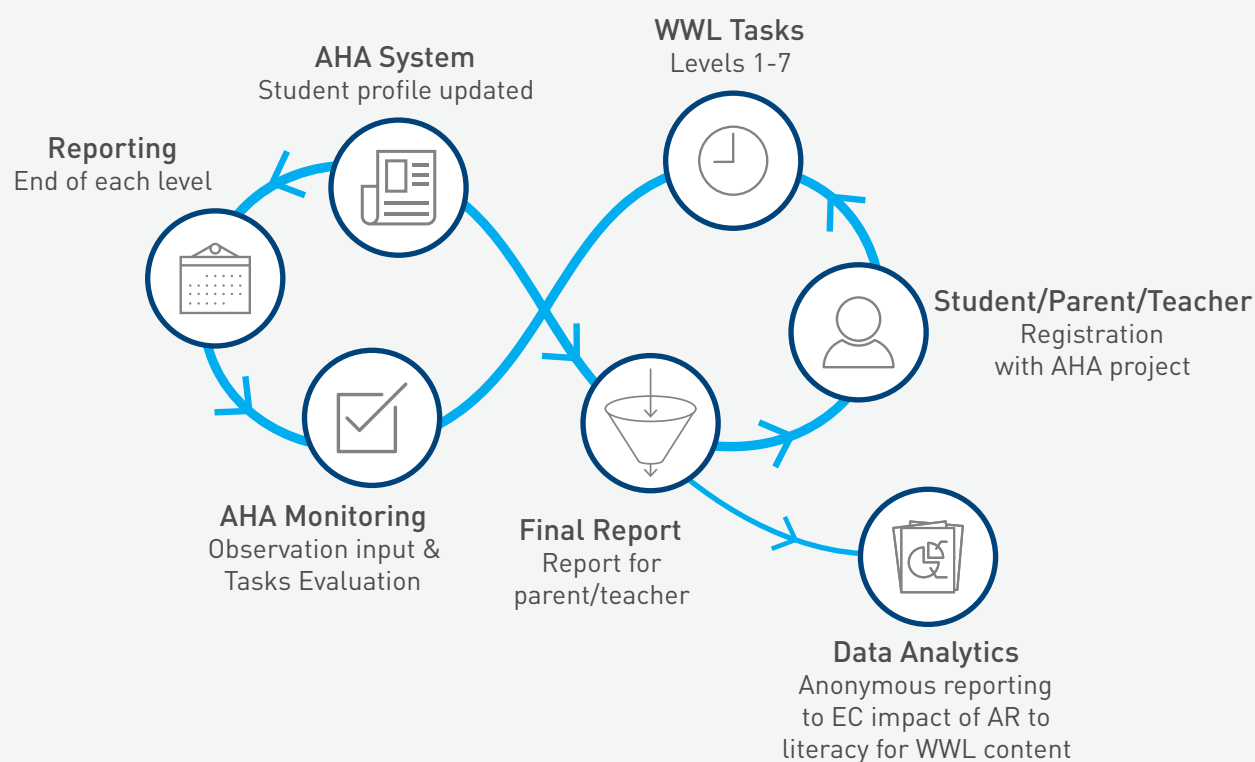


Call's pilot project objectives	AHA alignment with the call
<p>Identify existing digital learning solutions that can support teachers in the classroom and parents at home with pupils having attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder and/or concentration problems;</p>	<p>AHA will integrate existing digital solutions that have shown to support teachers in classroom and parents at home with students with ADHD. Figure 1 shows the detailed process that takes place during the AHA solution. The platforms to be included are:</p> <p><b>WordsWorthLearning:</b> WordsWorthLearning is an online literacy programme that has proven to resolve and reduce reading and spelling problems such as Dyslexia, along with additional improvements in comprehension, vocabulary and memory overall. Figure 2 shows the details of the of the WWL programme involved in AHA solution.</p> <p><b>WHAAM:</b> The WHAAM (Web Health Application for AdHd Monitoring) project is aimed at utilising a mobile app for diffusing a new culture in the ADHD intervention. The rationale is that technology can promote a better networking tool to support a holistic team involved in the care of an ADHD child including parents, teachers and health professionals (HPs). CNR ITD is the coordinator of this successful EU project and will join forces with AHA to monitor and evaluate the behaviour post introduction of WordsWorthLearning with AR components.</p>
<p>Provide good practice examples where technology has been successfully used in daily classroom activities to help pupils with ADHD and concentration problems. This should result in those pupils being better integrated into the activities as well as having an impact on their concentration and eventually learning outcomes.</p>	<p>AHA will provide good practice examples, focusing on existing technology of WordsWorthLearning to remediate reading and spelling problems, with the use of PC technology, augmented objects and a mobile app to deliver support to teachers and parents in the classroom and at home.</p> <p>WHAAM mobile app platform will be integrated with the data from WordsWorthLearning software and will evaluate and assess the impact on their concentration and eventually learning outcomes for the specific pedagogical tasks.</p>
<p>Collaborate with relevant national or regional associations or organizations to identify schools/classes with children that suffer from ADHD and that are willing to participate in the pilot.</p>	<p>AHA collaborates with the key Irish national associations to identify the schools with children that suffer from ADHD and that both their teachers and their parents are willing to participate in the pilot. HADD Ireland's mission is to make life better for people affected by ADHD. It is made up of volunteers- parents of children with ADHD, individuals with ADHD and professionals. HADD is dedicated to provide as much up-to-date information, resources and networking opportunities to individuals with ADHD, parents of children with ADHD and the professionals who serve them. Figure 3 shows the demographic of the students that have respondent and registered to participate in the AHA pilot study.</p>

Call's pilot project objectives	AHA alignment with the call
Carry out and evaluate representative pilots with participating schools in real classroom settings based on the identified technologies and good practices, using a robust, pedagogical approach.	<p>AHA will carry out integration development for the existing digital solutions; AHA will focus on representative pilots with participating schools in real classroom settings (provided from HADD Ireland). We have targeted a maximum number of 150-200 students for the evaluation of the pilot project. The main research questions to focus the research include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Have these technologies made an effect on the reading and spelling of students with ADHD?</li> <li>— Do these technologies have any effect on the behaviour of ADHD students (i.e. Does gamification of spelling via augmented objects encourage concentration?)</li> </ul>
<p>Provide a set of recommendations and a roadmap for policy makers, educational institutions, teachers, etc, for making best use of available technologies in classroom settings. Input from relevant stakeholders including teachers, researchers (e.g. child development and pedagogical experts), parents, relevant associations and industry, should be included. The recommendations should consider the limitations of currently available solutions</p> <p>AHA will provide anonymous data analytics and a report with all the findings from the pilot project. With the help of experts' from educational psychologists, a final report on recommendations and roadmap for educational institutions, teachers, parents and policy makers will be produced as final deliverable of the pilot project.</p>	<p>AHA will have surveys for input taken from everyone (associations, teachers, parents, researchers etc.) involved in the project and a comparison will be made with the initial report of the pilot project with the state of the art solutions' limitations. The state of the art report will be developed in the first phase of the project, including surveys with inputs from stakeholders to assess the problems of existing solutions.</p>

**Table 1:** Call's pilot project objectives and how they align with AHA objectives.

**Figure 1:** AHA process



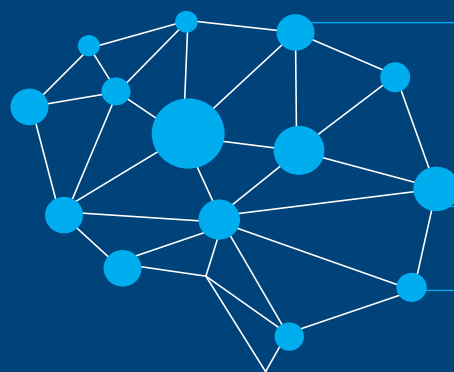
## Impact

AHA will advance the state-of-the-art research on ADHD digital education towards our vision of inclusive education. Hence, the outcomes of AHA can be used to inform the design of new teaching and learning ecosystems, in terms of digital solutions usability for ADHD. Analysis of the existing technology and the specific educational contexts then inform the scientific identification of pedagogic praxis for ADHD students. The technology and scientific knowledge are then used by teachers,

students with ADHD and their parents as they use AHA in new and creative ways to engage in innovative and personally meaningful experiential learning activities. The use of such technologies will promote excellence in education and skills through inclusive access to digital learning and 21st century competencies.

Detailed info at: <http://aha.ucd.ie/>

**Figure 2:** WWL programme within AHA



**Who?**

Class 4-6th Sep 2018  
Average IQ  
ADHD diagnosis  
Co-morbid issues

**What?**

Case history forms  
Pre-assessment & report  
Online teacher training  
Intervention school/home  
Re-assessment & report

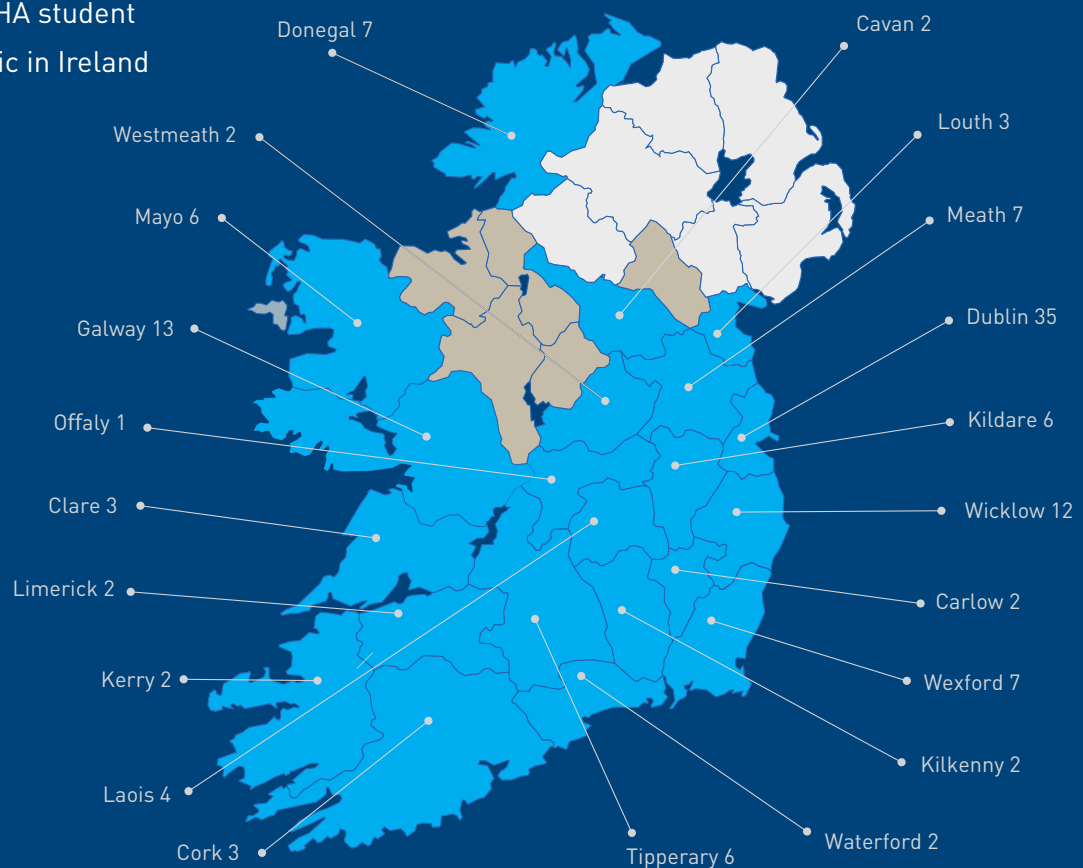
**Levels?**

Step by step programme  
7 Levels

**Program?**

104 Videos  
330 Interactive exercises  
12 M/C questionnaires

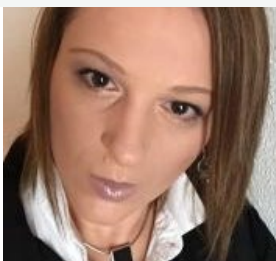
**Figure 3:** AHA student demographic in Ireland



Expected impact	AHA
Breakthrough digital technologies for ADHD teaching and learning, through novel research-industry collaborations in emerging areas.	Develop a pilot project to evaluate the impact of AR digital technologies that companies outside the project can use to develop educational products and services based on AR Effective use of current digital solutions on line for literacy (WordsWorthLearning) and monitoring ADHD behavior (WHAAM project).
Improved ability to innovate in key economic growth areas by fostering development of creative and scientific/technological skills.	Develop demonstrators for AR based ADHD teaching and learning. Intertwined development of creative, scientific and technological skills within the consortium and key stakeholders. Innovation through the by-products of the demonstrators through the SME partner of the project.
Increase of concentration to fulfill the teaching and learning tasks in literacy of ADHD students.	Provide the platform both on line and augmented to decrease the frustration during the teaching and learning process and increase the concentration. Evaluation of the digital solution provided will be associated with the employment of WHAAM project (Web Application for ADHD Monitoring).

**Table 2:** Expected impacts of AHA

## Author



### Eleni Mangina

Assoc. Professor Eleni Mangina joined UCD, School of Computer Science in 2002. Eleni is an active researcher in the area of applied Artificial Intelligence (AI) in domains of education, computer science and engineering. Recent research focus includes Educational Robotics, Virtual and Augmented Reality applications in education.

# Neurodiversity and Dyslexia

Nuala Brady

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## Abstract

Although usually defined as a learning disorder that is specific to reading, dyslexia reflects natural variations in neurological processing of the visual form of words and their associated sounds. Recent advances in neuroscience show that in learning to read we 'reuse' parts of the brain that are initially involved in face and object recognition. This way of thinking about reading may help de-emphasise dyslexia as a 'disability' while furthering our ability to support students for whom reading is challenging.

The term 'neurodiversity' describes one approach to understanding differences in cognition, behaviour and learning. Key to this approach is the idea that various neurological conditions - including dyslexia - reflect normal variation in our genetic makeup (Jaarsma & Welin, 2012). Crucially, the approach emphasises the need to understand and accommodate these differences in society. In the case of dyslexia the societal institution of education is paramount; from early readers in primary school to accomplished readers at university, neurodiversity means that some students will require extra supports to achieve the complex, cultural skill of reading.

Dyslexia is characterised by marked difficulties in learning to read that cannot be attributed to low intelligence, to poor motivation on the part of the child who is

learning to read, or to a lack of education and opportunity to read (Conway, Brady & Misra, 2018). The incidence of dyslexia among school children is estimated to be between 5% and 10% (Stein, 2001), and it persists beyond childhood into adolescence and adulthood. College students may experience particular difficulty as they encounter new vocabulary and terminology during their university education (Shaywitz, 1996).

Our understanding of dyslexia is greatly enhanced by thinking more generally about the cognitive skill of reading. The human brain appears to be 'hard wired' for certain perceptual and cognitive skills such as face recognition and spoken language, and babies learn to recognize others and to communicate with them early and effortlessly. In contrast, reading might be conceptualized as a 'cultural



invention' (Dehaene, 2009) for which we are not prepared by evolution. Learning to read requires years of formal instruction as children come to link the sight of a printed word (orthographic processing) with its sound or pronunciation (phonological processing). Alphabetic writing systems date from ~1500BC (Andrews, 2012) which is 'recent' in the history of human evolution, and the characteristics of the world's various writing systems reflect the requirement that they are easy to recognize and to produce (Changizi & Shimojo, 2005). This ease of recognition and production refers to 'neurotypical' processing and leaves open the possibility that reading and spelling may be challenging for people whose visual or phonological processing varies from the norm.

Literacy, the ability to read and write, is a measure of a population's education (Roser & Ortiz-Ospina, 2018) and universal literacy levels have risen from ~12% in 1820 to ~86% in 2015 (<https://ourworldindata.org/literacy>). This statistic is particularly interesting when we consider reading, and by extension dyslexia, from a neuroscience perspective. For example, if we ask which parts of the brain are involved in word recognition, then we are prompted to ask about the function of these parts of the brain before an individual child learns to read, or indeed, before an entire population learns to read.

Recent advances in neuroscience, particularly by Dehaene and colleagues

(Dehaene, 2009) show that there is a specific part of the cortex in the left hemisphere of the brain - now known as the Visual Word Form Area (VWFA) - that is crucial to the recognition of individual words. Like the analogous area in the right hemisphere, this region is initially involved in face and object recognition but acquires the specific function of word recognition as a child learns to read. The idea that the brain 'reuses' or 'recycles' brain circuitry is an exciting one for psychologists as it allows us explore similarities in how complex stimuli such as words and faces are processed.

The starting point for our own research in this area is the observation that recognition of words and faces present similar challenges to the visual system. Both are made up of parts, features (eyes, nose and mouth) in the case of faces and individual letters in the case of words. Spatial configuration - the specific way in which these parts are arranged - seems very important to recognizing individual faces and individual words.

Figure 1 reproduces a variant of the 'Thatcher illusion' (Thompson, 1980) but using an image of former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, who is shown in upright and inverted orientations. The image shown in the familiar upright orientation is thought to activate regions of the cortex that are sensitive to the spatial configuration of the features in the face; therefore the distortion is obvious and rapidly perceived. In contrast,

inverted images are thought to activate regions of the cortex that process in a more analytic, feature by feature basis; therefore, the distortion is not so apparent, and it takes us longer to discover what is wrong with the face.



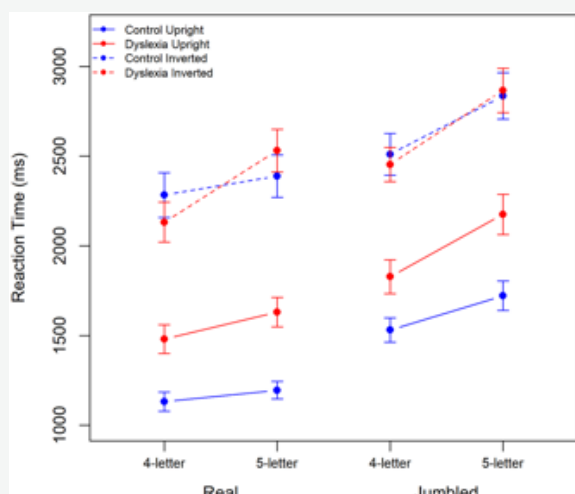
**Figure 1:** An image of Tony Blair which has been distorted by inverting the eyes and mouth. The distortion is much easier to see in the upright image on the right than in the inverted image on the left. One explanation for this effect is that the visual system is sensitive to facial ‘configuration’ (the spatial relations between the features) at upright orientations but resorts to an analytic style of processing when the face is inverted. Image available from [www.viperlib.com](http://www.viperlib.com).

Applying the same logic to words, it should be much easier to recognize errors in words or to say whether a pair of words are the same or different when they are in the familiar, upright orientation than when inverted. In a recent study we presented UCD students, half of whom had a diagnosis of dyslexia and were registered with ALL,

with pairs of word and asked them to judge, as quickly as possible, whether the words were the same or different (Conway et al., 2018). The stimuli included 4- and 5-letter words presented in both upright and inverted orientations and words which were intact or in which the letters had been jumbled (Figure 2). As shown in Figure 3 the students with dyslexia were as fast as their peers when the task was most difficult (in the inverted conditions) but they were considerably slower than their peers when the task was easiest (in the upright conditions). This suggests that analytic visual processing is intact in those with dyslexia but that, while they clearly do benefit from seeing the stimuli in the normal upright orientation, they do not benefit as much as typical readers. This is likely due to the fact that the students with dyslexia rely to a greater extent on slower, analytical processing during reading.

nurse    nnrse	sunre    snnre
ɹɹɹɹɹ    ɹnɹɹɹ	ɹnɹɹ    ɹnnɹɹ

**Figure 2:** Examples of upright real (upper left), upright jumbled (upper right), inverted real (lower left), inverted jumbled (lower right) stimuli all made from the word ‘nurse’. In this example the pairs differ by one letter. In the study both same and different trials were used.



**Figure 3:** Performance, measured by reaction time, was better when stimuli were upright than inverted, showing the advantages of configural processing. While students with a diagnosis of dyslexia were as fast as their peers when the task was most difficult (the inverted conditions) they were considerably slower than their peers when the task was easiest (the upright conditions).

The implications of this and related research for supporting students with dyslexia are

numerous. First, as analytic processing is slower than configural processing, students with dyslexia will likely need more time to complete examinations that are based on reading. Secondly, as ‘configuration’ refers to orthographic structure in the case of reading, students with dyslexia may be less fluent at spelling and will benefit from spelling waivers. Thirdly, conceptualizing dyslexia as a mismatch between aspects of visual and phonetic processing and the specific requirements of reading helps us appreciate that there may be considerable variability among students with a diagnosis of dyslexia as to the specific supports they require. Finally, it is important to remember that neurodiversity exists before we learn to read and does not go away when we learn to read. Therefore, an important support for students with dyslexia is to educate their teachers of their continuing needs in university.

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## Author

### Nuala Brady

Nuala Brady is Associate Professor of Psychology at UCD and Vice-Principal for Graduate Studies in the College of Social Sciences and Law. Her research is in the broad area of visual and social cognition, and includes work on the recognition of faces, bodies and gestures. Her recent research on word processing in dyslexia uses experimental procedures associated with the study of face perception to explore the nature of visual processing in dyslexia. She is grateful to the staff at UCD Access and Lifelong Learning (ALL) and to students registered with ALL for their participation in her research.

“Nothing about us  
without us”



# Asking questions is an effective means of promoting inclusion for people with disabilities

Amy Hassett

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## Abstract

Often people with disabilities (PWDs) do not feel that they are listened to and are not included in the decisions that affect their daily lives. While this is a significant issue, there is a simple solution: Ask Questions.

The challenges that come with being a person with a disability (PWD) can, at times, feel incredibly individual. It can feel like the issues that you face are completely different from those experienced by every other PWD. However, in the past year, I have spent a lot of time with PWDs and have learned a lot about the issues faced by most, if not all of us. Perhaps our greatest concern can be summarised by the phrase “**Nothing about us without us**”.

PWDs are often concerned that decisions regarding our lives and the resources we require are being made by people who do not have disabilities. This is a serious issue because, fundamentally, a person who does not have a disability can never truly understand what it feels like to be a disabled

person. One example of this comes up time and time again in casual conversation.

Quite often, when talking to someone who does not have a disability, the conversation turns to the accessibility of the campus where I’m studying. For the last four years, this has been UCD. Inevitably, the person whom I’m speaking to will bring up wheelchair doors, ramps and accessible lecture theatre seating, thinking that these issues would be my greatest concerns. They are not. My greatest concerns regarding accessibility in UCD are centred around the social aspect of college life. I worry that the location where a night out or day trip is being held will not be accessible. I worry that I will not have enough power left in my wheelchair at the end of the day to go to such an event.



And I worry that I will have to take my manual wheelchair instead and will be reliant on the kindness of friends and friends of friends wheel me around.

In all the time that I have been in UCD, throughout all the conversations that I have had with people in lecture theatres, hallways and shops, no one has guessed my concerns correctly. But perhaps the greater issue is that no one has ever asked me. It is automatically assumed that I, as a person in a wheelchair, will worry about doors, ramps and lecture theatre seating.

While this isn't a massive issue in this context, it does illustrate how ubiquitously PWDs are not asked about their opinions regarding the issues that they face. Instead, people who have little or no experience of being disabled make assumptions about our concerns. This is a big problem and leads to time, money and effort being wasted. But it doesn't have to be that way. There is a very simple, elegant solution to this problem. Ask questions.

I have yet to meet a person with a disability who takes offence at being asked what they accommodations they require or the issues they face. Generally, we enjoy it. When someone asks me what my greatest concerns or challenges are, they are respecting the fact that I have had different experiences to them as a result of my disability that they cannot understand. In much the same way as we cannot assume

what it is like to experience other forms of hardship such as bullying, sexism or racism, we cannot pretend to know what it is like to be disabled unless we find ourselves in that situation. To fail to ask questions is to not acknowledge the adversities that PWDs must face in their daily lives. But in asking PWDs questions, we are validating their experiences and allowing them to define themselves. Through asking questions, we give PWDs the power to define themselves and to present themselves in the way in which they would like to be presented.

**I don't want to be seen as the person who worries about ramps, and heavy doors and lecture halls because that is not who I am. I don't have to worry about those things because I have the physical strength to overcome those barriers and I don't need help with them. But I want to be the person who takes part in all aspects of college life, and I do need more support with the social aspect of college. If you don't ask me what I worry about, then I won't be able to tell you this, and you won't be able to help me. So please, ask questions.**

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## Author



### Amy Hassett

Amy Hassett is a Physiology Graduate from UCD who has worked with the Access and Lifelong Centre as a Student Leader for the past three years. She also served as the Student's Union Disability Campaign Coordinator in the 2017/18 academic year. Outside of college she has become involved in the disability rights movement, particularly in the area of societies attitudes and expectations of people with disabilities. She is currently living in Rotterdam, perusing a master's degree in Neuroscience.

# Diary of a 49-year-old teenager

John Duffy

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As a 49-year-old teenager, I was delighted and surprised to have been given the opportunity to address the panel and guests of the UCD Access Symposium 2018. My route to university has not taken the traditional course. With the help of access, I have been shown there are many different routes to university.

In the late 1980's I left school without a leaving certificate and with only one desire which was to get away from education as quickly as I could. I had found school to be a constant challenge which I never seemed to be able to get to grips with. When I finished school, I like many others emigrated to England for a short while. When I returned home to Ireland, I was able to get a job in a local factory as general labour on the factory floor. Over time I became a desktop publisher, and after twenty-three years I lost my job which led me to a crossroads where I had to decide did I want to continue workings in the print industry or did I want to take a second chance and try education again.

Enter into my life the access programme and all the support that came with it, one door closes, and another door opens. In my case, the door was University College Dublin. When I look back at my interview

with Thomond Coogan, I remember distinctly how nervous I was about even going for the meeting. There was a feeling of I don't belong in UCD, or more likely I was worried that UCD would say you don't belong in UCD. This was to turn out to be totally unfounded and untrue. When I started my first year in UCD, it was as a student on the access course which once complete, and the required marks have been achieved guaranteed me a place in UCD and in my case the opportunity to take a full-time Bachelor Arts degree course. The access course I undertook required me to take History and Study skills in my first semester and Sociology and Study skills in my second semester. University was giving me the chance to immerse myself in History books something which I had always had a love for which I have inherited from my father.

When I entered University as a BA student, I came intending to undertake a degree in History and Information studies with Archaeology as an elective. But after first year my interest in Archaeology had taken a greater hold of me than Information Studies. As I have mentioned earlier on, I had been a desktop publisher for over twenty years which is not what may be expected for someone who has dyslexia.

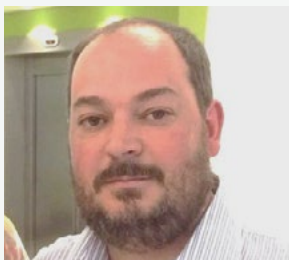
I was not diagnosed with dyslexia until the end of the first semester of my BA degree. Being diagnosed with dyslexia helped to explain why school had been a struggle for me during my formative years. With the help of the access centre and in particular Dr Lisa Padden was I able to overcome this issue. Throughout the many different supports the access centre has given me to work around my dyslexia it has also given me the confidence to become involved in activities that have taken place on campus and off. I have become an access leader which has enabled me to both welcome new students onto campus and also reach out to members of the community who may feel like I had felt that university is not for them. The support that is given in access has been integrated into the ethos of other departments within UCD. Nowhere for me was this support provided more strongly the School of Archaeology. Their support has

helped me to become more involved in both giving feedback from my fellow students and also making students aware of changes within the school. This work had been carried out through the staff-student liaison committee. My love of history has helped my appreciation of archaeology as they both complement each other. This year I have just completed my third year been involved in the evacuation of a site in Serbia, and this has enabled me to stay digging in the mud as all 49-year-old teenagers would love to be a part of. With my degree finished I now find myself starting masters to become a secondary school teacher which could not have been possible without the support of the access centre and the people in it that make a difference to people like me.

I would like to acknowledge in particular the support of Thomond Coogan, Dr Lisa Padden and my wife, Pauline.

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## Author



### John Duffy

John Duffy, from Kildare town, has been attending UCD for the last four years. His first year involved night classes taken through the Access programme, and since then he has begun a BA degree in both history and archaeology. Previous to his return to education he worked as a desktop publisher for over 20 years. On completion of his degree, he plans on starting a Professional Masters in Education.

# Supporting Student Mental Health – Whose Job Is it?

Julie Tonge

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## Abstract

This paper will address the challenges presented by student mental health in University College Dublin and higher education generally and suggest that a whole college approach is the way forward in addressing these challenges. This approach would involve all staff and faculty taking an active role in limiting the potential impact of college activities on student mental health.

It is difficult to avoid media headlines reporting on the challenges students are facing in relation to their mental health or what many are referring to as the “**student mental health crisis**”. This prompts the question if student mental health has got worse or if we are simply more aware of it, due to society becoming more open about discussing our mental wellbeing. On a recent visit to UCD, Dr Marsha Glines, the Dean of Academic Services in Regis College Boston, responded to this question by saying that she believes student mental health has become worse and she attributes this partly to how unprepared students are for college. She believes part of this lack of preparation is down to the protective nature of parents and a culture in which young people are never allowed to fail. The products of this protective culture are students who don’t know how to handle criticism and when they encounter a

relatively inconsequential setback, such as a low-grade on a first essay, this can lead to issues with anxiety and depression. This is particularly problematic in what we know is a largely vulnerable group, with the onset of mental illness most likely to occur during childhood or adolescence (Kessler & Wang, 2008, p. 124).

It can be difficult to determine when a student is experiencing poor mental health. Signs and symptoms can include visible distress and emotions, not attending classes or missing deadlines or stating that their anxiety is preventing them from completing or even attempting their work. Some of our students will have experienced mental illness before entering college and may be supported by a team of mental health professionals. Others may have no support network at all and may not have admitted to

A recent external review of mental health provision in UCD by the Work Research Centre highlighted that our mental health supports system for students are only partially developed and substantial further efforts are needed





parents or friends that they are struggling and are too nervous or embarrassed to discuss their feelings with their family doctor. Regardless of whether students have disclosed a mental health difficulty, these symptoms indicate at the very least that a student is unhappy and requires some level of support. What colleges are struggling with is who should provide this support particularly when college health services, who traditionally held this role, are reporting long waiting lists and many are unable to keep up with the increased demand for counselling. A similar situation exists in the UK where according to some estimates demand for college mental health services have increased by 50% (Yeung, Weale & Perraudin, 2016).

UCD currently responds by referring students to a range of supports including a programme Student Adviser (who can assist students in dealing with personal, social and emotional issues) or the Student Health and Counselling service. Students with enduring mental health difficulties can access disability supports and are entitled to a Needs Assessment which will lead to a range of Reasonable Accommodations and access to specialist supports. The number of students disclosing a mental health disability has increased substantially in recent years (in 2015 we had 160 students, last year that increased to 239 and this year 314).

Exams appear to be a particular cause of mental distress and students are

seeking help due to experiencing panic attacks, anxiety in large exam venues, and perfectionist tendencies. Our response to this is to facilitate them to take their exams in a smaller venue but there is little follow up and we don't usually investigate the causes of such anxiety or offer help in learning to manage panic attacks and other symptoms. There are obvious issues with our reliance on end of semester exams and it would be interesting to see if a more flexible system incorporating choice of assessment would lessen the number of disclosures from students about their mental health. Students disclose similar issues when they have been unable to meet the demands of their course and apply for extenuating circumstances. The result of this process may be that they are permitted to repeat an assessment without penalty or to hand in an assignment late but often nothing is done to address the presenting issue of poor mental health.

There is an argument to be made that sending students for counselling, disability support or exam accommodations is providing a sticking plaster for an issue that requires a much more widespread and cohesive approach. A recent external review of mental health provision in UCD by the Work Research Centre highlighted that our mental health supports system for students are only partially developed and substantial further efforts are needed. On the surface it would seem that early intervention to assist students experiencing signs of poor mental health may help to prevent subsequent

referrals to specialist supports such as one-to-one counselling and/or disability support.

Despite efforts to address the issues presented by student mental health it is still not clear who has a role to play in supporting these students. Perhaps this question is no longer relevant as in reality college staff and faculty are inevitably dealing with student mental health whether they deem it to be part of their role or not. A study published in the UK this year on the roles and experiences of academics in student mental health concluded that responding to student mental health problems is an inevitable part of the academic role (Hughes, 2018, p.5). A logical step further would be that it is an inevitable part of all student facing staff, faculty and perhaps others.

Staff, faculty and student representatives at all levels are being faced with challenges relating to student mental health, but many are not trained in providing such support and many are not supported by the institution in this aspect of their role. In the absence of training most of us rely on our own knowledge and experience which can lead to a patchy and often inadequate response. There is currently a limited range of options to refer a student too but no clear protocol for staff to follow so that they know that a student will be met, heard, and offered an appropriate level of support. UCD has developed a cohesive mental health policy but the referral options provided are limited and it is difficult for staff and faculty to

make a judgement call on what might be appropriate. This lack of clarity with regards to roles and responsibilities leads to staff and faculty who respond well to students' mental health needs becoming overwhelmed and in danger of burning out. Pastoral support is not allocated time nor rewarded in terms of promotion and this can add to the pressure on faculty as responding to student mental health needs inevitably takes away from research and teaching.

Some studies, including a recent publication on supporting student mental health by AHEAD in Ireland (AHEAD, 2016), and the review of our own mental health services, are pointing towards a whole college approach to supporting student mental health. This would involve having a comprehensive and diverse range of modalities – both preventative and interventive –available to support student health and wellbeing including counselling, group Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, mindfulness and resilience training, online supports and widespread training and support for staff and faculty at all levels. This approach must be overseen and communicated widely so that referrals to appropriate services can be made and will be followed up. A central point or person to refer students to who can assess a student's needs, refer to appropriate supports, and follow-up to offer further or alternative supports if needed. If we are serious about supporting student mental health in a meaningful and cohesive way, we need to design all our activities

with a focus on limiting the potential impact on student mental health. This does not mean making our courses easier or less challenging but creating an environment where students know what to expect, feel supported and where their well-being is important and protected. Improved mental

health amongst our student population can only have a positive impact with benefits including better grades, less absenteeism, more class participation and an atmosphere in which students can enjoy their learning experience.

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## Author



### Julie Tonge

Julie Tonge is passionate about mainstreaming and ensuring that students with disabilities can have full and equal access to all aspects of college life with the need for minimal individual adjustments.

Julie works with students, faculty and staff across all University departments and provides advice and training on disability awareness and inclusive practices. Julie also works to develop local and national policy to ensure adequate and consistent supports for students with a disability across the higher education sector. Julie is the Disability Officer in UCD Access & Lifelong Learning, a former member of the Board of Directors of AHEAD (Association for Higher Education Access & Disability) and is currently the chair of the Disability Advisers Working Network (DAWN), the professional organisation for disability officers who are primarily responsible for supporting learners with disabilities in Higher Education in Ireland.





## Foirgneamh Newman Newman Building

Léachtlanna L, M, N  
Lecture Theatres L, M, N



Léachtlanna O,P,Q,R  
Lecture Theatres O,P,Q,R



Oifig Chláir  
Programme Office



Comhairleoirí na Mac Léinn/Séiplíneacht  
Student Advisor/Chaplaincy



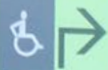
Tollán chuig an Leabharlann  
Tunnel to Library



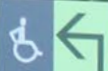
Copi Print



Léachtlanna L, M, N  
Lecture Theatres L, M, N



Léachtlanna O,P,Q,R  
Lecture Theatres O,P,Q,R



Leithreas  
Toilet



Leithreas Inrochtana  
Accessible Toilet



Ardaitheoir  
Lift



# Access ALL Areas

## UCD Progress in Campus Accessibility

Fiona Sweeney and Tina Lowe

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A Universally Designed environment is one that is fully inclusive. Universal Design provides a framework which allows for the creation of an environment so that it may be accessed, understood and used to the greatest practicable extent, in the most independent and natural manner possible, in the widest possible range of situations and without the need for adaptation, modification, assistive devices or specialised solutions (Government of Ireland, 2005) (Ireland, Disability Act , 2005).

### Introduction

Historically, UCD is made up of a diverse physical environment on a 350-acre campus, comprising 18th century listed buildings; 21st century buildings; with the main campus built in the 60s when accessibility was not on the agenda.

UCD has a continuing commitment to providing education to a diverse range of students, and these commitments have been reaffirmed in UCD Strategy to 2020, specifically Objective 5 which aims to 'attract and retain an excellent and diverse cohort of students, faculty and staff'. The university's

Strategy for Mainstreaming Equality of Access and Widening Participation elaborates the university's commitment to broadening the range of opportunities for students from diverse backgrounds.

The Disability Act 2005 was created to progress and embed the participation of people with disabilities in society by supporting the provision of disability specific services and improving access to mainstream public services. Under this legislation, sections 25 -29, 38 to 40 and 47 place obligations on public bodies, in this case UCD, to make buildings and services universally accessible to staff, students and visitors with disabilities. In order to ensure that a coherent, institution-wide response was made to this Act and relevant legislation, it was recommended to undertake an audit of specific buildings at UCD selected as high priority for improvements in accessibility. The audit established the 2012 status of the accessibility of these buildings in terms of accessibility, ease of use, and prioritised accessibility improvements on a phased basis, in accordance with legislative requirements.

## Guiding principles of campus accessibility

In 2010 the role of Campus Accessibility Officer, mandated under Section 26(2) of the Disability Act 2005, was established to create awareness and to act as a conduit for disability issues throughout the university.

However, the disability sector has moved on since this Act came into force. The addendums to the Building Regulations, specifically Part M, Building Control Act, (Ireland, Technical Guidance Document M - Access and Use (2010) which came into force in January 2011, now bring the building regulations from the initial area of disability expertise to the area of inclusion for all.

Access is now seen in terms of universal access which means that accessibility issues are dealt with in terms of our entire population, including our ageing population, people with disabilities and other users such as parents with prams and buggies. This paradigm shift from disability issues to universal access is an opportunity which enables institutions such as UCD to create a more accessible campus as well as a more accessible customer-driven business model and a more inclusive teaching and learning curriculum.

The main change to this building regulation is that the disability term has been replaced by the term Access for All. This is now

referring to universal access and design. Universal access and design translates to access for all which means that everyone has to be included. The legislation refers to parkways, roads, access to services, paths, signage, access to buildings and Disability Access Certificates, which are now required on all new buildings in addition to Fire Safety Certificates.

### How we approached campus accessibility:

In 2012 an accessibility audit was commissioned by Access and Lifelong Learning in conjunction with Estate Services. Ten buildings were chosen on the basis of highest footfall, and buildings in most urgent need of accessibility adjustments.

A focus group comprising staff and students with disabilities, Estate Services staff and staff members of the Access & Lifelong Learning Unit was established to consult with the selected auditors throughout the audit implementation.

The Audit adhered to the legislative context which included:

- The Disability Act 2005 and referenced in the NDA's Code of Practice on accessible public services. (Authority)
- An audit to the standard of the principles of Universal Access and Design
- Part M of the Building Regulations 2010(with the additional changes which come into effect in January 2012)



- Building Control Act, 2007
- A factual description of the accessibility features of the site
- A description of facilities and practices at the time of the audit
- Good practice examples and other helpful advice and guidelines where appropriate and would make recommendations in relation to a process of management of access issues.

Audit recommendations were prioritised as follows:

<b>P1 Public area</b>	high priority
<b>P2 Public area</b>	medium priority
<b>P3 Public area</b>	at next major refurbishment
<b>S2 Staff area</b>	medium priority, alter if staff requires, or at next refurbishment
<b>S3 Staff area</b>	major alteration required
<b>Mnt</b>	maintenance issue
<b>Mgt</b>	management issue

## From audits to actions

Significant progress has been made since 2012 in implementing the recommendations of the accessibility audit. This has been possible as a result of the ongoing financial support committed by the university and by fruitful partnerships with UCD units, including UCD Estates Services and the UCD Safety Office.

Capital works have been advanced through a close working relationship with

Estates Services. In addition to these capital projects, a significant milestone in advancing accessibility was achieved with the incorporation of the Building for Everyone (NDA) Universal Design guidelines (Authority, Building for Everyone) into the UCD buildings guidelines, ensuring that all future capital works in UCD meet the highest standards of accessibility.

Strategic decisions have been taken to make the main spine of the campus, and the areas with the most footfall a priority for accessibility works to maximise the impact of our limited resources. UCD Access & Lifelong Learning and UCD Estate Services hold regular update meetings to keep informed of progress on capital projects, to plan and agree how the annual accessibility budget is spent and to systematically address Priority one and Priority two audit recommendations, based on accessibility impact and value for money.

For example, in many instances it is not practically possible to make all building exits suitable for some people with disabilities. It was agreed to rationalise the number of step free emergency exit routes and to provide reasonable accommodations through a combination of signage, management and awareness of Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans (PEEPS) for staff and students.

Improvements are ongoing to routes throughout the campus. Ramps have been







added where appropriate and/or improved, with tactile paving to indicate change of levels. Disabled parking bays have been added to and improved. Manual doors at entrances to buildings have either been replaced or have been power assisted, vastly improving external access and access to buildings on campus.

Internally, within buildings, double narrow doors have been replaced with larger single doors to improve circulation, plain glass doors have been manifested and doors with high vision panels replaced with doors with vision panels at the correct height. Flights of stairs have been improved with stair nosings installed to top and bottom rungs of steps. New and additional accessible sanitary facilities have been installed in some buildings while other accessible sanitary facilities have been improved.

## Internal accessibility and wayfinding

Both internal and external signage was regarded as priority one and two items throughout the accessibility audit reports with internal signage a combination of ad-hoc interventions and no consistency to make it easily understood throughout the campus buildings.

In 2015, an internal accessibility signage tender was awarded to an architectural company to conduct a detailed survey of nine audited buildings with designs for each

sign type, drawings showing layout, size & position of each sign and a document that could be issued to suppliers of signage for pricing. In addition to compliance with the Disability Act 2005, Part M Building Control Regulations 2010 and the Building Controls Act 2007. Signage should follow the NDA Building for Everyone guidelines.

The scope of the signage project covers:

- Step-free accessible routes
- Refuge areas
- Floor levels
- Directions to lifts, key offices and lecture theatre
- Accessible sanitary facilities.

The design principles of the accessible signage project strove to ensure that effective universal signage should be normalized and consistent, that the Wayfinding should be intuitive, self-navigable and easily read.

The wayfinding strategy is based on well-structured colour coded navigation guides with signs at all key decision points, with the aim to provide the following reassurance:

- 1 I know where I am,
- 2 I know where my destination is,
- 3 I know that I am following the right route and
- 4 I know that I have arrived at my destination.

The outcome of the project is designed to:

- Reduce featured destinations to key

- locations,
- Strengthen route choices for both wheelchair and abled access equally,
- Provide clear visuals and clarity for the visually impaired.
- Deliver an accessible signage strategy that can be built upon and rolled out in all campus buildings and signage normalisation for internal wayfinding.

## Conclusion

While access to the university built environment has vastly improved since the

2012 audit, many accessibility challenges remain, in particular some of the historic buildings and those built in the 1960's.

By adopting a Universal Design approach to new builds and major refurbishment projects, the university is future proofing access to the built environment. The central annual audit works budget line, ring fenced for access audit projects, strengthens commitment, understanding and awareness of the needs of every campus user, allowing our cohort of students, staff and visitors full and inclusive access to all areas.

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Fiona Sweeney BA, H Dip in Education, HDip in Computer Applications in Education, MSc in Agriculture, Extension and Rural Development, is the Head, Outreach Engagement & Transition in UCD Access and Lifelong Learning. Fiona began working at the university in 2000. She brings her training and experience of

secondary school teaching to her role and combines it with her experience of working in a variety of community development roles. Fiona leads UCD's outreach programme, whose aim is to increase access to students from target communities/groups experiencing low progression rates to higher education. She leads a team of access experts who work with DEIS Primary schools, DEIS Secondary schools, Further Education & Training, and targeted groups and communities. Fiona also leads on campus accessibility in the university.



### **Tina Lowe**

Tina Lowe is the UCD Campus Accessibility Officer and former University Disability Officer. Blind since 1993 due to viral meningitis, she returned to education in UCD in 1997 and successfully completed a BA in Languages, followed by a Master's degree in Equality Studies. Tina works on campus accessibility projects

that relate to the built and technical environments. She is also a member of the UCD Staff Disability Network. Tina was part of the team that made history at Shankill Tennis Club in Dublin when 13 countries from around the world competed in the 2018 World Blind Tennis Championships – the first time the Championships have been held in Ireland.

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