

Disability Awareness and University Staff Training in Ireland (Practice Brief)

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Abstract

It is vital that all university staff have awareness of the difficulties that may be experienced by students with disabilities. Staff must be given the knowledge and resources to support these students effectively. University College Dublin (UCD) Access & Lifelong Learning has developed a communication and training strategy to improve disability awareness among staff in UCD, Ireland. This article will outline the development and implementation of this strategy as a model that could be adapted in other institutions. In particular, this Practice Brief will outline the training options provided for staff with a focus on the implementation of Universal Design for Instruction (UDI). Inclusivity and accessibility are vital components in the approach to design and delivery of education at all levels. This article gives an overview of the practical tips and advice given to Faculty in UCD who wish to implement the principles of UDI in their own work.

Keywords: Universal design; inclusive education; university teaching; disability; staff training.

University staff must be provided with the knowledge and resources to effectively support students who may be experiencing difficulties due to their disability. Students with disabilities represent 4.6% of the total student population in Ireland, up from 0.7% in 1993/94 (Association for Higher Education Access and Disability [AHEAD], 2013). This paper outlines the development and implementation of a strategy to improve awareness among staff in University College Dublin (UCD) Ireland, which could be adapted for use in other institutions. Lack of participation of individuals with disabilities within higher education has been linked with obstacles to participation (Shevlin, Kenny & McNeela, 2004), lack of positive expectations for young individuals with disabilities in primary and post-primary education (Hanafin, Shevlin, Kenny, & McNeela, 2007; Shevlin, Kenny & Loxley, 2008), and the inequitable social structures within society that disadvantage individuals with disabilities (Priestley, 2001). The Irish National Disability Survey (2006) found that one-third (32%) of respondents had stopped their education sooner than they intended because of their disability, due to how it affected or limited them (Central Statistics Office [CSO], 2006).

The Disability Act 2005 places a statutory obligation on public service providers in Ireland to support access to services and facilities for people with disabilities and is applied alongside the Equal Status Acts 2000-2011. To ensure compliance, the Disability Advisors Working Network, Ireland established a Code of Practice adopted by UCD, in accordance with the Disability Act 2005, the Equal Status Acts 2000-2011 and the University Act 1997. UCD is Ireland's largest university with over 25,000 students (with almost 4% registered for disability support), and is committed to a policy of equal opportunity in education and to ensuring that students with a disability have as complete and equitable access to all facets of University life as can reasonably be provided. The Equal Status Acts 2000-2011 define disability as including physical, sensory, mental health, medical, and learning difficulties/conditions. The legal definition does not offer any practical assistance to those working to support students with disabilities who present with varying and specific difficulties. AHEAD¹ offers a useful alternative definition:

A student is disabled if he/she requires a facility which is outside of the mainstream provision of

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the college in order to participate fully in higher education and without which the student would be educationally disadvantaged in comparison with their peers. (Disability Advisors Working Network [DAWN], 2008, p. 38)

This definition highlights the potential disadvantage for students with disabilities that may be caused by the college environment: physical campus, teaching styles, and procedures or attitudes. This emphasises the social model of disability (society should remove barriers) rather than the traditional medical model (person with the “impairment” needs to adapt) (Hutchison, 1995; Johnston, 1994). To maximise the potential of students, the barriers to full participation of students with disabilities need to be removed in academic settings (Collins & Mowbray, 2005).

In analysing the potential reasoning or motivation for staff training it is important to note that, although staff can be willing to interact positively with students with disabilities (Gilson, 2010), they may unintentionally erect barriers inhibiting student success (Thomas, 2002). This can result from staff having never received adequate training in providing accommodations to students with disabilities (Cawthorn & Cole, 2010), or it can be the result of staff not being exposed to students with disabilities (Sze, 2009). This results in staff often being unaware of how to adapt their teaching to suit the needs of students with a variety of learning styles (Exley, 2003; Stodden, Stodden, Kim-Rupnow, Thai, & Galloway, 2003). Students with dyslexia were found to have significantly lower self-esteem and to feel more anxious and less confident than other students in their written work and academic achievements (Riddick, Sterling, Farmer, & Morgan, 1999). Significant barriers include the lecturer talking too quickly, overheads being removed before the student could digest the content, and difficulties in note taking (Fuller, Healey, Bradley, & Hall, 2004; Riddell, Tinklin, & Wilson, 2005). Strategies to overcome these barriers include handouts in advance and alternative format lecture notes (Sanderson-Mann & McCandless, 2005; Wright, Baptista Nunes, & Katechia, 2000). Overcoming barriers and developing and implementing strategies results in the individual becoming part of the social whole.

One of the most effective frameworks for encouraging inclusive educational practices is Universal Design for Instruction (UDI). The nine principles of UDI were developed by McGuire, Scott, and Shaw (2006). UDI principles were chosen ahead of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) (CAST, 2011) principles as they apply directly to a university setting and focus on practical application rather than theoretical concepts. The

University of Connecticut has developed a successful programme of supports and tools that help teaching staff in particular to understand UDI and implement it in their own contexts (McKeown, Banerjee, Madaus, & Gelbar, 2012). These tools are designed to assist with planning, delivery, and assessment and are organised around three core areas of UDI: cognitive access, communication access, and physical access. Overall the implementation of UDI principles would have untold benefits for all students. An accessible campus, accessible teaching materials and websites, and inclusive teaching practices would all work together to help the institution gain a reputation for providing an excellent and positive educational experience.

Often students from underrepresented groups feel marginalised or isolated from their peers because they are marked out as “different” due to financial status, educational background, age, or disability. The “othering” of students in education is highly problematic (Freire, 1970; Tatum, 1997). “Othering” these students, making them feel intrinsically different and segregated from their peers, can be highly damaging. Often the very methods by which we support students with disabilities make them feel labelled and removed from the general student population. For example, providing a separate venue for students who require extra time in examinations is supportive but also isolating. By implementing UDI, universities can show a commitment to ensuring that students with additional challenges are treated as equal to their peers. Lack of awareness and the environment are the key factors affecting the impact of a person’s disability in their day-to-day life. At universities we must ensure that all staff are aware of the impact they can have on a student’s experience so that they can do all that is possible to ensure equality. Research has shown that while students may come from diverse backgrounds they share “similar concerns and expectations about going to university” (Hockings, Cooke, & Bowl, 2007, p. 730). Therefore, staff must remember that all students should be encouraged to seek an equally positive and enlightening experience at university as students with a disability enter university with the same expectations and trepidations as their peers.

Widening participation is currently a major concern across the further and higher education sectors². Numerous studies have shown that integrating UDI principles has a positive effect on the experiences of students with disabilities and other under-represented student groups (Chita-Tegmark, Gravel, Serpa, Domingos, & Rose, 2012; David, 2010; Kalivoda, 2003). Students no longer feel they are being singled out as the teaching/learning environment is perceived as

inclusive to all. UDI allows for the consideration of social justice/multiculturalism in education (Pliner & Johnson, 2004). Students from diverse backgrounds need to be considered in education planning. Widening participation, full/active participation and student retention are all important institutional goals that can be at least partially achieved through the implementation of UDI principles.

Developing the Strategy

UCD Access & Lifelong Learning developed a communication and training strategy to improve disability awareness among staff. Three key elements were considered when developing this strategy: (1) Message – identifying the areas of concern for staff and students; (2) Audience – identifying the audience for this message and ways of reaching them effectively; and (3) Time – identifying a way of providing knowledge and resources without placing significant time burden on staff.

In determining the message for staff communications and training, we analysed our most common staff concerns and queries. From staff, these involved how to support students in class and how to equitably assess all students. Student queries often involve how best to communicate with academic staff and how to get information regarding assessments and class materials. To ensure that our strategy was evidence-based rather than developed solely from anecdotal experience, detailed quantitative and qualitative data were gathered from students registered for disability support on their experiences in UCD. These data were gathered in an anonymous online survey sent to all 974 students registered with us at the end of the 2012/13 academic year and again to all 1076 students at the end of the 2013/14 academic year. Simple questions were asked with set responses and two open-ended questions that required typed responses. The quantitative questions asked students to identify their programme area and nature of disability and the other questions were as follows:

- What have UCD staff (teaching staff, support staff, etc.) done to make your UCD experience positive as a student with a disability/learning difficulty? Please outline all examples of good practice you have experienced.
- What advice or guidelines would you give to UCD staff in order to improve the experience of students with disabilities/learning difficulties?

We had a 15% response rate each year, and the representation of student categories broadly matched those of the group as a whole (see Table). Students provided a large amount of data for the open questions. This was analysed and categorised with word clouds used to visualise the trends in the responses. The responses clearly showed that students felt staff required more training in supporting students with disabilities. Students identified areas requiring staff attention:

- Knowledge of how to provide reasonable accommodations in the classroom and examinations.
- Knowledge about specific disabilities caused by different impairments.
- Lack of sufficient and/or clear information for students.
- Need for regular formal and informal communication with students.

These items became the key areas covered in our training and communications strategy.

The target audience for our communication and training was determined to be staff across the university rather than just those directly teaching students. This was based on feedback from students who reported discussing their support requirements with staff outside of the academic setting: academic administration and other support units. Reported student experiences seemed to point to an inconsistent level of understanding of how reasonable accommodations should be provided and who was responsible for taking action when a support was requested. It was clear that a more comprehensive communication strategy was required.

We developed our partnerships with the two key units involved in staff training: UCD HR Learning & Development and UCD Teaching & Learning. The suite of workshops developed for delivery through HR is designed to be accessible and useful for all staff in the university. The workshops delivered through UCD Teaching & Learning are designed specifically for teaching staff. We are acutely aware of the increasing time pressure faced by all members of staff working in the education sector. A series of workshops were developed – one-hour lunchtime sessions and two-hour sessions; we felt that any time commitment beyond two hours within one day of the teaching term would place too much of a burden on staff with demanding workloads. However, we have successfully delivered one day-long seminar funded by the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching & Learning in Higher Education outside of the teaching term. We also developed an information email to be sent to all academic

staff at the start of each semester, outlining important information regarding student supports, promoting upcoming training opportunities, and reminding staff that we are available as a resource to those with any queries or concerns regarding students with disabilities.

When developing resources, designing communications, and planning training workshops, three key areas were identified for development among staff: Universal Design for Instruction, Tips for Providing Disability Supports, and Understanding Accessibility. The most important area is undoubtedly UDI. Much work has already been done on developing a model of implementation for various aspects of this approach in postsecondary education. Burgstahler and Cory (2008) in particular present a number of strategies that can be rolled out across institutions. UDI strategies are particularly helpful for those students who are currently under-represented in third-level education: mature students, students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, and in particular students with disabilities. The core tips and strategies we chose are listed here (see Appendix B):

- Consistent good design of Virtual Learning Environment.
- Variety in class delivery.
- Choice of assessment.
- Provision of detailed guidelines for completing assessment.
- Consistency of assessment methods in comparable modules/courses.
- Compliance with WCAG 2.0 and guidelines for producing accessible material.
- Embedding core skills into all modules.
- Practice assessments made available online for every module.
- Facility for submitting drafts of continuous assessments.
- Facilitating study/discussion groups for every module.
- Clear communication strategy between students and faculty.
- Provide a statement of inclusivity for each Module.

Staff Training

All staff working in education need to recognise there is a shared responsibility for providing an equally positive inclusive educational experience to all students. Our communication and training strategy is designed to support staff in their work to support students. Creating this culture of mutual support allows for a “safe” environment where staff feel comfortable asking questions

and expressing concerns, resulting in an open dialogue between Access staff and other university employees.

We examined different delivery methods for our training sessions, examining the benefits of self-paced online learning and face-to-face workshop style sessions. Online training would help to address the issues of time commitment required from staff, allowing them to be more flexible about when and where they engage in training. Online training has been very successful in the University of Connecticut project mentioned above. However, we felt that the key messages of our training sessions would be more effective if delivered in person in an informal workshop setting. It was also important to develop a relationship with the staff members who attended the training. Essentially, in face-to-face training, ongoing trust was built up in staff members so that the Access & Lifelong Learning could act as a support in their work and not as governing body who would reprimand them for saying or doing “the wrong thing.”

Our main goal is that all staff in the university can work together pre-emptively to develop a universally supportive strategy that will ultimately benefit all students, including those with disabilities. Recent research has pointed to the fact that the differences between online and face-to-face training outcomes are negligible and what should be considered is the context of the training and the specific desired outcomes (Fishman et al., 2013). For us, relationship building is as important, if not more important, than the delivery of the key information in the sessions and, therefore, a face-to-face approach was the most suitable. However, we are currently developing some online Continuing Professional Development (CPD) modules for those staff members who are entirely unable to attend face-to-face training.

We always strive to implement the teaching strategies that we are promoting – active learning, interaction, learning through discussion, and providing the key information taking into account differing learning styles. A key aspect of our staff training workshops is that they are as interactive as possible. In our earlier sessions, we perhaps worried too much about making sure that all the facts were delivered. However, as the training has developed a much more discussion-based participatory training model has emerged (see Appendix A). At the start of each session, we ask the participants to consider some key questions about their understanding of disability and accessibility. While we are dealing with a very serious issue, we always try to ensure that the sessions have a collegial atmosphere introducing humour where possible. We then deliver our information – how the Access & Lifelong Learning supports students, how to provide reasonable accommodations, and how UDI can be implemented in UCD.

We then present a number of scenarios to participants that encompass all of the most common difficulties faced by students and staff in relation to the topics covered. Participants are then asked to discuss possible solutions to these scenarios in groups (see Appendix C). This interaction and discussion of the core issues allows participants to discuss their own experiences and share their own approach in a safe and supportive environment. Rather than asking participants to think about the procedures, we ask them to reflect on their own experiences and practices which leads to much more fruitful discussion. Fostering an environment where staff members can talk about their experiences of supporting students with disabilities or revealing an experience where retrospectively they feel they should have acted differently is the most successful outcome of the training sessions from our perspective.

Following the participant discussion we go through possible solutions from participants and encourage the use of UDI strategies. We have also included some of our students in the training and this has worked particularly well. In one session, a student described her experience as a student with a disability in relation to teaching/learning aspects of her programme identifying some specific changes that would benefit students with disabilities (and all students). In the day-long session mentioned above, a group of students provided feedback after the scenario discussion on how the issues could be addressed from their perspective.

Following the workshops we provide participants with a number of simple resources that staff can refer to quickly to answer questions or address concerns. These resources include:

- **Disability Factsheets:** These fact sheets outline the common difficulties experienced by students with disabilities such as Asperger's Syndrome or Specific Learning Difficulties. The factsheets then offer suggestions to staff on how to best support these students in university as well as providing links to further resources (Fact Sheets may be found at <http://www.ucd.ie/openingworlds/ucdaccesscentre/supportsforstudentswithadisability/informationforucdstaff/>).
- **Inclusive Curriculum Tips:** These tips provide information on how best to include students in the classroom and pre-emptively address issues that may arise. They address issues such as teaching material and assessment.
- **Guides for Providing Reasonable Accommodations:** These comprehensive guides outline the supports available to students with a disability

and how those supports may be implemented in the classroom and in assessment contexts.

These follow-up resources are also available on our website for all staff members to access, not just those who have attended our training sessions. Staff are also provided with all the materials used in workshops, including the scenarios and suggested solutions. Participants are encouraged to pass along the information freely to anyone who may be interested.

Training Outcomes and Future Recommendations

At the time of writing, a total of 322 staff have participated in our staff training sessions across 25 sessions, which varied from six participants to 45, with an average attendance of 13 staff. This has included teaching, administrative, and support staff from across the university as well as some colleagues from outside of UCD. We have completed tailored sessions for all programme-based student advisers, library staff, and staff in a number of specific schools (e.g., Veterinary Medicine, Business, and Agriculture and Food Science). Tailored sessions work particularly well as staff can email a list of areas they would like to focus on in the session, so we directly address their specific concerns as well as deliver the key messages identified by students.

Feedback from participants has been overwhelmingly positive. We gathered this using an anonymous online survey following each workshop/session. A number of participants commented that some training should be compulsory for all staff. This would be ideal; however, we need to be very cautious about how this is implemented as we want staff to continue to see that our role is to support them rather than enforce procedures. Our training already forms part of the Certificate/Diploma in University Teaching offered at UCD. Were this type of qualification to become a requirement of teaching at third level, we would hope that disability awareness would be a core part of that programme. However, it may be some time before it is compulsory for third level teaching staff to have a formal teaching qualification. Currently, we believe it would be best for all staff to receive some basic training in disability awareness and providing reasonable accommodations when they start working in the university. We could then deliver additional training after they had gained some experience working with students with disabilities. The initial training is required so that staff are aware of their responsibilities and the student experience is not impacted negatively where a required reasonable accommodation is not provided.

Our numbers of student queries and issues that required us to contact other staff members across the university have reduced dramatically. For example, queries relating to staff members being unaware of how to provide reasonable accommodations in examinations are now almost exclusively in relation to new staff members. The research on the impact of the training and communication strategy will be the next step in this process. We plan to survey students in schools/departments where many staff members have received training and those in schools/departments where few staff have received training and quantify their responses looking at the key issues identified through our earlier student surveys.

Anecdotally, students now report that staff members are much more active in discussing their support requirements with them and staff actively follow-up with students who may need reasonable accommodations for assessments. This increased communication between students and staff results in an open relationship and helps to overcome the potential “othering” of students as previously discussed. Currently, training is advertised to all staff and they can choose which training sessions, if any, they would like to attend. As supporting students with a disability is an essential component of every staff member’s job, it would be beneficial if an introductory level of training was required for all existing and incoming staff. This could be integrated in existing training for new staff rather than adding a significant time burden. As mentioned above, we plan to pilot an online module with staff in the next academic year. CPD is a necessity

in most positions so it should be relatively easy to build this into staff induction. The development of a Disability Support Board with representatives from all areas of the institution to address queries as they arise and to further promote training opportunities to staff would also be a significant step forward. The concurrent development of an institutional UDI forum for sharing of ideas and practices as well as a database with examples of how it has been implemented across the institution would also help in the promotion of inclusivity and knowledge sharing.

Conclusion

The ultimate goal in an educational institution, with regard to supporting students with disabilities, should be the mainstreaming of the provision of support to further eliminate the “othering” of students. While some steps have been taken towards this goal, such as the requirements of academic staff to provide supports for in-class tests, there is still much work to do. While it is likely that there will continue to be a need for dedicated support staff, the role of these staff members should expand to include support of staff and provision of awareness training. With the increased implementation of UDI principles and strategies in UCD, we hope to see increased widening participation and an appropriately diverse campus. As our educational practices evolve to include opportunities for participation and engagement for all students, we will hope to lead the way in true inclusivity.

Table 1

Students with a Disability Registered with UCD Access Centre

Category	2012/13	2013/14
ADD/ADHD	61	80
Autistic Spectrum Disorder	32	33
Dyspraxia	15	36
Hearing Impairment	54	33
Mental Health Condition	112	130
Physical Disability	63	71
Significant Ongoing Illness	129	156
Specific Learning Difficulty	473	495
Visual Impairment	20	24
Other	15	18
Total	974	1076

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Footnotes

¹ AHEAD, Association for Higher Education Access and Disability is an Irish independent non-profit organization working to promote full access to and participation in further and higher education for students with disabilities and to enhance their employment prospects on graduation.

² Further Education Courses are usually delivered in Colleges of Further Education rather than Universities or Institutes of Technology, which are often referred to as Higher Education Institutes (HEIs). Further Education courses are usually of one year duration and are most often level 5 or 6 as designated by the Further Education and Training Awards Council. Higher Education usually refers to courses that are level 7 or above – for example, an honours Bachelor's Degree is level 8.

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Appendix A

Sample Workshop Agenda

1. Principles of Disability Support in UCD
2. Process of Registering for Disability Support.
3. Communication with Academic Schools
4. Supports available to students with a disability
5. Providing Reasonable Accommodations
6. Disclosure and Confidentiality
7. Awareness – using the Fact Sheets
8. Universal Design for Instruction
 - a. Principles and tips for implementation
9. Assessment & Exams
10. Introduction to Assistive Technology Tools
11. Scenario Discussion
12. Student Input

Appendix B

Implementing Universal Design for Instruction

Consistent good design of Virtual Learning Environment.

Many teaching staff in universities already make their materials available online. The provision of these notes allows students to focus in class without worrying about writing down everything said by the tutor/lecturer. The expansion of this practice would be beneficial to all students. Although some lecturers worry that providing this material may result in a drop in attendance, the benefits of providing notes for those students who are dedicated to their subjects would far outweigh any possible drop in attendance (Larkin, 2010). Research has shown that a well-planned approach to supporting learning using online resources benefits all students (Hwang & Chang 2008). As academic staff seek to provide an active learning experience for students, this should not be a significant issue as teaching practice moves away from the traditional model. In fact, the flipped classroom approach already advocates for the provision of all material ahead of time to allow for active discussion in class. The materials provided, therefore, could not act as a substitute for the experience in classes/lectures. The compulsory provision of notes for every module online would also allow for a more consistent approach.

UCD Teaching & Learning (2013) have developed a project called “Good Practice in Blackboard Design.” This project supports academic staff in the creation of modules in the online learning environment which are uniform in design and layout. As part of this project UCD Access and Lifelong Learning have provided a set of guidelines on how to create accessible material for use on Blackboard. These guidelines form part of the wider project guidelines for academic staff.

Variety in class delivery.

Many teaching staff use a variety of teaching methods. However, others are still overly reliant on the traditional lecture model. Staff should be encouraged to try new methods of delivery through in-school training sessions and forums through which academics are encouraged to share their own experiences. Utilisation of module feedback and active seeking of student feedback on particular delivery methods/styles is also an excellent way to improve teaching practice.

Choice of assessment.

Students should be given the opportunity to prove their knowledge in a variety of ways so as to allow for differing learning styles. For example, assessing a module through essay-format alone does not allow a student for whom verbal expression is preferential to gain the best grade possible for them. Thompson, Johnstone, and Thurlow (2002) note that “universally designed assessments are designed and developed from the beginning to allow participation of the widest possible range of students, and to result in valid inferences about performance for all students who participate in the assessment” (p. 6). UCD Teaching and Learning (2011) have piloted a Choice of Assessment Methods project which can be viewed as a valuable first step in the process of embedding choice for assessment into all modules.

Provision of detailed guidelines for completing assessment.

Students should be provided with a detailed assessment sheet which outlines, in plain language, what is required for the assignment. This sheet should be as detailed as possible and include a clear marking rubric ensuring students know what is expected of them. Guidelines could include details on how many secondary sources are required, which sources are appropriate, an annotated reading list, and a list of FAQs. Ouellett (2004) stresses that being inclusive requires academic staff “to take expectations for assignments out of the intuitive realm and make public the expectations for performance and demonstration of progress. This is done by providing clear expectations and feedback and by offering learners comprehensive instructions for course requirements” (p. 141).

Consistency of assessment methods in comparable modules/courses.

There should be consistency across modules with regard to the amount of work and level of difficulty associated with assessments. In order to make the amount of work predictable in each module there should be a strict set of

guidelines outlining the appropriate amount of assessment. This would be somewhat complex as it would involve attempting to make comparisons between very different types of assessment e.g. essay, quiz, project, presentation.

Compliance with WCAG 2.0 and guidelines for producing accessible material.

Following these guidelines will help universities to comply with the legislation which states that material should be equally accessible to all (including the Disability Act 2005 within the Irish context). By embedding these guidelines in the process of creating all new materials the high cost of ‘retrofitting’ will be avoided.

Embedding core skills into all modules.

Many universities offer courses in first year which seek to provide students with the skills necessary in third level. However, it is highly beneficial if some time is spent in each module ensuring that students have the skills required to complete the module. These skills may include academic writing, oral presentations, reading techniques or research abilities. Setting aside at least one hour in each module to review these skills, as well as providing resources through the online learning environment, will help to ensure that no student is left at a disadvantage.

Practice assessments made available online for every module.

Short quizzes that students can take themselves to judge how well they know the material being covered can help students to become more self-aware in terms of their own knowledge and learning practices. This also helps students to stay focused on their work.

Facility for submitting drafts of continuous assessments.

Many university departments already offer this valuable facility, if in a somewhat limited way. Allowing students to submit drafts of their work helps them to understand that producing a complete piece of work is an on-going process. In order to provide consistency in every student’s educational experience, this facility should be made available in every module. This would, of course, require extra time of tutors/lecturers. However, the result of this practice would be much-improved student work which must ultimately be the goal of all staff working in education.

Facilitating study/discussion groups for every module.

Jehangir (2008) notes that “the intent of learning communities is to create a space for dialogue and connections between disciplines and ideas, but also to extend the intellectual into the sociocultural experience of students” (p. 184). Study groups should be established in class and encouraged to meet outside of class time. Group study topics/questions can be set to help structure the study time. Online discussion boards can be set up using Blackboard, and these can be a valuable tool for students who may not be able to attend campus outside of class hours. A closed Facebook group can also be set up. This can be a useful way for lecturers to communicate with students. Bringing their educational experience into their social space encourages students to see college life as an important and interesting part of their life as a whole.

Clear communication strategy between students and faculty.

This strategy should be clearly communicated to all students within a school/programme. Staff office hours should be advertised and extra time should be made available during peak assessment times. Feedback should be freely available to students, and this feedback should be positive and encouraging. Detailed outlines of how to improve work should also be made available with as much individual feedback given as possible as this is shown to be the most beneficial (Dihoff, Brosvic, Epstein, & Cook 2004). Generic grading sheets should be avoided as in many cases they do not offer any substantial guidance on what a student should do going forward.

Provide a statement of inclusivity for each module.

A statement of inclusivity should encourage tolerance of diversity in the classroom and should reassure those who would like to disclose information about their learning needs that this information will be treated with confidentiality and respect. Often disclosure can be very difficult for students with ‘hidden’ disabilities so this encouragement is needed. It is the responsibility of teaching staff to communicate that all students will have “equal access and equal opportunity” (Higbee, Chung, & Hsu 2008, 63). Pedelty (2003) emphasises the need for teaching staff to discuss this statement in their first class so that students are not left to merely read the statement on their own.

Appendix C

Scenarios for Staff Training

Scenario 1—extended deadlines and continuous assessment.

A second-year undergraduate student has approached you to request an extension for an essay that was due the previous week. The student has disclosed to you that they have a mental health difficulty and as such have had difficulty with concentrating in class and when working on the assignment. They have requested that they are able to submit their continuous assessment in June when the exam period is finished. What course of action would you suggest?

Scenario 2—supports for visually impaired students.

You are about to go and teach your first class of the semester. You have just noticed on your online class list that there is one student with a visual impairment registered for your module. Your module uses a variety of class delivery methods and resources including audio-visual material. What can you do to ensure that this student does not experience disadvantage due to their disability?

Scenario 3—supporting students with group work.

Your module is assessed using a combination of an end-of-semester exam and a group project. One group of students has come to you to complain that a member of the group is not carrying out their share of the work. You are aware, based on your online class list, that the student being referred to has Asperger's Syndrome. Suggest an appropriate solution for all students.

Scenario 4—recording devices in classes.

You have noticed that there are many students in your class using recording devices. You are not comfortable being recorded due to the risk of plagiarism and possible misuse of recordings. You have checked your online class list, and there are three students in your class with 'Use of a recording device' listed as a Reasonable Accommodation. What can/should you do in this situation?

Scenario 5—investigating poor attendance.

There is one student in your class who attends sporadically. There are marks available for attendance. You've noticed on your class list that this student has Epilepsy. The student has not approached you to disclose or provide any medical certs. What should you do in this situation?

Scenario 6—ensuring equitable access to class activities.

You are planning a field trip for your class to an archaeological dig. Your class will be travelling by coach to the site and will then have the opportunity to participate in part of the dig. One of the students taking your module is a wheelchair user. What should you consider when planning the trip?

Scenario 7—supporting students on placements.

You are in charge of a practical/placement module. There are a number of students with disabilities taking your module. You have checked your class lists, and the supports listed only seem relevant to a classroom environment. These include the use of a recording device, use of literacy software, providing notes and a number of awareness supports including Learning Disability, Asperger's Syndrome and Diabetes. What action should you take?

Scenario 8—supporting students to develop organisational skills.

There is one student in your module who has repeatedly submitted assignments late, comes to class late and has missed a number of classes. When you speak to them about these issues, they don't have any explanation but appear to be extremely disorganised. Subsequently you have noticed on your class list that this student is registered for disability support, but you are not sure why. What can you do to support this student?

Scenario 9—providing class materials.

A student has approached you and requested that you provide them with your slides in advance of lectures. They have 'Provide Lecture Notes' listed as a Reasonable Accommodation. You usually publish summary slides on Blackboard after the lecture as you are concerned that students will not attend if full notes are available. How should you respond to this student's request?