

HIGHER EDUCATION

National Forum of Inclusive Higher Education Providers – together is better



The Inclusive National Higher Education Forum (INHEF), is a national interest group comprised of higher education providers and other professionals interested in supporting access routes and inclusive post secondary education initiatives to learners with intellectual disabilities. The mission of the INHEF is to provide a collaborative space for consultation between providers, with a view to driving strategic developments, informing policy debates, building capacity within higher education institutions to establish and deliver education programs for people with intellectual disabilities. The INHEF will have a particular focus of facilitating and improving the sustainability of inclusive higher education initiatives in the Republic of Ireland. In this article, Mr Des Aston, National & School Coordinator, Trinity Centre for People with Intellectual Disabilities (TCPID) and INHEF colleagues have compiled some examples of specific initiatives underway in four HEI's in Ireland.

There are more learners in Irish higher education than ever before. In 2017/18, there were 44,000 new undergraduate students amongst the 232,000 students enrolled in higher education institutions (Higher Education Authority: HEA, 2019). There are now 14,720 students with disabilities representing 6.2% of the total student population. This figure represents a 17% rise in the number of students with disabilities in higher education year on year (AHEAD, 2019). Whilst it bodes well for society to have so many students accessing university level education, particularly the increase in numbers of students with disabilities making the transition from second level education, unfortunately this is not the case for students who are recognised as having an intellectual disability*. This cohort of students can be a minority within a minority. Many students with an intellectual disability often complete second level education with the equivalent of a Junior Certificate standard of attainment, meaning that they are not eligible to apply for higher education courses administered through the CAO application system.

In a [previous article](#) in Guidance Matters (Issue 2: Spring, 2019), The Trinity Centre for People with Intellectual Disabilities (TCPID) presented compelling evidence that people with intellectual disabilities still face significant barriers when attempting to access further/higher education courses and meaningful employment in Ireland. Inclusive educational initiatives have organically developed among Irish higher education providers over the past decade that are specifically designed for students with intellectual disabilities to fully participate within our Universities, Colleges, and Institutes of Technology. We now have the evidence from these learners that demonstrates their very real aspirations to avail of the educational and employment opportunities that will enable them to lead more independent lives. Higher education institutions have the potential to establish inclusive programmes designed to provide meaningful education and employment participation within Irish society. Through the establishment of the Inclusive National Higher Education Forum (INHEF), we have exemplars of how higher education institutions can engage further in enabling people with intellectual disabilities to achieve their lifelong goals.



INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY TRALEE

Skills for Life (with St. John of God, Kerry Services)



St John of God, Kerry Services in partnership with the Institute of Technology Tralee (ITT) has for the past 12 years provided a college experience with QQI Awards at levels 1 and 2 for young adults with intellectual disabilities leaving school.

The Skills for Life course is the very meaning of community partnership, being between the Health Service Executive (HSE), the Institute of Technology, Tralee and Saint John of God Kerry Services, each partner bringing vital components. The HSE funds, and fully supports, this model of service employed by St. John of God, Kerry Services to partner with the ITT and to recognise the Skills for Life course as a post-secondary education option for adults with mild to moderate intellectual disabilities.

The programme has developed symbiotic relationships across the ITT campus, supporting joint projects and collaborative learning opportunities for the Skills for Life students; the students of the Health and Leisure Adapted Physical Activity course; and the students studying Social Care in ITT. Socially, the environment of the college campus offers a great learning experience for all students, and the Skills for Life students are no different. The ITT community fosters a natural support network for the growth and personal development of the Skills for Life students which cannot be duplicated or taught in a classroom.

Of course, the highlight of any academic year is the conferring ceremony which celebrates the personal development and achievements of each graduate. ITT officially recognises and celebrates the graduates of the Skills for Life course as they too receive their parchment from the President of the Institute along with all other graduates at the conferring awards ceremony. Every graduate then goes on to make their way in the world.

LIMERICK INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

Leadership and Advocacy & Human Rights and Equality



The Limerick Institute of Technology launched a Leadership and Advocacy programme in 2009 specifically developed for people with intellectual disabilities. It resulted from a perceived need for people with intellectual disabilities to develop a greater sense of self-worth and to develop their self-advocacy skills.

The programme delivers modules relevant to the lives of individuals with intellectual disabilities. It aims to encourage active citizenship and impact social change. The programme is tailored to the needs of each cohort of students within the course curriculum. It provides facilitative learning in Advocacy, Leadership, Human Rights, Independent Living, Community and Citizenship. Students attend college one day a week for a total of 14 weeks. The curriculum is delivered through lectures, workshops and collaborative learning with students from other programmes.

Since 2009 approximately 200 people with intellectual disabilities have graduated from LIT. The voice of the learner is central to all courses and learners are continuously being consulted about the content of the programme to ensure that capacity building is taking place. The programme was shortlisted for the Aontas STAR awards on both occasions that the course was nominated by LIT.

The students and graduates of the programme have been influential in raising awareness of issues relating to disability, diversity and equality within the LIT community and within their wider communities. The ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities by the Irish government in 2018 inspired graduates to consult with LIT to develop a course of further study to put their learning to use as activists. This consultation

informed the development of a follow-on course, entitled Human Rights and Equality, piloted in 2019 in the Ennis Campus. The main objective of both programmes is to assist individuals to live a more fulfilled life as active citizens, aware of their rights as equals in society.

DUBLIN CITY UNIVERSITY

DCU Ability



[CLICK TO LINK](#)
 Dublin City University (DCU) received funding from the Irish Government and the European Social Fund as part of the ESF Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning 2014-2020. The Faculty of Science and Health, Office of Civic Engagement and the Disability and Learning Support Service in DCU worked in partnership with [St Michael's House](#) to create the [DCU Ability Programme](#).

DCU Ability has the specific aim of helping young people aged 18-29 with any disability to become more career ready and prepared for employment. This is done by offering occupational therapy and career assessment followed by a tailored training programme (ranging from 1:1 tuition to a 12-week course) and work placement opportunities. A major part of the programme is supporting the students in their personal career planning and ensuring that everyone leaves with a personal plan that includes goals in areas such as work and education.

The programme based on DCU's Glasnevin campus gives students not only the opportunity to attend the programme but also to avail of the facilities on campus and become comfortable in a busy University setting. The Ability professional team come from different backgrounds such as Project Management, Occupational Therapy, Careers Advice, Speech and Language Therapy and Education. Students have access to a range of professionals who have the experience and expertise to make sure they get the best out of the programme.

Work placements are important as they give the students a chance to sample different roles in a real work environment. Students are helped to prepare a CV and attend for interview. Most of the work placements provided are on the DCU campuses' and students offered opportunities to work in many different areas including faculty and school offices, the sports centre and on-site restaurants and shops.

It is important for potential applicants to know that they do not lose any current services or supports when attending DCU. Potential students need to meet certain criteria such as being within the age range and referred by their current service provider. The first students commenced the programme in early 2019 and already a number of students are working towards paid employment or further education.

MARY IMMACULATE COLLEGE LIMERICK

Certificate in General Learning and Personal Development



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 Since 2010, [Mary Immaculate College](#) (MIC) in Limerick has offered a programme designed to support the inclusion of students with intellectual disabilities in Higher Education. This programme, the [Certificate in General Learning and Personal Development](#) (CGLPD), gives expression to the mission of the College and its commitment to social justice and enables the creation of a richly diverse learning community where the contribution of each person is valued.

[CLICK TO LINK](#)
 Over the course of the two-year programme, learners participate in several modules and innovative learning workshops including maths and financial management, social studies, creative art appreciation, career development and work placement training. These modules are designed to support learners' holistic development and further their skill development and employability. The students work with peer mentors drawn from the Faculty of Education and take part in a range of lectures

and workshops with other undergraduate students in the College. Learners on the programme form part of student governance structures and play an active role in decision making as representatives of the Students Union and as members of College clubs and societies.

Housed within the Faculty of Education at MIC, in the department of Educational Psychology, Inclusive and Special Education, the CGLPD is informed by evidence-based research in the field of inclusive higher education. We are delighted that this programme has been built in partnership with agency partners including [Enable Ireland](#), the [Brothers of Charity](#) and [St. Joseph's Foundation](#). The programme received formal accreditation as a QQI Level 4 Major Award in 2013, through a partnership agreement with the [Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board](#) (LCETB) and represents an innovative example of collaboration between the Further Education and Training and the Higher Education sectors. Many of our programme Graduates have transitioned to Level 5 programmes in the local community, while some have progressed to degree courses in MIC.



*The [WHO \(2019\)](#) defines Intellectual disability as someone who has 'significantly reduced ability to understand new or complex information and to learn and apply new skills (impaired intelligence). This results in a reduced ability to cope independently (impaired social functioning), and begins before adulthood, with a lasting effect on development'

For further information, check out the INHEF website - <http://inhef.ie/>

E-mail: info@inhef.ie

NCGE grateful to Mr Des Aston and to the individual contributors below.



Dr Deirdre Corby,
DCU Ability Project Lead,
Dublin City University
deirdre.corby@dcu.ie



Martina Neylon,
Course Leader,
Limerick IT
martina.neylon@lit.ie



Dr Orla Slattery,
Inclusion Coordinator,
Mary Immaculate College
orla.slattery@mic.ul.ie



Dr Anne O'Byrne
Lecturer in Inclusive Education (SEN).
Mary Immaculate College
anne.obyrne@mic.ul.ie



Cait O'Leary
Coordinator, Community Day
Services,
St. John of God, Kerry Services
cait.oleary@sjog.ie

