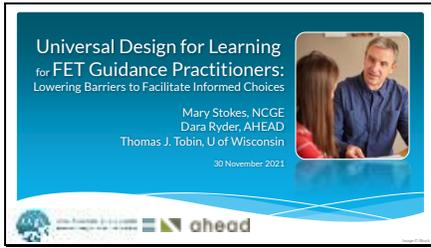


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# Universal Design for Learning for FET Guidance Practitioners: Lowering Barriers to Facilitate Informed Choices

Mary Stokes, NCGE  
 Dara Ryder, AHEAD  
 Thomas J. Tobin, University of Wisconsin-Madison

30 November 2021

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Hello to all of our career-guidance, FET Centre guidance, and adult-education guidance services colleagues. I'm Mary Stokes. We're glad you could join us for this live session, or that you're making time to experience the recorded version in your own time.

In furtherance of our "door is always open" mission to offer impartial, inclusive, informed choices for clients, our time today is about universal design for learning, or UDL. We're joined by Dara Ryder, the CEO of AHEAD, and Tom Tobin from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, both of whom are advocates for inclusive practices across a number of learning spaces, including guidance.

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The supports that you provide to your students and members of your communities are predicated on them knowing that you are there, trusting that you can help, and understanding that you'll listen. What's one way that you currently signal to your potential clients that your door is, indeed, open?

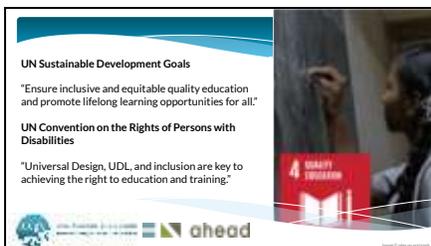
You can respond to this question privately, by thinking it through or writing your response on a piece of paper, just for yourself—or you can respond in this community via the Chat feature in Zoom. We'll put 2 minutes on the clock for you to think and respond. You'll hear music during this time; if you'd like to think in silence, turn off your audio. We'll note when the music is ending so you can turn the volume back up. Once the two minutes is completed, we'll give voice to your shares.

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Hello. I'm Dara Ryder, with AHEAD. Inclusive design is part of international, national, and field-specific goals that we can all work toward and within. I'll share a few of them here to get us started and provide context for why accessible interactions aren't an add-on that we do, but part of our core services for our learners.

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**UN Sustainable Development Goals:** "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all."

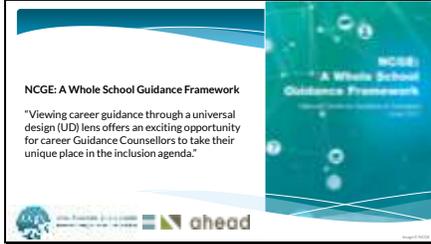
**UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities:** "Universal Design, UDL, and inclusion are key to achieving the right to education and training."

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**National Further Education & Training Strategy:** The Further Education & Training (FET) sector is committed to developing “inclusive practice across the system [and] adopting a universal design for learning (UDL) approach in shaping its future provision.”

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**NCGE: A Whole School Guidance Framework:** “Viewing career guidance through a universal design (UD) lens offers an exciting opportunity for career Guidance Counsellors to take their unique place in the inclusion agenda.”

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What is UDL? The definition from the originators of the framework at the Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST), look like this in a guidance context:

- **Provide options for engagement** with the guidance process so that you can get more learners interested and motivated in exploring their learning pathway, and build the skills and strategies they need to reflect and stay the course—the “why” of guidance.
- **Provide options for representing key information** about what guidance services are and what learners’ various options are, so that all learners have opportunity to fully understand the choices available to them and can make informed decisions about their future—the “what” of guidance.
- **Provide options for action and expression** so that learners regardless of their preferences and abilities have the opportunity to communicate their experiences with you, and that you can build the skills they need to set learning goals and monitor their progress—the “how” of guidance.

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Not all learners are like this group of post-leaving certificate students. UDL allows us to reach out to people in our communities who are English-language learners, people with disabilities, neurodivergent learners, and neighbors whose work or caregiving schedules make it challenging to connect with our office for individual or group counseling.

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Variability among our learners and community looks more like Irene's story:

An Indonesian woman who lost confidence after moving to Donegal with little English is now plotting a path to employment thanks to Donegal ETB's Further Education and Training (FET) Service.

Irene Harlyana moved to East Donegal to join her husband a number of years ago in July 2017. But she struggled at first with a language barrier preventing her from making friends and integrating into her local community. She was determined to reach her full potential in her new home.

Irene said: "I love meeting new people, making new friends and connections, but because English is my second language I found it difficult to have proper conversations with people when I first came to Ireland, especially when I wanted to express my feelings, so I became a quiet and rigid person when I was in the middle of society. I lost confidence in meeting people, I found myself staying more indoors than in social life."

The experience was daunting at first, but with support from her husband Irene decided to explore the possibility of returning to education to improve her English.

Irene visited the Carrigans and St. Johnston Community Centre to explore options for courses. She was guided to Elena Gill from Donegal ETB's Adult Guidance and Information Service, who met with her to share all the ways that the ETB supports adult learners.

After looking at her life goals, Elena encouraged Irene to enroll on a QQI Level 3 course in Retail Skills including Communication. This was the starting point of a rich and fulfilling education journey.

The course equips students with communications, maths, ICT and retail industry knowledge to pursue a range of employment opportunities.

<https://www.donegaldaily.com/2020/07/01/irene-joins-community-with-confidence-with-guidance-from-donegal-etb/>

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Through engaging in consultation and considering international academic and practice considerations, the NCGE developed the *Whole School Guidance Framework*. We provide services and interactions that are meant for everyone, as well as for some of our clients, and others for only a few people.

How can we achieve this effectively?

The continuum suggested in the "Whole School Guidance Framework" is indicated in the diagram on the screen. It may be useful to follow the link to the framework document and visual model that is provided in the handout for this session and to think about what the Whole School Guidance Framework would look like in FET.

<https://www.ncge.ie/resource/ncge-whole-school-guidance-framework>

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The DES *Adult Education Guidance Initiative Operational Guidelines* (2012) state that “AEGI targets individuals and groups that experience particular and acute barriers to participation and are more difficult to engage in the formal learning process.”

[https://www.ncge.ie/sites/default/files/AEGI\\_Operational\\_Guidelines\\_2012\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.ncge.ie/sites/default/files/AEGI_Operational_Guidelines_2012_FINAL.pdf)

This is a worthy goal. Our ongoing challenge is to incorporate and integrate the priorities and strategic plans that affect that way we provide FET guidance. The reality of day-to-day FET guidance for our client and learner cohorts leads us to find ways to simplify our interactions and lower barriers—for ourselves as well as for our clients.

Guidance in Ireland encompasses “a range of learning experiences provided in a developmental sequence that assist students to develop self-management skills which will lead to effective choices and decisions about their lives.” (DES, 2005, p. 4)

Additionally, “guidance is recognised at national and European policy levels as fundamental to lifelong learning that supports the development of human potential, social inclusion, employability and economic prosperity.” (National Guidance Forum, 2007)

Finally, how we, as professionals, engage with learners as they plan for the future, will directly affect not just their futures but also the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (e.g., SDG4 Quality Education and SDG10 Reduced Inequalities).

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In the design of our educational content and conversations, it can feel like we have to cover all of the possible ways that learners might need to experience them: text, audio, visuals—tactile formats, too. Remember, though, that UDL is about lowering access barriers and creating expert learners.

We don’t need to anticipate every possibility, and we do not have enough time, people, and funding to do so, anyway. Rather, think about the interactions that you want your learners to have—with materials, with each other, with you in guidance interactions.

Is there only one way that those interactions can take place right now? Create just one more way: this is the plus-one approach, and it helps you to narrow your scope and effort when you apply inclusive design ideas like UDL.

The ideal, of course, is to design learning and development interactions in an inclusive fashion right from the beginning (and UDL helps us do that, too). But most of us are not designing brand-new interactions, so the plus-one approach helps us to focus our limited resources where they will have the biggest positive effects.



If we are to empower people from different life circumstances—English-language learners, people with disabilities, learners from disadvantaged backgrounds—to transform their futures, guidance and career planners require a unique approach and knowledge of the variability our learners present to us.

So how should we think about guidance with our UDL hats on? Mary Quirke and Conor McGuckin wrote about this in a 2019 article entitled “Universal Design for Learning (UDL)—Implications for Guidance.”

Quirke, Mary & Conor McGuckin. (2019). Universal Design for Learning (UDL)—Implications for Guidance. *Guidance Matters* 1.3 (Winter): 6-10. <https://www.ncge.ie/sites/default/files/GM3-Feature%20Article-Universal%20design.pdf>.

Career guidance professionals engage with a variety of learners from all different circumstances, backgrounds, and levels of preparedness. We’ve known since the 1980s that “a one size fits all” approach cannot, and does not, work. How, then, to manage guidance for “all, some, and few”?

UDL asks us to be intentional in our observation and response to the variety among our clients. As the visual shows, we must think of inclusion at varying levels for people with differing needs and develop connected approaches to supports. “Change comes through challenging taken for granted assumptions. We all are key to making that change as educators and service providers” (Eburn Joseph).

Quirke, Mary & Conor McGuckin. (2021). A Big Question—Is it time to redesign how we design the future for our learners? *Guidance Matters* 1.6 (Summer): 46-49. <https://www.ncge.ie/sites/default/files/NCGE-GM6-Research.pdf>.



The following Case Study was submitted to the Adult Guidance Management System (AGMS) in 2020 by an ETB Adult Education Guidance Service, entitled “Complexity of Issues Presenting with Disability Clients and FET Supports.”

“Michael” (we’ve changed his name for confidentiality) had successfully completed the Leaving Certificate, and was interested in earning a QQI level-5 professional learning certification in Computer Networks with Software.

Michael was a highly functioning autistic, Aspergers, ADHD, and OCD learner. He had received supports at second level, and he initially attended the FET Centre with his parents. Because level 5 certificates require significant independent practice skills, and Michael required a lot of learning supports, structure, and time, the tutor was finding it increasingly difficult to engage Michael in class—and Michael was becoming increasingly frustrated and demotivated.

We organised a meeting among the FET centre manager, tutors, learning support staff, and guidance counsellor to identify the issue and what we could do about it. We then met with Michael and his parents to devise a plan to address the key challenges:

- Michael’s coping skills.
- Expectations from Michael and his parents.
- Constraints on support that we could provide.
- Not having a Special Needs Assistant (SNA) for highly functioning Autism.

This collaborative approach, commitment, and engagement from the FET centre manager, tutors, learning support staff, and the guidance counsellor led to the determination that UDL was not a sufficient approach for Michael. He needed individual supports: a previous graduate from the course was brought in for 1-to-1 mentoring.

Most of the affordances that were put in place for Michael, such as alternative assessments, were also shared with the class at large as options that helped to reduce barriers. Michael’s guidance counsellor played a pivotal role in determining and advocating for the individual and systemic changes that would help him and his classmates to succeed.

For instance, the guidance counsellor identified the need for an SNA in the Further Education Centre. Likewise, the level of collaboration and sharing of expertise between staff has strengthened staff relations.

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Michael's story is the *opposite* of UDL: it's an accommodation: making one change, one time, for one person. As guidance professionals, you can incorporate UDL into your practices across all of the learners whom you serve by applying some of the specific checkpoints in the UDL framework.

We'll share three of these checkpoints, and we'd enjoy hearing from you about how you design interactions with your advisees now, and how you can (or perhaps already do) expand the engagement, access to information, or ways that learners can show what they know in conversation with you.

<https://udlguidelines.cast.org/>

- Checkpoint 8.1 - Heighten salience of goals and objectives
- Checkpoint 1.1 - Offer ways of customizing the display of information
- Checkpoint 6.1 - Guide appropriate goal-setting

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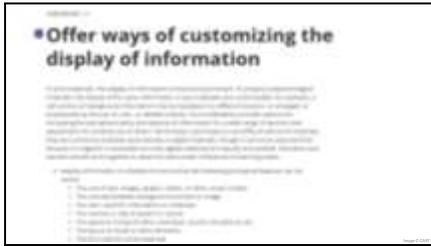
### Checkpoint 8.1 - Heighten salience of goals and objectives

Over the course of any sustained project or systematic practice, there are many sources of interest and engagement that compete for attention and effort. For some learners, they need support to remember the initial goal or to maintain a consistent vision of the rewards of reaching that goal. For those learners, it is important to build in periodic or persistent "reminders" of both the goal and its value in order for them to sustain effort and concentration in the face of distracters.

- Prompt or require learners to explicitly formulate or restate goal
- Display the goal in multiple ways
- Encourage division of long-term goals into short-term objectives
- Demonstrate the use of hand-held or computer-based scheduling tools
- Use prompts or scaffolds for visualizing desired outcome
- Engage learners in assessment discussions of what constitutes excellence and generate relevant examples that connect to their cultural background and interests

<https://udlguidelines.cast.org/engagement/effort-persistence/goals-objectives>

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### Checkpoint 1.1 - Offer ways of customizing the display of information

In print materials, the display of information is fixed and permanent. In properly prepared digital materials, the display of the same information is very malleable and customizable. For example, a call-out box of background information may be displayed in a different location, or enlarged, or emphasized by the use of color, or deleted entirely. Such malleability provides options for increasing the perceptual clarity and salience of information for a wide range of learners and adjustments for preferences of others.

While these customizations are difficult with print materials, they are commonly available automatically in digital materials, though it cannot be assumed that because it is digital it is accessible as many digital materials are equally inaccessible. Educators and learners should work together to attain the best match of features to learning needs. Display information in a flexible format so that the following perceptual features can be varied:

- The size of text, images, graphs, tables, or other visual content
- The contrast between background and text or image
- The color used for information or emphasis
- The volume or rate of speech or sound
- The speed or timing of video, animation, sound, simulations, etc.
- The layout of visual or other elements
- The font used for print materials

<https://udlguidelines.cast.org/representation/perception/customize-display>

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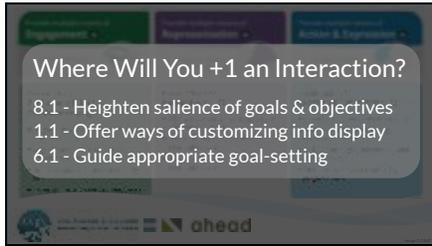
### Checkpoint 6.1 - Guide appropriate goal-setting

It cannot be assumed that learners will set appropriate goals to guide their work, but the answer should not be to provide goals for students. Such a short-term remedy does little to develop new skills or strategies in any learner. It is therefore important that learners develop the skill of effective goal setting. The UDL framework embeds graduated scaffolds for learning to set personal goals that are both challenging and realistic.

- Provide prompts and scaffolds to estimate effort, resources, and difficulty
- Provide models or examples of the process and product of goal-setting
- Provide guides and checklists for scaffolding goal-setting
- Post goals, objectives, and schedules in an obvious place

<https://udlguidelines.cast.org/action-expression/executive-functions/goal-setting/goal-setting>

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So, given these UDL checkpoints, what do you see as opportunities to apply a little “plus one” design to your content or interactions with learners?

- Checkpoint 8.1 - Heighten salience of goals and objectives
- Checkpoint 1.1 - Offer ways of customizing the display of information
- Checkpoint 6.1 - Guide appropriate goal-setting

We'll put 2 minutes on the clock for thinking and responding. You can respond just for yourself by taking notes with pen and paper or your electronic device. Or you can wait until the music stops playing and use the **Raise Hand** feature in Zoom to be recognized and come onto the live microphone to share an idea. Or you can respond in the **Chat** feature, and we'll give voice to as many comments and ideas as we can.

If you'd like to mute the audio while you're thinking, we'll also signal in the chat when the music is about to end. Now, here are two minutes for thinking about where you will plus-one an interaction in your everyday work.

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Your colleagues at AHEAD have a wide variety of follow-on resources and programming that can help you to explore more ways to lower barriers for many learners, address specific disability-support needs from an informed and supportive position—and save yourself effort in the bargain, too.

- *UDL for FET Practitioners* Guidance [<https://www.ahead.ie/udlforfet-guidance>]
- UDL Badge [<https://www.ahead.ie/udl-digitalbadge>]
- Discover AT Tool [<https://www.ahead.ie/Discover-your-AT>]
- Digital Accessibility Webinar Series & Resources [<https://www.ahead.ie/Digital-Accessibility-Webinar-Series>]

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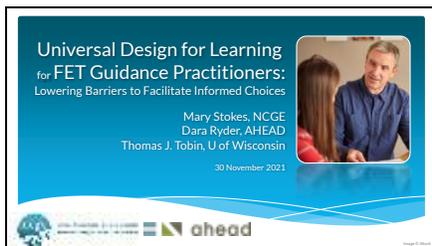


Now that you've had a chance to experience what universal design for learning is, seen some examples of how it work for learners from a variety of backgrounds and circumstances, and even seen where its limits are when we work with learners who need individual accommodations, what's the one biggest thing you will take away from our time together today?

- What are you doing already that we've underlined as important?
- What idea do you want to try in your day-to-day work?
- Or what big question is still with you?

We won't use a music cue for this interaction; rather, post your One Big Thing into the **Chat** feature, and we'll give voice to them as they come in.

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Thank you!

We're glad you joined us for today's webinar. Look for the handout that accompanies this session for all of the links and resources we referred to in the live session. Thank you all, and good day to you!