

# Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Inclusive Education in Maynooth University

Maynooth University is an increasingly diverse campus, with the largest number of pioneer students in Ireland. Many of our students come from other cultures, and we have a well-earned reputation for a welcoming LGBTQI+ culture, as well as a strong commitment to neuro-inclusion and other protected identities. We want our university community to flourish and our strong commitment to compensating for intersectional disadvantage by reducing barriers to learning is key to that. Through the [Maynooth University Strategic Plan, 2023-2028](#), which reflects national and international Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) priorities, the University clearly articulates its commitment to inclusive education. Specifically, the plan notes that the Institution's

vision builds on over two hundred years of academic excellence; on our commitment to and achievements in equality, diversity and inclusion in higher education; and on our societal mandate for public good as a civic university with significant local, regional, national and international impact. (2023, p. 6)

The Plan incorporates an intention to 'consider the principles of Universal Design for Learning to support inclusive approaches to teaching, learning and assessment' (p. 16).

We aim to build on our track record and on our commitment to social justice to ensure that every member of our University community has the opportunity to thrive, regardless of who they are and where they come from. The *Strategic Plan* emphasises that the institution defines itself in terms of 'providing life-changing opportunities for all who can benefit from higher education' (p. 6). It echoes key United Nations Sustainable Development Goals through its purpose towards imagining and creating 'better futures for everyone, without discrimination, without judgement, without bias. We continue to be committed to social justice and to the development of a sustainable future for our planet and its people' (p. 6).

Ensuring fairness and making education accessible to all involves everyone in the institution. Staff need to be mindful of the education challenges that students face and the pedagogical considerations of working with a diverse group of students particularly those highlighted in the *National Access Plan* (2022-2028).

Students may be juggling a range of significant responsibilities at home or have limited resources which can make their path through higher education more difficult to navigate. In order for all students to achieve their education goals, we approach teaching with an open and inclusive mindset. We strive to access the necessary support and guidance so that we can help students with unique skills, experiences, and needs. Approaches such as Universal Design for Learning (UDL) can provide staff with principles and practical advice to help address individual student needs effectively. Hand-in-hand with addressing the diversity of student learning needs, UDL has an integral and central part to play in strengthening our social justice actions. As such, UDL is a concrete, measurable set of principles and actions that meaningfully builds equity into our learning environment.

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## References

Maynooth University (2023). *Maynooth University Strategic Plan 2023-2028*. Accessible at: <https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/presidents-office/maynooth-university-strategic-plan-2023-2028>

Higher Education Authority (2022) *National Access Plan. A Strategic Action Plan for Equity of Access, Participation and Success in Higher Education 2022–2028*. Accessible at: <https://hea.ie/assets/uploads/2022/12/National-Access-Plan-2022-2028-FINAL.pdf>

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