
GUIDE TO UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING

AFFECTIVE NETWORKS:
THE **WHY** OF LEARNING



RECOGNITION NETWORKS:
THE **WHAT** OF LEARNING



STRATEGIC NETWORKS:
THE **HOW** OF LEARNING



Introduction

This document is intended as a guide and reference for FET practitioners in their implementation of a ‘Universal Design for Learning’ (UDL) approach to teaching, learning and assessment.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a set of principles and guidelines that aim to develop expert learners¹ by using a variety of teaching methods in order to lower barriers to learning and give all learners equal opportunities to succeed. By applying the principles of UDL in our FET programmes, we build in flexibility to better accommodate learners’ strengths and needs. Universal Design for Learning is not about creating individual supports for learners but rather about adopting more inclusive practices that can help to reduce the need for individual supports.

¹ Expert learners are “purposeful and motivated, resourceful and knowledgeable, and strategic and goal-directed.” See CAST. (2017). UDL tips for fostering expert learners. Available at <http://www.cast.org/publications/2017/udl-tips-fostering-expert-learners>.

Principles of UDL

Principle 1- Multiple Means of Engagement.

The first principle focuses on how we engage with learners and adopting practices that will better contribute to effective engagement with learners who will invariably have individualised reasons for engaging in education and training and have varied expectations and understanding of success.

- **Be clear about your learning outcomes and programme goals.** - Also, encourage learners to be clear about their learning goals. If possible, give examples of previous learner journeys.
- **Make space for listening to your learners.** - Try to give learners more than one way of contributing to a conversation; speaking out-loud, free-writing, various text options etc.
- **Create a safe learning environment.** - Not just physically safe but socially safe. Practice and promote mutual respect, freedom of thought and expression, create a broad-minded, unprejudiced environment.
- **Check often for understanding and progress.** - Rather than asking, “Do you understand?” opt for “Tell me your understanding of this.”
- **Encourage Group working.** - Peer learning and cooperative learning can be very effective and afford better understanding.
- **Give formative feedback frequently.** - Formative feedback is given while a project, assessment, or assignment is still in progress. Focus on showing how learners are meeting milestones and building new skills on good foundations.
- **Reflect your learners.** – Contextualise the learning process by using examples , stories and images that they can relate to.
- **Show struggles.** - Show how you, as an expert in your FET subject, go through the process from not-knowing, to curiosity, to experimentation, application to practice, and eventual expertise.
- **Chunk learning.** - Consider breaking up larger or more complex pieces of learning into smaller, more manageable ones and then focus on how they connect together.

Principle 2- Multiple Means of Representation.

The second principle focuses on how we present information and the overall accessibility of the learning content.

- **Provide alternatives for visuals and audio.** – Try to provide at least two different means by which a learner can access the same information.
- **Offer ways to customise the display of information.** – If you are relying on certain learning platforms, become familiar with the platforms accessibility and appearance options and make learners aware of them. Having this control can be of real benefit to learners.
- **Clarify syntax and structure.**- For more complex ideas, technical language and jargon, first start with simpler language and explanations and introduce more technical elements as learning progresses.
- **Clarify vocabulary and symbols to be used.** – Consider at all times, but particularly at course and lesson planning stage, what could be strange or new vocabulary or symbols to some or all learners. Plan for how these will be introduced and learned.
- **Check often for understanding and progress.** - Rather than asking, “Do you understand?” opt for “Tell me your understanding of this.”
- **Activate or supply background knowledge.** – Fundamentally, this approach involves activating or linking to the learners’ prior knowledge. It can also include more sophisticated processes such as ‘*Concept Mastery Routines*’ which have proven very effective with learners with autism.
- **Highlight patterns, critical information, big ideas, and relationships.** – Take the time to give clarity on the connections between class activities and learner expectations. Remind learners how the day-to-day activities connect with the course learning outcomes and with their individual and occupational goals.

Principle 3- Multiple Means of Action & Expression.

The third principle focuses on how we ask or expect learners to show their learning. What options can we create for learners to do this while adhering to the assessment requirements of the module and keeping consistency in how we mark the evidence of learning.

- **Add options that allow for different physical responses and flexibility in pace of learning.**– Particularly on practice pieces or drafts give options such as audio-recording etc.
- **Support learners to use no-, low- and high-tech options.** – Using tech. is not necessarily an assessment requirement. There may be assessments where low tech. options are appropriate if a learner has a preference for them. (Design a poster for example).
- **Be intentional about what you’re actually asking learners to do.** – Consider the skills or knowledge that the learner is expected to attain. How do we assess that skill or learning without inadvertently testing for other skills not expressed in the course descriptor.
- **Provide alternatives to pen, paper, and talking.** – We tend to have an over-reliance on more traditional methods of checking-in with learners. Consider use of other means (polls, online applications, paper slips and a box etc.)
- **Allow and support learners to use tech-help when expressing themselves.** – Expression technology should be available to all learners, not just those who rely on it (example include Speech to text, ‘Outlining’ or ‘Mind-mapping tools’ etc.
- **Create multiple paths for learners to show their skills.** – Where assessment is concerned, ensure that where options are given to learners to present evidence of learning, that the same LOs are addressed, and the same marking scheme can be applied.
- **Guide learners to set and express goals.**- Support learners to goal-set and plan.
- **Support planning and strategy development.**- Support learners to develop work and learning strategies for themselves. How they might break up tasks, practice processes etc.
- **Provide scaffolds for performance.** – Give as much clarity as possible in relation to the learning and assessment processes. Create graphics too where possible.
- **Give rubrics, guides, and opportunities to perform peer- and self-assessment.**- Take time to focus on the assessment requirements and the specific differences between what a distinction/merit/pass might look like in the context of upcoming assessment. Give the learner the tools to self -assess or peer assess their work.

Quality Assurance and UDL

UDL constitutes an important principle with regard to teaching, learning and assessment. It is incumbent on providers of education and training to adopt a universal design approach to programmes of learning, not just to make more accessible to a wide range of diversity in the learner cohort but also to create more profound learning experiences for our learners, and to ensure the relevant competencies and understanding of our programme graduates as they progress and apply their learning.

Ahead <https://www.ahead.ie/aboutus> promote the ‘Plus One’ method of introducing UDL into teaching practice. This denotes the adoption by the teaching practitioner of a UDL approach in one element of their course. After implementation, the practitioner can then review (preferably in conjunction with the learners) the effectiveness of the approach and build upon successes and address shortcomings in a systematic fashion.

The WWETB Quality Team suggest that it is best practice to adopt this ‘Plus-One’ approach in the teaching process in the first instance and to consider UDL approaches to assessment subsequent to this, when UDL approaches become more intuitive. When utilising UDL approaches in assessment, it is important to note the following:

- Award bodies often prescribe the assessment methodologies to be used when assessing learning associated with an award. These should not be deviated from unless formally agreed in conjunction with the WWETB Quality Team.
- Consistency, veracity and fairness are integral to valid assessment. It is imperative that in each iteration of assessment, there is;
 - **Consistency**- in what learners are being asked to produce/demonstrate, in how learners are marked and the clarity of marking, in the learning standards that learners exhibit in what they produce/demonstrate.
 - **Veracity**- the learners’ response to assessment is verifiably their own work. Evidence of the specific learning outcomes have not been supported/assisted by another party. This is particularly important in the context of group projects. Has each learner provided unsupported evidence of learning outcomes?
 - **Fairness**- in that all learners in a learning group are afforded the same supports and options as their peers. It may not be appropriate to treat all learners equally but there should be equity of opportunity and support across the board.

Training

There is free training available in UDL principles and practices through the organisation which lead to Digital badges. These include:

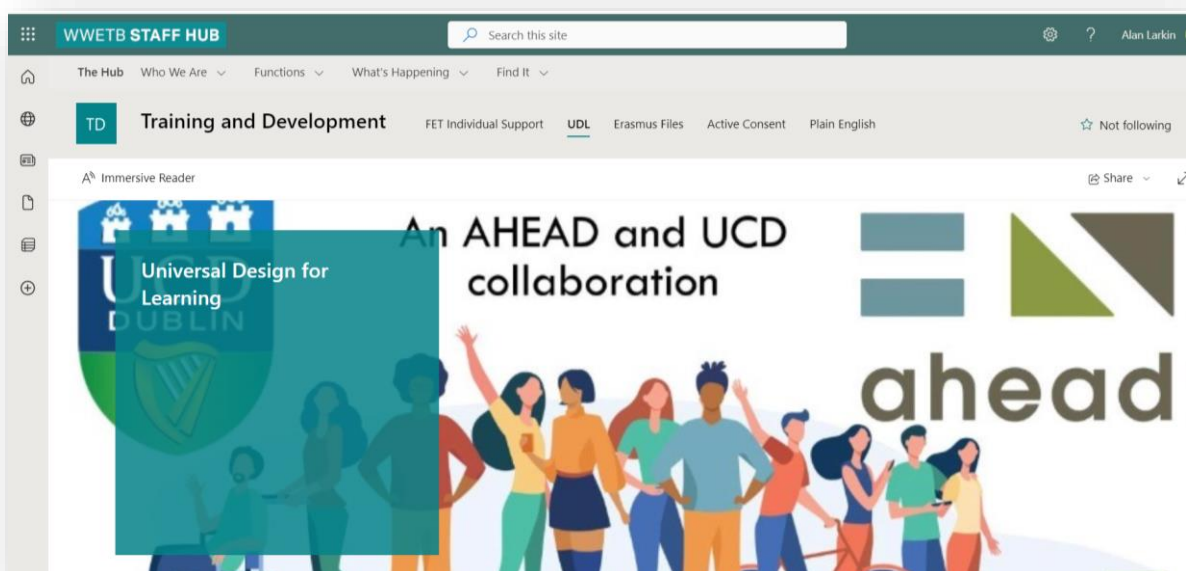
- Introduction to UDL- Part-day course:
 - 90-120 min. course facilitated by Ahead. Digital Badge: 'Introduction to UDL'.

- UDL Practitioner Training- Three-week course
 - 10-week (25 hours) course facilitated by Ahead & UCD. Digital Badge: UDL in Teaching and Learning.

- UDL Facilitators Training- Supplementary course
 - 5 additional hours upon completion of T&L Badge- Ahead. Digital Badge- UDL Facilitator.

For more information regarding continuing professional development opportunities and resources check out the designated page on the [WWETB Staff Hub:](#)

<https://wwetb.sharepoint.com/sites/WWETBTrainingDevelopment/SitePages/Universal-Design-for-Learning.aspx>



References and Useful Links

[SOLAS – UDL for FET Practitioners- March 2021](#) (*UDL for FET Practitioners- Guidance for Implementing Universal Design for Learning in Irish Further Education and Training- 2021: Ann Heelan, Dr Thomas Tobin, and Dara Ryder.*)

<https://www.ahead.ie/udlforfet> SOLAS Resource Hub for UDL

<https://www.ahead.ie/udl> Ahead website.

<https://library.etbi.ie/library/UDL> ETBI Website- UDL Guidance for Practitioners.

<https://library.etbi.ie/library/pldai> ETBI Website- Assistive Technology and AI recorded seminars- Digital Learning Institute.

<https://www.fess.ie/assessing-through-the-udl-lens-autumn-2023> -FESS Training opportunities.
