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**DEVELOPING HIGHER EDUCATIONAL
PROGRAMMES FOR PEOPLE WITH INTELLECTUAL
DISABILITIES IN TRINITY COLLEGE, THE
UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN, IRELAND**

INTRODUCTION

Widening societal participation for people from marginalised groups has become an established feature of policy frameworks internationally (Council of Europe, 2006; United Nations, 1993). Irish policies in this area have developed rapidly over the past couple of decades and the initial focus on people from socio-economically disadvantaged groups has been extended to include people with disabilities (Government of Ireland, 2005). Irish legislation enshrining an inclusive education policy within schools has been enacted and support structures have been developed to enable children with difficulties in learning to access the curriculum at primary and secondary level (Report of the Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities 1996; Educational Act 1998; Equal Status Act 2000; Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004; EPSEN, 2004). At tertiary level, there is also evidence of increased numbers of people with disabilities participating in higher education (AHEAD, 2015). Indeed the inclusion of students with disabilities is now high on the agenda across the sector and the success of many institutions and faculties in creating an inclusive environment for students with disabilities and specific learning difficulties has been acknowledged.

However, while this picture is encouraging, policy initiatives supporting greater access to higher education for people with disabilities have not been extended to include people with intellectual disabilities. Grigal, Hart and Paiewonsky (2010) report that people with intellectual disabilities are rarely mentioned or differentiated from those with other types of disabilities in U.S. studies on postsecondary education. As most people with intellectual disabilities have been considered unable to gain the academic requirements for university admission, it is often assumed that they are unlikely to succeed or belong in such a setting (Eisenman & Mancini, 2010; Hart, Grigal, & Weir, 2010a).

Despite the dearth of policy initiatives targeting the inclusion of students with intellectual disabilities higher education, paradoxically, in the Republic of Ireland, the number of adults with intellectual disabilities accessing inclusive tertiary/postsecondary education courses have gradually been increasing over the last ten years, along with the number of education programmes designed to serve their needs. This achievement is primarily - though not exclusively - a result of the work of the National Institute for Intellectual Disability (NIID), a Trinity College initiative which played a key role in the Republic of Ireland in developing higher educational programmes for people with intellectual disabilities (Lally, O'Brien & O'Keeffe, 2009). In 2009, the support of a project grant from the Irish Higher Education Authority through Strategic Innovation Funding allowed for the roll-out of the Certificate in Contemporary Living (CCL) to five third-level institutes throughout Ireland, namely: University College Cork, Mary Immaculate Limerick, Dundalk Institute of Technology, Waterford Institute of Technology and St Angela's College Sligo. More recently, a National Forum of inclusive third-level educators has been set up with the aim of politically promoting the benefits of tertiary education for people with intellectual disabilities.

The Forum has brought a collective momentum that stands in stark contrast to the state of affairs that existed less than twenty years ago in Ireland, a time when the idea of attending a university was unheard of for a person with intellectual disabilities. The seeds for change were planted by the combined efforts of two determined parents who approached Trinity College in 1998 regarding the possibility of providing an inclusive educational programme for their adult children. The choice of this particular college is noteworthy - Trinity College is an institution which permeates a strong social justice ethic; non-traditional students are supported, including mature learners, parents, carers, or those who study part-time or who have a disability. Inclusivity is a core value of the College which aims to offer equality of access and opportunity to all. The current College Strategic Plan (2014-2019) sets out to "encompass an ever more diverse student community, providing a distinctive education based on academic excellence and a transformative student experience" (p. 17). Furthermore, Trinity is also recognised as Ireland's premier university and is ranked within the top hundred universities in the World (QS World University Ranking, 2016/17).

It is also significant that when approached by these parents, the then Provost of the College and a number of the key college officers reacted in a positive manner. The outcome of this interaction resulted in the government Department of Education together with the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform agreeing to finance a Feasibility Study which recommended the establishment of an Institute for the Study of Learning Difficulties. This name was later changed to the National Institute for Intellectual Disability (NIID) and in 2004 the NIID was formally established in Trinity College with the aim of promoting the rights of people with intellectual disabilities through its mission of inclusion through Education, Research and Advocacy. This location was considered to be the most

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appropriate site for a national institute on the grounds that the College had a wide range of relevant disciplines and could provide the necessary inter-disciplinary expertise.

Aligning its work within the overarching framework of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD, 2006, Article 24), along with Irish legislation and government policies on disability (Equal Status Act 2000; Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004), the main preoccupation of the NIID in the early years was with formulating appropriate educational programmes for adults with intellectual disabilities to participate in higher education. An educational initiative - Project Interact – laid the foundation for this objective. Launched in 1997, Project Interact involved a partnership between St. John of God Services, the National Council for Vocational Awards and the School of Occupational Therapy, Trinity College Dublin. The aim of this project was to promote education for adults with intellectual disabilities into mainstream settings through self-directed learning opportunities, and to explore new roles for first-year occupational therapy students as facilitators of learning. Both groups of students - first-year occupational therapy students and adults with intellectual disabilities - experienced changes that were described by the coordinator of the programme as “profound” (Foley, 1996, p. 10). For example, occupational therapy students gradually began to see “beyond labels”; they became less inhibited and ultimately gained a sense of confidence with themselves and others. The students with intellectual disabilities also gained significantly – they become more independent and vocal and “challenged the right to express themselves and to have more control over their lives” (p. 10).

Inspired by the success of Project Interact, a six month CCL pilot programme was launched by the NIID in 2005. The success of this initiative led to the formation of the two-year CCL programme which was formally approved by the Trinity Council in 2006. At this time, the CCL was the first full-time course for people with intellectual disabilities to be offered within a higher education environment in Ireland and was aimed at promoting full citizenship for students with intellectual disabilities through the development of learning and social networks, as well as career opportunities (O’Brien, O’Keeffe, Kenny, Fitzgerald, & Curtis, 2008). In February 2008, the first nineteen students graduated with the CCL qualification, becoming the first students with intellectual disabilities in Ireland to graduate from a full-time course within a tertiary educational setting. From 2008 to 2016, over 150 students graduated from the programme, leading to a rich tapestry of social capital within Irish communities and organisations.

OUTLINE OF THE CCL PROGRAMME

The CCL programme can be characterised as a mixed/hybrid model (Hart, Grigal, Sax, Martinez, & Will, 2006). The two-year CCL programme comprised eleven modules which covered the expressive arts, the humanities, sports and recreation

and transferrable skills. CCL students were also provided with opportunities to partake in wider campus life - they audited courses of their choice alongside their non-disabled undergraduate peers (O'Connor, Kubiak, Espiner & O'Brien 2012). They undertook an expressive arts programmes under the guidance of professional artists, and also participated in a variety of work placements both within and outside the college environment. On the successful completion of all CCL modules, a process entitled Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope (PATH) (O'Brien, Pearpoint & Kahn, 2010) was offered to students and their parents/guardians as part of the CCL students' transition from College and into the next stage of their lives. Finally, upon completing their studies, CCL students graduated in a formal ceremony at Trinity convocation alongside their non-disabled peers.

ARTS, SCIENCE AND INCLUSIVE APPLIED PRACTICE (ASIAP)

It is against the backdrop of the NIID and the success of the CCL that the Trinity Centre for People with Intellectual Disabilities (TCPID) was established in 2014 and was formally included as part of the core activities of the School of Education and integrated into the School's governance structure. The TCPID's aim is to continue the NIID's core mission of establishing an inclusive learning environment for people with intellectual disabilities under the structure of the School's Inclusion in Education and Society (IES) research group. IES was established in 2010, and is based on the central principle of supporting the inclusion of people from marginalised groups in education and society through focused research and to examine inclusive theory, policy and practice within education. The inclusion of the TCPID in the School of Education is timely, as for the past decade colleagues in the School have been developing a focus on the educational and social inclusion of marginalised groups within society (see for example, Thomas & Loxley, 2001; Shevlin, 2010). Within this approach, the School's understanding of inclusive education has shifted away from an exclusive focus on special educational needs, towards an understanding of inclusion as a catalyst for empowerment, achieved through the collaboration of both mainstream teachers and students working together towards a common objective. Furthermore, the School's recognition of the transformative potential of students' voice has allowed new insights to be gained into the factors that make a difference to pupils' learning and progress (for example, see Flynn, 2015; Kubiak, 2015).

Accreditation of the Arts, Science and Inclusive Applied Practice (ASIAP) curriculum

The provision of a formal award aligned to the Irish National Framework of Qualification (NFQ) had not been possible when students were enrolled on the CCL programme. To address a growing demand for accreditation, the Arts, Science and Inclusive Applied Practice (ASIAP) curriculum has been designed to lead to the provision of a Level 5 Certificate (major award) to students successfully completing the course. This accredited Level 5 award marks a departure for Trinity College where bachelor, masters and doctorate degrees - positioned on the NFQ at level 8, 9 and 10 respectively - are normally awarded. It was deemed important that the ASIAP should be recognised as a *bona-fide* Trinity course for people with intellectual disabilities, and acknowledged as a programme which fostered high academic expectations from its students regarding the level of learning achieved and the workload undertaken.

Overall, ASIAP students are required to take modules totalling 120 credits (where one credit is equal to 20-25 hours of student work) which are taught over four academic terms of 12 weeks over a two-year period. The ASIAP programme adopts a holistic approach towards the delivery of its curriculum; it uses interdisciplinary methods to examine topics, and encourages students to become collaborative as well as independent learners. Furthermore, students participate in and complete research projects on personal and professional development, consequently developing a broad range of skills that can be transferred to the employment market.

Programme aims, course structure, content and learning outcomes

The ASIAP has six main aims:

1. To help students with intellectual disabilities develop the ability to think critically about disability, express viewpoints, engage in logical discussions and problem-solve effectively within a higher education learning environment.
2. To equip students with the interdisciplinary knowledge to navigate the community and employment sectors.
3. To develop in students the learning skills required for developing their own person-centred plan when engaged in the wider community.
4. To provide students with the learning skills and knowledge needed to confidently advocate for change in their own lives and the wider disability community.
5. To encourage collaborative learning through project-based tasks incorporating academic content and applied skills to reinforce overall academic, professional and personal development.

6. To introduce students to academic scholarship, evidence-based interdisciplinary research and university life.

Course structure and content

Many of the 22 modules which make up the ASIAP curriculum are an extension of, or have been informed by the content of the CCL programme. The ASIAP is divided into six interdisciplinary themes: 1) advanced learning theories and self-development; 2) applied research theories and practice; 3) applied science, technology and maths; 4) business and marketing; 5) advocacy, rights and culture; 6) fine arts and languages (see Table 1). Each of the six interdisciplinary themes take a disability studies approach where students are required to examine how disability is influenced and reinforced through political, economic and social perspectives. The sequence of modules undertaken by students over the course of year 1 and 2 is outlined in Table 2.

Table 1 ASIAP interdisciplinary themes and modules

Theme	Modules
Advanced Learning Theory and Self-Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning Theory and Practice • Occupational Therapy: Personal and Self-Development • Occupational Therapy: Preparing for Transition
Applied Research Theories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research: Theories and Concepts • Research: Practice and Application
Applied Science, Technology and Maths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applied Health Science: Body Systems and Functions • Applied Health Science: Health Promotion and Intellectual Disabilities* • Application of Numbers • Emergency and Disaster Management • STEM and Society
Business and Employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entrepreneurship and Disability

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marketing, Disability and Society • Work Placement Practicum
Rights and Advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human Rights • Self-Managing Services • Disability Rights Practicum
Fine Arts and Languages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expressive Arts • Language and Society • Italian for Beginners* • Exploring Art: Renaissance to Modern* • Film Analysis • Poetry* <p>(*electives)</p>

Table 2 An outline of ASIAP modules from year 1 and 2

Year 1		Year 2	
<i>Semester 1</i>	<i>Semester 2</i>	<i>Semester 1</i>	<i>Semester 2</i>
Learning Theory and Practice	Applied Health Science: Body Systems and Functions	Research: Theories and Concepts	Research: Practice and Application
Expressive Arts	Self-Managing Services	Entrepreneurship and Disability	Work Placement
Human Rights	Application of Numbers	Film Analysis	STEM and Society
Language and Society	Emergency and Disaster Management		Marketing
Occupational therapy – Personal and Self Development		Occupational Therapy: Preparing for Transition	Disability Rights Practicum
	Electives: Italian for Beginners	Electives: Poetry Health Promotion	

	Exploring Art: Renaissance to Modern	and Intellectual Disabilities	
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Student profile and admission requirements

Individuals who are interested in undertaking the ASIAP programme are invited to an open day in the TCPID where they and their families/ advocates are presented with an overview of the course and have the opportunity to ask questions. Subsequent to this event, individuals fill out an application form and are invited to attend one-to-one interviews and a group workshop. Selection is based on the applicant's educational and employment experiences, general interests, motivation to undertake the course, and the support structures they have around them. All who apply are in receipt of a government disability allowance based on having an enduring intellectual impairment and typically would have attended a special school, a special unit within a school, or a mainstream school.

Students must be 18 or over by the time they commence the programme, have an intellectual disability, and be leaving or have already left second-level education. At a minimum, they must have completed their Junior Certificate (providing proof that they have completed their Junior Certificate and have achieved a grade of D or above in Mathematics and English at Foundation, Ordinary or Higher level), or an equivalent Level 3 course on the NFQ framework. Due to great variability in opportunities that exist for students with intellectual disabilities in regards to completing a formal educational qualification, applications from individuals who do not meet the above requirements may be considered for the course in certain circumstances.

College services and supports

ASIAP students have equal access to college facilities and resources as any other Trinity undergraduate. This includes membership of Trinity clubs and societies, access to the library, use of the canteen and coffee docks, availing of the Student Counselling Services, the College Health Care and the Career Advisory Service, the Disability Service, use of the Sports Centre and contact with the College Tutor who is appointed to look after the general welfare and development of the students in his/her care.

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Other college supports include the support of a designated Occupational Therapist (OT) which forms part of the module entitled Occupational Therapy: Personal and Self Development. In this component of the course, students have the opportunity to engage in individual and group sessions with the support of an OT who also provides assistance in the form of supported study, a time when students can work independently but will have a member of staff available if they require help.

In addition to the informal support of classmates and other students, organised peer support and learning is done in collaboration with the Trinity Societies and undergraduates taking professional degrees. One example is the Trinity Vincent de Paul Society who runs a weekly lunch time social group for ASIAP students. Students from the Discipline of Occupational Therapy and the School of Social Work and Social Policy also provide opportunities for co-learning on the module entitled Applied Health Science: Body Systems and Functions.

Core staff, teaching strategies and methods of assessment

TCPID staff include a course co-ordinator, an administrator, an Occupational Therapist, Professors from the School of Education, and a Pathways co-ordinator. The Pathways co-ordinator engages with the TCPID's business partners in order to fundraise and develop viable work placements for both graduates and students of the programme. This role also includes engaging with secondary school personnel with a view to promote and develop suitable pathways into higher education for children with intellectual disabilities currently in the education system.

Lectures are delivered by full-time professors who are experts in fields such as language, expressive arts, mathematics, Science Technology Engineering Mathematics (STEM), as well as disability studies and health science. All ASIAP teaching staff have considerable experience teaching students with intellectual disabilities and are very conscious of the need to be creative in their approach to the delivery of their respective modules. Consequently, a wide variety of teaching methods are adopted that include: direct delivery, peer teaching, cooperative learning in groups, graphic teaching/facilitation, embodied learning and guided discovery. The use of such strategies demonstrates that teachers are very mindful of the variety of ways students learn and the nature of their individual approaches to learning. In general, a person-centred approach is adopted - student and teacher work together to identify the most compatible teaching and learning format. As a consequence, lesson plans are developed accordingly to meet the individual learning needs of each of the students in the class. Modules have been designed to provide students with multiple and varied assessment types to ensure the variety of students' preferences are taken into consideration. For example, students will be

given the choice in each of their modules to decide which assessment format best suits their learning needs. Assessments can include: 1) communicating (oral presentations, debates, posters, role play), 2) managing information (essays, self, peer and group assessment, concept / mind mapping), 3) demonstrating knowledge and understanding (reports and projects), 4) thinking critically and making judgements (journal keeping, multiple choice questionnaires, collaborative critical thinking). Regardless of format chosen by the student, assessments are graded equally across students using a standardised assessment rubric that matches specific learning outcomes.

Reflections of the first year of the ASIAP

At this time of writing, the first academic year of the new ASIAP certificate is reaching completion. Reflecting on their learning experience, students acknowledged that the programme has been both challenging and rewarding and has brought a new understanding to their awareness of what it is to be a university student. To some it is a recognition of increased confidence and new skills; as one student stated: *"I like college life, I like socialising with friends in college. I like college projects, classes on campus. I now come to college independently. I like going to the gym at Trinity"*. To others, it is a willingness to embrace new challenges has also led to enhanced self-esteem, with one individual commenting that the best thing about being in Trinity College was the pride of being recognised as the same as his non-disabled peers: *"I like telling people that I am a Trinity College student. People are impressed that I am in Trinity. All my friends that I went to mainstream school with are in universities and because I am in Trinity I feel the same as them."*

All students noted that over the course of the year they have witnessed an increase in their independence and an improvement in their social skills. This has led to new opportunities for friendships and learning; one student expressed it thus: *"The things I like are working with the OTs in sports and hanging out with my friends at lunch... I like communicating in group work... I liked learning in a group of people."*

Even at this halfway stage of their programme, most students are thinking of their future and have positive expectations for what lies ahead, not only with regard to their college education but also in relation to their career and personal life. Two comments illustrate these thoughts:

My hopes for the next year? I hope to build up my confidence and speak up more. I am also hoping to pass all my modules and graduate.

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I want to get a job in an office and work very hard. I want to raise a family with my future wife. I want to live independently, pay all my bills, save some money for my kids to go to school and to have money for trips and going out.

Finally, all lecturing staff involved in the programme spoke about their sense of personal satisfaction of teaching on the ASIAP certificate. They felt affirmed by the energy of the students' enthusiasm and how their positive engagement in classes contributed to class dynamics. In this regard, the reflections of one expressive arts lecturer is worth noting: *"I was overwhelmed by the positive response of the students. They seem to, for some reason, really embrace the possibility of studying (a second language) – more so than any other group of adults I've ever worked with."*

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Including people with ID within higher education settings traditionally reserved for an educational elite challenges many assumptions governing societal perceptions of the purpose of higher education (Le Roy, 2010). Educational expectations for children and young people with intellectual disabilities have usually been influenced by deficit based models. As a result, a compensatory model of education for this cohort often emerged focused on remediation of perceived deficits (Thomas & Loxley (2001). Almost inevitably, educational opportunities for this cohort became more limited. As these individuals progressed through the education system they struggled at post-primary level as assessment regimes became more rigorous and demanding (Shevlin & Griffin, 2007). However, recent changes in assessment systems designed to accommodate children and young people from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds has often benefitted young people with intellectual disabilities. Recent research has indicated that young people with intellectual disabilities could attain a Junior certificate qualification based on a range of flexible assessment approaches (Rose, Shevlin, Winter & O'Raw, 2015). However, it was also apparent from this research that the assessment systems of the state's Leaving Certificate qualification - the final examination in the Irish secondary school system —was less flexible and consequently less accommodating for these individuals with intellectual disabilities. It is difficult to be definitive about the qualifications achieved by students with intellectual disabilities who attend special schools as the types of qualifications available have not been officially documented.

Implementing the principles of inclusive education within higher education and establishing viable progression routes and/or employment for people with intellectual disabilities remains a critical challenge (Moriña, 2017). The ASIAP programme in Trinity College and equivalent programmes in higher education can

represent legitimate aspirations for young people with intellectual disabilities when accessible pathways are established between secondary and higher education. There is always a risk however, that despite good intentions, such higher education programmes lack credibility in the 'real world' of employment and independent living. The ASIAP programme at Trinity College Dublin offers one context which has the potential to forge the social connections and friendships necessary for people with intellectual disabilities to compete in the world of work and build lifelong meaningful social networks. It is not 'lack of ability, but rather the consequence of attitudinal and environmental barriers, both within higher education and external to it, which preclude and diminish the possibility of students participating within that process' (Government of Ireland, 2000).

Final reflections

While there is a growing demand for people with intellectual disabilities within Ireland to gain access to educational opportunities within higher education, the existing higher education infrastructure however has not been designed to include students with intellectual disabilities. Consequently, a series of transformations, both at institutional level and in classroom practices, need to be considered in higher education in a move towards a more inclusive institution. First, attitudinal responses need to be examined to see if institutions regard students with intellectual disabilities as legitimate students like their non-disabled peers. Second, faculty should be supported and trained in how to carry out inclusive pedagogy and universal designs for learning. Finally, progression pathways for students with intellectual disabilities need to be explored to see how these individuals can be enabled to advance with viable qualifications that have status with educational institutions and credibility with potential employers. The findings of such explorations will inform our endeavours as educators in establishing an inclusive learning environment within higher education and beyond.

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