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UEM Guiding Principle 10 (Access and equal opportunity)

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UEM Essentials

Guiding Principle

10

At a glance

Guiding Principle 10 Access and Equal Opportunity

Energetically and proactively facilitate equitable access to education and opportunities for all students and potential students, particularly those from underrepresented communities, regardless of economic or social background, disability, gender, racial or cultural background or belief.

Support and promote a culture of equality, inclusion and respect for all in the TU Dublin community.

ACCESS AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITY

The consequences of educational disadvantage have a significant and wide-ranging impact on all facets of life; including, economic well-being, civic involvement, and personal growth. Across the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) there is a clear correlation between the foundation levels of education and the likelihood of participation in further and continuing education. This correlation is especially strong in nations with low levels of overall public provision of adult and second-chance education. Irish adults with third-level degrees are four times more likely to pursue lifelong learning than their peers with only second-level qualifications (Gidley et al., 2010). The Department of Education and Science (2003, p. 16) re-emphasises this, noting;

These patterns suggest that initial education and continuing education and training are mutually reinforcing, and that education combines with other factors to make adult training least common among those who need it most.

[Recent National policy](#) has signalled a transition in the value placed on high quality and life-long learning and is evident in learner support ranging from “access”, through “participation and engagement”, to “success through empowerment”. This multifaceted approach creates distinct, but consistent, pillars for the growth of all learners through a high-quality higher education system.

FOR MORE INFO

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INTRODUCTION

Educational equity, fairness and inclusion comprise two core elements; fairness and inclusion. The principle of fairness ensures that personal and social conditions such as gender, socioeconomic class, or ethnic origin, should not be a barrier to realising educational potential. Actioning the principle of inclusion ensures that everyone receives an education that meets a minimal standard (OECD, 2008. p. 2).

Building on these core principles, equity of access to higher education is a fundamental principle of Irish education policy and is identified as a core national objective for the higher education system in the

Department of Education and Skills' Higher Education System Performance Framework (SPF) 2014–2016. Specifically, one of the main objectives of the SPF is 'to promote access for disadvantaged groups and to put in place coherent pathways from second-level education, further education and other non-traditional entry routes.' At a European level the Bologna Process also emphasises the goal of advancing social inclusion and promotes higher education as being inclusive of all members of society, including men and women, urban and rural residents, and members of all socioeconomic groups.



RELEVANCE TO THE UEM

TU Dublin aims to be inclusive in all aspects of the University and, in doing so, create a welcoming atmosphere in which to learn and work. An inclusive approach to student recruitment is an integral part of TU Dublin and this is achieved through supportive policy and practice resulting in a diverse student body that reflects the demographics of the region, as well as providing developmental opportunities and services to enable all students to learn and thrive. Informed by the [UN Sustainable Development Goals](#), Athena SWAN and Race Equality promote the attainment of equality of opportunity in higher education. These are important measures and indicators of inclusive actions. The University monitors agreed targets and reports regularly on progress, ensuring that there is a TU Dublin-wide focus for, and interdisciplinary research on, equality, diversity and inclusion.

TU Dublin has published a comprehensive [Equality Statement](#) which notes 'that the student body entering, participating in and completing its programmes at all levels reflects the diversity and social mix of the Dublin region, and Ireland's population' (TU Dublin, 2019). Additionally, it recognises the UN Sustainable Development Goals embedding SDG 4 'Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all' and SDG 5 'Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls' into policy. It specifically highlights the aim to provide an enhanced experience and positive educational outcomes for all students through the utilisation of approaches such as Universal Design for Learning in the provision of education and related services, supports and facilities.

EMERGENT PERSPECTIVES

Actively supporting and promoting a culture of equality, inclusion and respect typically tends to focus on success, empowerment and maximising human potential. However, Gidley and colleagues (2010, p. 139) highlight other important interventions to increase equitable participation and engagement, which include:

Voice ‘being heard’: There has been a growing focus on including and amplifying the student voice as HEIs develop a greater focus on student centred learning (Guiding Principle 1 - Student centred and student engaged for student success). This pedagogical evolution has been supported by the acknowledgment of how communities of learners socially construct knowledge, and the desire amongst learners for the university to become central in their communities (Gillard, 2008). Voices being heard includes the process of students representation through partnership with a number of studies highlighting that student partnership can promote greater equity and inclusion (Allan, 2003, p. 622, Marquis et al., 2018).

Flexible Learning Pathways: The United Nations Education 2030 Agenda encourages all countries to develop well-articulated education systems that offer flexible learning pathways (FLPs) for their students. They define Flexible Learning Pathways as “entry points and re-entry points for all ages and all educational levels, strengthened links between formal and non-formal structures, and recognition, validation and accreditation of the knowledge, skills and competencies acquired through non-formal and informal education” (UNESCO, 2015, p. 33). This is further discussed in a UEM Essentials on Flexible Learning Pathways.

These interventions reflect the critical pedagogy of educational theories grounded in social justice, for example Freire (1994) and Giroux (2003) and place the dimensions of hope, goals, pathways and agency to the fore (Snyder, 1991). With these core pillars in mind, some examples of learner engagement from across TU Dublin include Universal Design for Learning Community of Practice and targeted EDI projects and initiatives.

TU Dublin Path 3 Project

PATH 3 is a partnership between TU Dublin and community organisations to support access to Higher Education for under-represented groups. The partnership brings together different sectors to share knowledge and devise strategies that support equity of access to Higher Education. We are particularly focused on strategies to support people from communities and groups where there has not been a strong tradition of participation in third level education.

Enabled by the EDI Directorate at TU Dublin, [projects](#) addressing equality, diversity and inclusion for students and staff in every area of the University’s work are underway. Examples include;

[ESTeM](#): a unique mentorship programme for female students in Engineering and Computing to address gender equality. The purpose is to bring students, ranging from females in apprenticeship up through postgraduates in engineering and computing, together with women role models from industry.

[Building MultiStories](#): A Framework to Diversify the Curriculum in Higher Education.

This is a joint collaborative process by staff and students to identify changes to their curricula, to resources and to assessments that consider alternative epistemologies and diverse knowledge sources by embedding information literacy teaching from the library services into modules.

[Women in Technology United \(WITU\)](#): consisting of staff across all the TU Dublin campuses, coming together with the aim to retain students in technology courses and increase gender diversity in technology courses, while being inclusive of all gender minority groups.

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University Education Model
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CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE

The Irish Higher Education Authority (2017, p.6) highlights that Irish Higher education institutions must “*ensure that the student body entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels reflects the diversity and social mix of Ireland’s population*”. Additionally, the International Association of Universities (IUA, 2019) urges all interested parties to act on the potential and promise of equitable and inclusive education. They suggest robust and collective action, based on ongoing research, data analysis and the systematic monitoring of progress, will help achieve these goals. Furthermore, global “knowledge societies” must prioritise equitable access to higher education and expanding involvement. However, ensuring that a diverse university community is supported is a significant challenge; the following questions may be useful prompts for exploring:

- How might we support and promote a culture of equality, inclusion and respect for all?
- How might we facilitate equitable access to education and opportunities for all students in Higher Education in general, and TU Dublin specifically?
- How might we emphasise each Higher Education applicant’s potential through suitable admission policies and practices?
- How might we provide a number of flexible learning pathways for entry, through, and post Higher Education in general, and TU Dublin specifically?
- How might we respond to the diverse learning needs of our learners to reduce the degree attainment gap experienced by some students?([Advance HE](#), 2021)
- How might we develop career structures for staff that reward quality teaching, curricular innovation, and responsiveness to learner diversity?

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