

Innovative Research Solutions with Industry

Education

CLIENT:
Daughters of Charity

AREA:
Innovation in Access to HE



Inclusion of learners with Intellectual Disability in mainstream third level education



The Daughters of Charity (DoC) is one of the biggest service providers in the Intellectual Disability (ID) sector in Ireland. The majority of its projects are located within the Dublin 15 area and it is an important employer of Social Care graduates. As such the DoC are a natural partner for ITB.

Access to education is seen as both a human right and a rite of passage for young people in Ireland today. Third-level college is the place in the young adult's life where he or she comes of age, develops his or her own identity, and makes the transition from young person to adult. While the EPSEN Act 2004 enables access for those with ID to second level education, no such provision is made for third level education. To this end ITB and the DoC have come together to provide an initiative which will enable those with ID to access third level education and gain a qualification, alongside and within the same learning space as the general student population.

The course is based within the social care area of ITB's Department of Humanities. This provides ready access to trained and experienced social care workers who also teach in the discipline. This unique partnership between ITB and DoC has resulted in the development of a fulltime, two year, four semester NFQ level 3 general life and work skills programme for those with ID. This is provided on a campus that is very easy to navigate for those with perceptual and cognitive difficulties and is integrated with existing ITB mainstream



Learners on the programme at ITB

provision at NFQ level 7. The modules being offered include personal and professional development, health and wellbeing, creative studies and horticulture. In December 2009 the first six learners commenced the programme and in March 2012 it received formal validation from FETAC (now QQI). The learners from DoC and students from ITB attend the same tutorials and are taught in integrated classes despite studying at differing NFQ levels. In order to achieve a smooth fit between the two levels of delivery required, a number of supports and procedural considerations are in place. →

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•> The project is funded by the DoC which supports a coordinator and pays part tuition fees for the learners. ITB meanwhile provides premises and learning facilities pro bono. AIB innovation funding was provided in 2010 which allowed an outcomes study to be completed and this facilitated the roll out of the pilot project onto an official footing.

It was found that the programme enabled those with ID to participate in education for life/work in a supported and challenging environment. It also allowed them to achieve an accredited qualification at NFQ level 3. As an additional benefit, it was found that the experience of integrated education was highly valued by the general body of students who were a part of the initiative and who learned alongside the learners with ID.

The stark fact is that people with disabilities are underrepresented within the workforce and those with moderate Intellectual Disability are virtually absent. Essentially this project seeks to change this fact and it is hoped that in the long-term it can provide a model which can be mainstreamed to deliver significant social and economic impact.

The first group of six learners has graduated and AIB innovation funding is now being used to carry out a feasibility study to examine/establish the next step for the project. Another six learners are presently enrolled and similar annual intakes are expected into the foreseeable future. It is envisaged that the next stage of the initiative will be to set up an employment initiative for those graduates who wish to pursue opting in to the workplace, further enhancing the impact of this intervention. ■

TESTIMONIAL

Denis Cronin
Daughters of Charity

“The Daughters of Charity have been to the forefront of developing educational programmes for over 70 years. We are delighted with the success of this joint venture with ITB. Integration into third level is such a huge step and apart from the academic achievements, it has done so much for the confidence of the six Service Users involved. We look forward to continuing our work with ITB to ensure that a range of suitable options are available to all participants”.



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