

# OPENING STATEMENT

To: the Joint Committee on Education and skills

## AHEAD has 3 KEY actions to bring to the committee

1. Task the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching & Learning to promote Universal Design for Learning to build a more inclusive mainstream environment.

1 in 10 students in every lecture hall in higher education has a disability. 1 in 20 receives disability supports. The numbers are increasing year on year, but the current system of ADD-ON supports is overloaded - in fact it has become obsolete. Something has to change and AHEAD believes strongly that the solution is **“To mainstream the delivery of equity of access in HEIs “** (National Access Office Strategic Goal) and to change the way we teach.

Mainstreaming means making the general learning environment and curricula (see level 1 in the chart below) as inclusive as possible and that inclusion is everyone’s job. This means designing curricula with a clear picture in mind of who the students are and where they come from. This model is called Universal Design for Learning (UDL), a concept borrowed from Product Design and Architecture, and it is based on understanding the needs of the wide diversity of learners in the system.

A solution would be to promote UDL by rolling out a Strategic Initiative Fund through the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning that encourages institutions to build an inclusive mainstream learning environment, thereby minimising the need for add-on supports



Chart 1

## 2. To provide grant funding to the FET sector on the basis that they have students with disabilities.

SOLAS have an ambitious plan for world class education with active inclusion as a strategic goal. The FET sector has more students with disabilities with more complex needs requiring supports than those in higher education institutions. To ensure that students with disabilities can exercise their rights to take part on FET courses, the sector can:

- Provide strategic and grant funding to FET colleges to build inclusive structures and to support staff to ensure they can adequately support students with disabilities attending their courses.

## 3. Allocate state funding to programmes for students with an intellectual disability in higher education.

All levels of education must reflect the full diversity of our society. Students with an intellectual disability have the same rights as other students to benefit from higher education. Eleven higher education institutions currently provide programmes, (see chart 2) for young people who live with an intellectual disability to address the serious shortcomings in post-secondary education opportunities for this cohort (with the exception of HSE funded services - an option many of the young people do not wish to avail of). Currently, no state funding is available to support these programmes either at the level of the student or the institution and as a result the long term survival of these programmes is at serious risk.

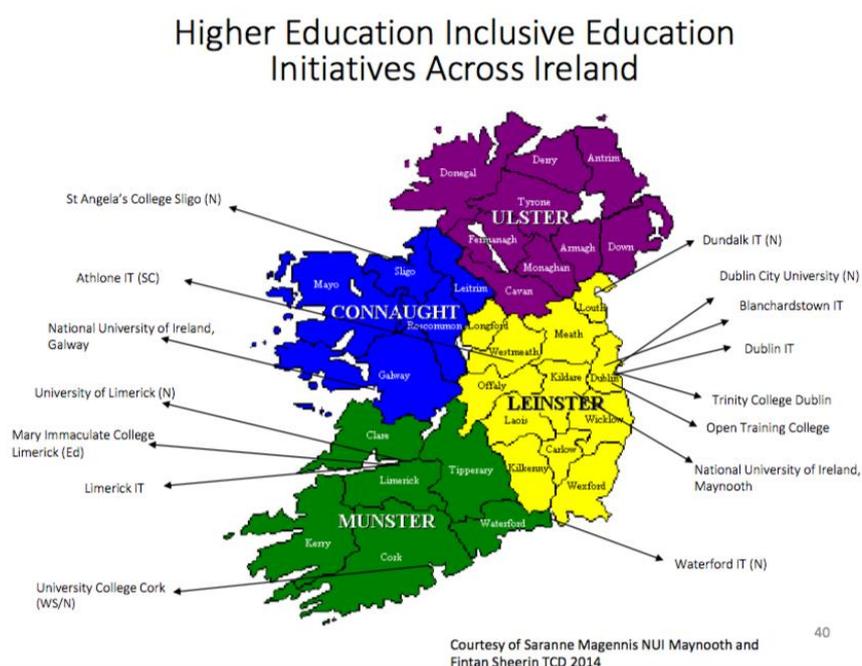


Chart 2