



10 Ways to Ensure Online Assessment is Accessible and Inclusive

Developed to support the Irish higher education community in the initial weeks of the move to online/remote teaching and learning in March 2020

Many of those who teach in Irish higher education are now faced with the challenge of creating online assessments for the first time. These tips, developed in partnership with AHEAD, outline some of the ways you can ensure, as far as possible, that the online assessments you plan are accessible to and inclusive of all your students:

- 1 First and foremost, liaise with your institution to discover what tools and resources are readily available in your virtual learning environment and recommended by your institution.
- 2 Ensure that you make a clear statement to students that you are open to hearing their concerns regarding any proposed alternative assessment methods (especially where accessibility is concerned) and provide a clear channel of contact for them to communicate with you about it.
- 3 If accessibility concerns are raised, liaise with the Disability/Access Office in your institution for advice. Let students know that you are trying your best in a tough situation, that you know that you won't get everything right, but that you are willing to listen and respond to their concerns.
- 4 Offer students a choice in how they reach the learning outcomes in line with the principles of **Universal Design for Learning**, e.g., the choice to either submit a written assignment or deliver a video or audio presentation. This will support equity for students with disabilities and guarantee that students have options should they meet technical/accessibility challenges with a particular format.
- 5 Where possible, create and provide students with a sample assessment submission for any alternative assessments you are developing so that they have clarity on what is expected of them.
- 6 To support students in choosing an assessment method and making a quality submission, provide simple guidelines on the use of any tools or techniques which must be used to create new types of assessment formats. If possible, provide a trial/demonstration of unfamiliar technologies to be used.
- 7 When sharing assessment briefs, ensure these documents are in accessible formats and basic digital accessibility principles are applied, e.g., use sans serif fonts, apply headings, use good colour contrast and add alternative text to images. **See more detail on creating accessible documents here.** Use Word docs rather than PDFs where possible as they are more accessibility friendly and allow students to customise their experience to a far greater extent (e.g., fonts, colours, read aloud).
- 8 Be aware that use of timed online testing is highly problematic for many students with disabilities. If using this method of alternative assessment, please liaise with your Disability/Access Office concerning any exam accommodations (e.g. extra time) which may be required for students with disabilities on your programme and the accessibility of the platform you are intending to use. If a platform is not digitally accessible and students require the use of assistive technologies, the only equitable solution may be to offer the student(s) an alternative assessment mechanism.
- 9 Try to provide students with opportunities to support each other in preparing, discussing and developing their assessment submissions. Enable students to connect and support each other in online settings using discussion forums, live chat facilities and peer support groups.
- 10 Remember equity in terms of assessment type does not mean that the assessment and marking criteria and workload have to be the same for each type of assessment; they can be different, but they do have to be equitable. **(Check out the equity template at 3:39 minutes in the video here.)**