DESIGNING A UNIVERSITY FOR ALL: WORKSHOP SUMMARIES AND BEST PRACTICES

Erasmus+ Blended Intensive Programme

Designing a University for All

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Introduction

This book brings together the content, methodologies, activities and practices developed during the various workshops of the 'Designing a University for All' Blended Intensive Programme, funded by the Erasmus + Program, project 2025-1-PT01-KA131-HED-000307416-1, which was organized by the Polytechnic University of Tomar, Portugal between 22 and 26 June (physical component) and on June 16 and July 14 (virtual part), in partnership with the following universities:

Adana Alparslan Türkeş Science and Technology University (Türkiye)

Breda University of Applied Sciences (The Netherlands)

Budapest University of Technology and Economics (Hungary)

D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics (Bulgaria)

Opole University of Technology (Poland)

Polytechnic University of Tomar (Portugal)

Södertörn University (Sweden)

Uczelnia Biznesu i Nauk Stosowanych Varsovia (Poland)

University of Greifswald (Germany)

University of Ljubljana (Slovenia)

University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice (Czechia)

Valahia University of Târgoviște (Romania)

Wroclaw University of Health and Sport Sciences (Poland)

Its purpose is to go beyond a simple record of the sessions held. The document is intended to serve as a resource for the dissemination and transfer of knowledge, enabling other higher education institutions to learn about the approaches used, reflect on their applicability and, where appropriate, adapt them to their own contexts.

The workshops addressed different aspects of accessibility and inclusion in higher education: physical spaces, digital accessibility, teaching practices, language and communication, invisible disabilities, support for students with special educational needs, and institutional reporting mechanisms.

Each chapter sets out:

- the topics covered;
- the activities and methodologies used;
- the key concepts and tools;
- the best practices identified;
- examples presented during the sessions;
- ways in which the content can be adapted to other institutional contexts.

1. Workshop: “Introduction to Accessibility and Practices”

1.1. Objective

The workshop was based on the idea that accessibility should enable everyone to access, understand, use and participate independently, safely and with dignity.

The workshop sought to move beyond a narrow view of accessibility as merely the removal of physical barriers, presenting it instead as a cross-cutting aspect of the university experience.

1.2. Topics covered

The concept of human diversity was explored, challenging the idea of the 'average user'.

The following types of limitations were analysed:

permanent;
temporary;
situational.

Different dimensions of accessibility were also presented:

Physical accessibility

routes;
entrances;
lifts;
toilets;
furniture;
evacuation.

Communication accessibility

plain language;
sign language;
subtitles;
Braille;
alternative formats.

Sensory accessibility

lighting;
contrast;
acoustics;
noise;
orientation.

Cognitive accessibility

clear information;

logical organisation;
consistent signage;
reduced complexity.

Digital accessibility

websites;
learning platforms;
apps;
documents.

Social and organisational accessibility

institutional policies;

culture of inclusion;

participation.

1.4. Practical activity

The participants carried out an accessibility audit of the campus.

In groups:

- they used a checklist;
- they toured buildings or routes;
- they identified barriers;
- they identified good practices;
- they drew up recommendations;
- they presented the results to the group.

1.5. Transferable good practice

The audit can be turned into a regular institutional practice.

An institution could, for example, create a campus accessibility checklist and carry out participatory audits involving students, teaching staff and support staff.

The outcome should enable a progression from:

Observation → identification of the barrier → proposed solution → institutional improvement.

2. Workshop: Accessibility in Digital Spaces

2.1. Objective

The workshop aimed to develop skills for producing accessible digital documents and presentations, including for people who use assistive technologies.

2.2. Topics covered

Document structure

The importance of correctly using hierarchical headings was highlighted, as this facilitates navigation and comprehension of the document.

Contrast

- The need to ensure sufficient contrast between text and background was discussed.

Accessibility Checker

- The Microsoft Office Accessibility Checker tool was presented.

It was also emphasised that automated checking should be supplemented by manual review.

Images

- Various situations were discussed:
- decorative images;
- simple informative images;
- complex informative images.

For informative images, an appropriate text alternative must be provided.

Hyperlinks

It was recommended that descriptive text be used for hyperlinks, avoiding generic expressions such as ‘Click here’.

PowerPoint

Best practices were presented, such as:

- using unique titles on each slide;
- checking the reading order;
- organising elements appropriately.
- Audio and video

The provision of the following was highlighted:

- subtitles;
- transcripts.
- colour

Information must not rely exclusively on colour, so as not to create barriers for people with visual impairments or colour blindness.

2.3. Practical activity

Participants applied these recommendations to:

- Word documents;
- PowerPoint presentations.

They used the Accessibility Checker and discussed the results in groups.

2.4. Transferable best practice

An institution can develop an institutional checklist for accessible digital documents, including:

☐ hierarchical headings

☐ adequate contrast

☐ alternative text

☐ descriptive hyperlinks

☐ reading order

☐ captions/transcripts

☐ appropriate use of colour

☐ automated checking

☐ manual review

This checklist could be incorporated into the processes for producing teaching and administrative materials.

3. Workshop: Accessibility in Pedagogy

3.1. Objective

The aim of this workshop was to identify barriers that different students may face and to apply the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL/DUA) to create more inclusive educational experiences.

3.2. Opening activity

The session began with an icebreaker, pairing participants from different institutions or countries.

This was followed by an interactive quiz using Mentimeter, allowing participants to answer questions, discuss in pairs and subsequently analyse the answers.

3.3. Situation analysis

Participants analysed videos relating to:

vision;

hearing;

mobility;

emotional wellbeing;

neurodiversity.

Each group was asked to identify barriers and possible adaptations.

3.4. Collaborative work

Five groups were formed:

Vision;

Hearing;

Mobility;

Emotional wellbeing;

Thinking and neurodiversity.

Each group identified specific, observable barriers that a person might encounter in a traditional classroom.

3.5. Application of UDL

The barriers were subsequently organised according to the three principles:

Representation — “What?”

Different ways of presenting information.

Action and Expression — “How?”

Different ways of demonstrating learning.

Engagement — “Why?”

Different ways of promoting motivation and participation.

3.6. Redesigning a curriculum unit

All groups were given the same curriculum unit and had to propose improvements.

They were asked to suggest up to two improvements, at least one of which had to relate to assessment.

In the end:

the groups presented their proposals;

the participants noted down useful ideas;

each group identified one barrier and one solution for each UDL principle;

each participant identified one specific action to implement in their own practice.

3.7. Transferable good practice

This methodology can be used in in-service teacher training through the following sequence:

Identify barriers → classify the barriers → apply UDL → redesign the course unit → review the assessment → define a specific action.

It is a particularly useful practice because it transforms the concept of inclusion into a concrete change in teaching practices.

4. Communication – Inclusive Language Guide

4.1. Objective

The workshop addressed the importance of diversity, inclusion and inclusive language within the institutional context.

The Inclusive Language Guide was presented as a practical tool for promoting equality, respect and representation.

4.2. Topics covered

Concepts such as the following were explored:

sex;

gender;

gender identity;

stereotypes;

discrimination;

gender equality;

intersectionality;

disability;

impairment.

4.3. Language recommendations

Recommendations such as the following were presented:

- avoid stereotypes;
- avoid unnecessary references to personal characteristics;
- respecting gender identity and chosen pronouns;
- avoiding masculine generalisations;
- using collective or generic terms;
- using gender-neutral language wherever possible;
- using words such as ‘who’ or ‘someone’.

Specific recommendations were also presented regarding language related to disability.

4.4. Examples

Among the rephrasings presented:

men’s rights → human rights

disabled → person with a disability

men and women → people / human beings

young men and young women → young people

4.5. Transferable good practice

An institution can develop its own Inclusive Language Guide, applicable to:

websites;
regulations;

forms;

emails;

administrative documents;

teaching materials;

institutional communications.

5. Invisible Disabilities

5.1. Objective

The workshop aimed to raise awareness of situations in which a person has a disability or condition that is not immediately visible, but which can have a significant impact on their participation.

5.2. ‘Inside-Outside’ Exercise

The session began with a pair-work activity.

Participants answered questions about:

abilities;

difficulties;

achievements;

support needs.

The activity concluded with a reflection on the impossibility of truly understanding a person's challenges based solely on their appearance.

5.3. Content

Examples were given of conditions that may not present obvious external signs, including:

depression;

insomnia;

high blood pressure;

high cholesterol;

chronic muscle pain;

lymphoedema;

arthritis;

osteoporosis;

early menopause;

genetic predispositions such as BRCA2.

5.4. Communication and Design for All

The following topics were covered:

accessibility symbols;

priority access;

contrast;

typography;

visual hierarchy;

iconography;

universal symbols;

inclusive representation.

5.5. Transferable good practice

An organisation can review its communication and signage by asking:

"Does this solution only address visible needs, or does it also take into account needs that are not immediately apparent?"

This approach can be applied to:

signage;

customer service;

priority access;

communication;

spaces;

support procedures.

6. Workshop: Support for Students with Special Educational Needs

6.1. Objective

The workshop outlined the regulations and procedures adopted by UPTomar to support students with Special Educational Needs.

The objective is to ensure:

- equal access;
- participation;
- academic success;
- removal of barriers;
- reasonable adjustments;
- support throughout the academic journey.

6.2. Who is eligible?

The following groups of students were considered:

physical disabilities;

hearing or visual impairments;

neurological conditions;

dyslexia;

dyscalculia;

other specific learning difficulties;

serious illnesses;

recovery from accidents;

medical treatments with a significant impact on academic performance.

6.3. Process

The procedure outlined includes:

the student's application;

submission of documentation;

referral to the Observatory;

interview;

preparation of a report and recommendations;

decision;

notification to the student and the relevant services.

The possibility was also raised for a lecturer to refer a student for assessment when they identify significant difficulties.

6.4. Support measures

Measures were presented relating to:

Administration

priority in enrolment/registration;

timetables;

placement locations.

Classroom

accessible classrooms;

reserved seats;

assistive technologies;

recording of lessons for academic purposes;

adaptation of resources.

Assessment

oral or written examinations;

additional time;

assessments in separate stages;

authorised assistance;

specific equipment or technologies.

Assignments

extended deadlines;

adapted submission formats;

alternative dates;

weighting of content where appropriate.

6.5. Case study — dyslexia

The case of a student with dyslexia was presented; the student reported difficulties with reading and comprehension and requested:

for exam papers to be read aloud;

extra time;

a seat close to the teacher and the blackboard.

Following an assessment, the following measures were recommended:

- oral examinations wherever possible;
- extra time;
- larger print;
- greater spacing;
- assessment focused primarily on content rather than on formal errors resulting from dyslexia.

6.6. Transferable good practice

This model can serve as a reference for institutions wishing to create or review an institutional procedure to support students with SEN/NEE.

A key element is to distinguish between:

reducing academic demands

and

removing barriers to learning and assessment conditions.

7. Workshop: Whistleblowing Portal

7.1. Objective

The workshop presented the Whistleblowing Portal as a tool designed to promote:

ethics;

integrity;

transparency;

accountability.

The material was presented in accordance with Portuguese Law No. 93/2021 and European Directive 2019/1937.

7.2. Situations covered

Areas such as the following were presented:

public procurement;

financial services;

the environment;

public health;

consumer protection;

data security and protection.

Situations such as the following were also addressed:

harassment;

discrimination;

abuse of power;

exclusionary practices;

academic misconduct;

breaches of institutional ethics.

7.3. Principle of good faith

Reports must be made:

on reasonable grounds;

based on credible facts or evidence;

in good faith.

The importance of providing the following was also emphasised:

factual information;

dates;

locations;

persons involved;

documentation or evidence.

7.4. Confidentiality and protection

The workshop addressed:

anonymous reports;

secure systems;

restricted access;

confidentiality;

protection against reprisals;

witness protection;

support provided for under the applicable legislation.

7.5. Process

The procedure is as follows:

Submission → username and password → follow-up → secure communication → additional information where necessary.

7.6. Transferable best practice

For other institutions, the key practice is to ensure that there is a mechanism which is:

clear;
accessible;
secure;
confidential;
accompanied by information on its scope;
accompanied by information on whistleblower protection.

Conclusion — A model for institutional transfer

The series of workshops enables the identification of a cross-cutting model of good practice for higher education institutions.

The practices presented can be organised into six areas:

1. Assess

Identify barriers through audits, observation, situation analysis and user involvement.

2. Design

Apply Universal Design and UDL from the outset, rather than relying solely on subsequent adaptations.

3. Adapt

Create tailored arrangements where specific needs exist, whilst maintaining academic standards and objectives.

4. Communicate

Ensure that language, digital documents, signage and institutional information are accessible and inclusive.

5. Raise awareness

Use activities, case studies, videos, discussion and reflection to develop an institutional culture of inclusion.

6. Institutionalise

Transform good practices into:

regulations;

guidance;

checklists;

procedures;

training;

support mechanisms;

whistleblowing mechanisms;

assessment and continuous improvement processes.

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