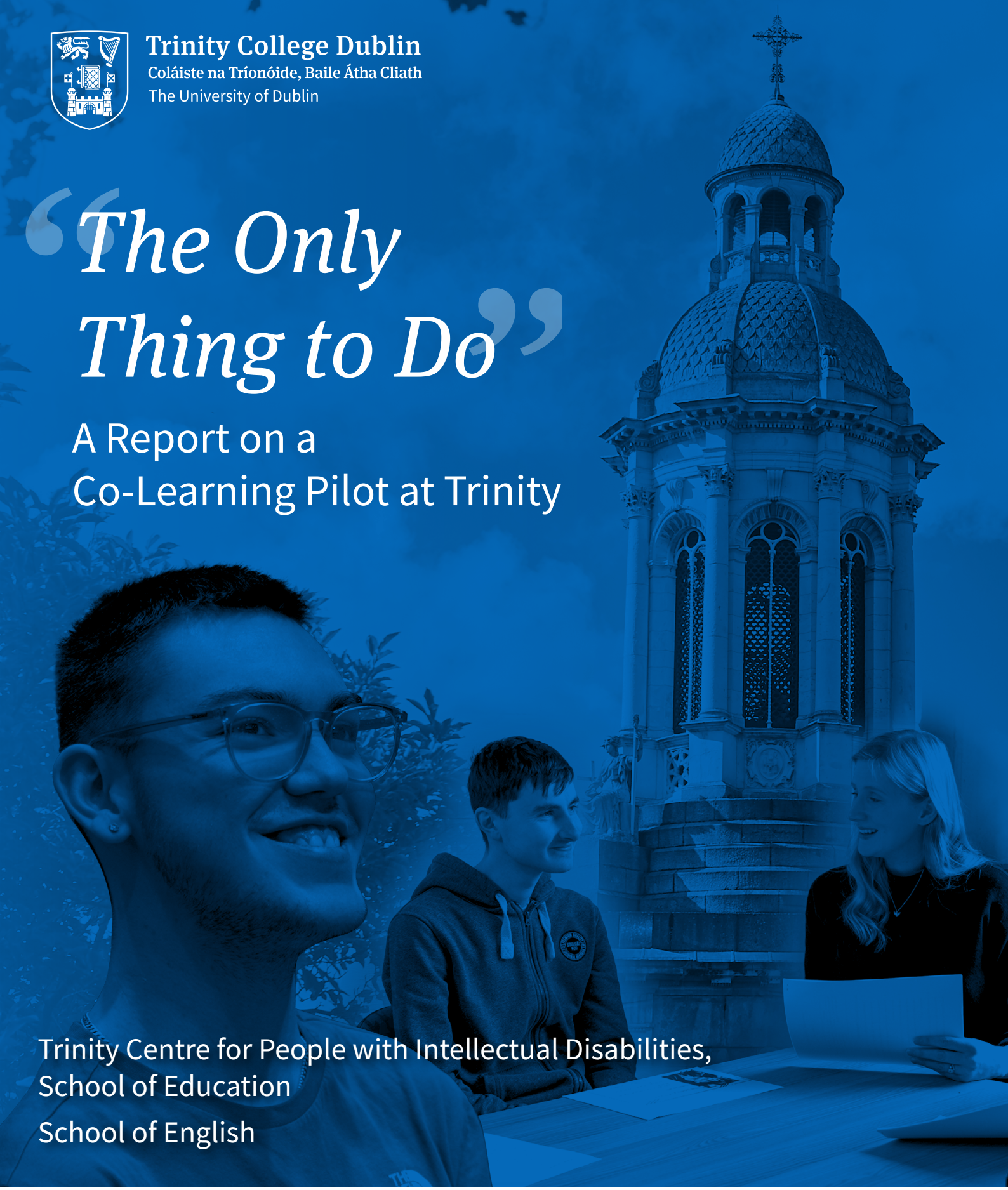
Trinity College Dublin
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath
The University of Dublin

"The Only Thing to Do"

A Report on a Co-Learning Pilot at Trinity



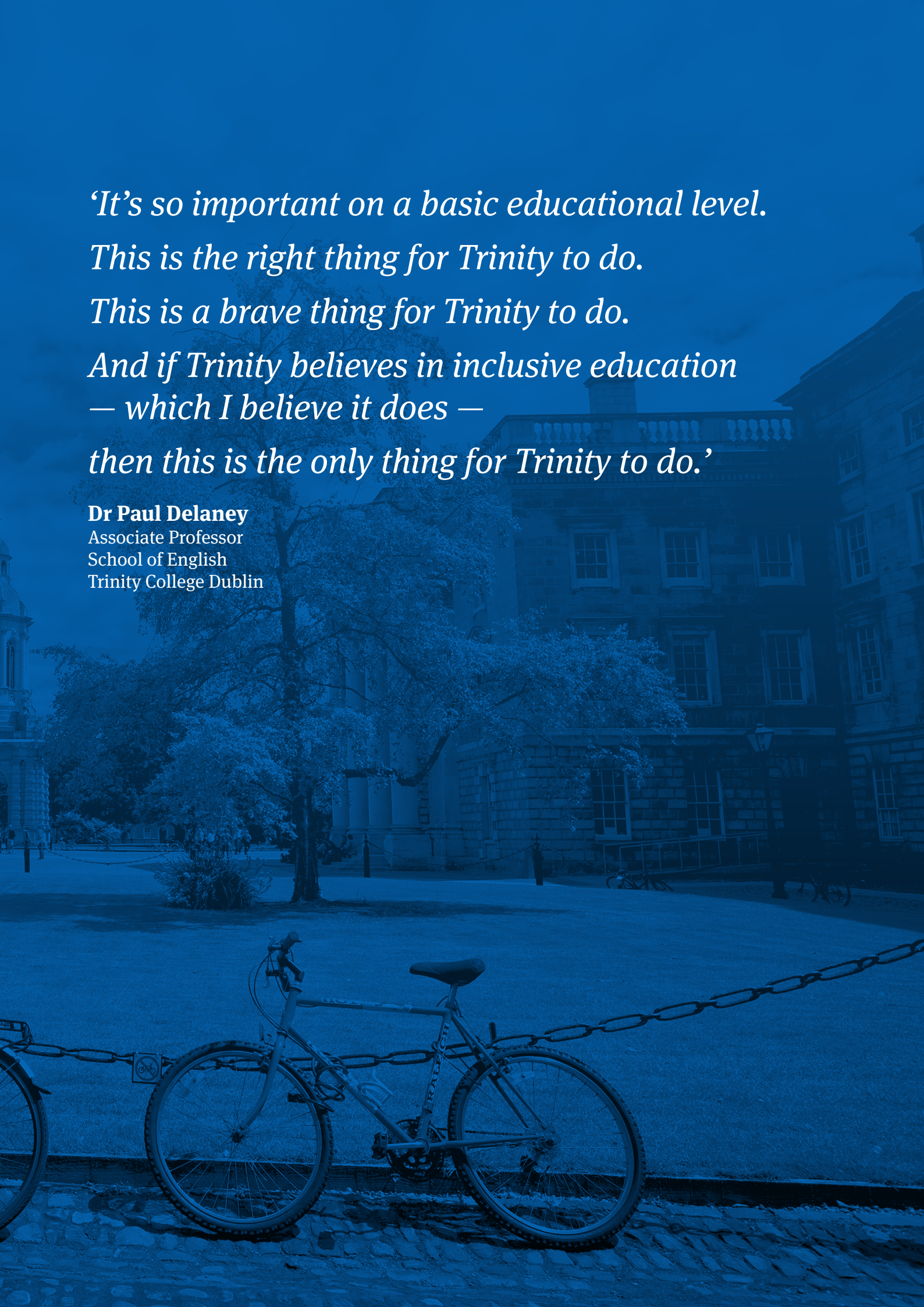
Trinity Centre for People with Intellectual Disabilities,
School of Education
School of English

TCPID
Trinity Centre for People with Intellectual Disabilities
Ionad na Tríonóide do Dhaoine le Míchumais Intleachta
Learning without Limits
For an inclusive society
School of Education, Trinity College Dublin

Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath
Trinity College Dublin
Ollscoil Átha Cliath | The University of Dublin
Scoil an Bhéarla
School of English

Trinity College Dublin
School of Education

PATH
Programme for Access to Higher Education



‘It’s so important on a basic educational level.
This is the right thing for Trinity to do.
This is a brave thing for Trinity to do.
And if Trinity believes in inclusive education
— which I believe it does —
then this is the only thing for Trinity to do.’

Dr Paul Delaney
Associate Professor
School of English
Trinity College Dublin

Publication Identifiers

ISBN:
978-1-911566-56-4

eISBN:
978-1-911566-57-1

Authors:
Des Aston[1], Rebecca Easler[2], Méabh Ní Choileáin[2], Paul Delaney[2], Owen Barden[1], Rosie Lavan[2], Conor Mc Guckin[1], Michael Shevlin[1]

Affiliations:
[1] Trinity Centre for People with Intellectual Disabilities, School of Education, Trinity College Dublin [2] School of English, Trinity College Dublin

To cite this report:
Aston, D., Easler, R., Ní Choileáin, M., Delaney, P., Barden, O., Lavan, R., Mc Guckin, C., & Shevlin, M. (2025). "*The Only Thing to Do": A Report on a Co-Learning Pilot at Trinity*. Dublin: Trinity College Dublin.

Further resources:
Watch a short video about the Co-Learning Pilot Project at https://youtu.be/K9gAxRWagWg?si=9VEL8Sk96VqTZQwo

Foreword

Trinity's new strategic plan, Thrive, commits the university to creating an environment where every member of our college community can realise their full potential.

This Co-Learning Pilot Project by the Trinity Centre for People with Intellectual Disabilities (TCPID) in the School of Education, and the School of English, is an outstanding practical example of the innovative thinking that we want to see right across the university as we facilitate that culture of thriving.

I want to commend the TCPID and the School of English for their leadership in embarking on this pilot project. Their partnership demonstrates the power of collaboration - across Schools and disciplines - to create transformative opportunities for students and staff alike.

Inclusion benefits everyone. It goes beyond widening access, as vital as that is; it is also about enriching the learning experience for the entire college community. Indeed, one of the key findings of this pilot project is that co-learning benefits all students, cultivates mutual respect, deepens engagement, and strengthens a sense of belonging.

An exciting aspect of the Co-Learning Pilot Project is its scalability and it is my hope that other Schools and disciplines will explore similar approaches, ensuring more students benefit from shared, inclusive learning environments. It is ambitious too, reimagining inclusion not as an add-on but as a core design principle for teaching and curriculum development, challenging conventional assumptions about inclusion in higher education.

I also acknowledge the recommendations in the report regarding the policies, resources, and research needed to embed co-learning as a sustainable and integrated part of Trinity's academic offerings.

I want to take this opportunity to underline that, at a time when the values of diversity and inclusion are under attack in so many parts of the world, Trinity College Dublin will fiercely defend these core principles.

Trinity's leadership in inclusive education is recognised nationally and internationally. This Co-Learning Pilot Project is yet another example of that fantastic spirit of innovation and ambition.

Dr Linda Doyle
Provost & President
Trinity College Dublin,
the University of Dublin

Acknowledgements

We would like to warmly thank all the students from TCPID, School of Education and the School of English who participated in this co-learning pilot. Our sincere gratitude also goes to the academic, professional, and administrative staff whose support made this work possible.

We extend our thanks to the academic leads from other schools with whom we are collaborating to expand co-learning opportunities, and to the Trinity Inclusive Curriculum Project for their expert guidance. Our appreciation also goes to Trinity disAbility Services and the Centre for Academic Practice for their support and advice throughout.

We gratefully acknowledge the funding that made this work possible: PATH 4 Phase 1 (2022) – Universal Design Fund: Supporting inclusive, universally designed higher education environments for all, and PATH 4 Phase 2 (2023–2026) – Course provision for students with intellectual disabilities. PATH 4 is a funding initiative by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) and the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS).

A very special acknowledgement is reserved for Dr John Kubiak, whose vision, dedication, and leadership have been central to the philosophy and success of the co-learning project. John has been a cornerstone of TCPID for over 20 years, transforming the lives of countless students and graduates through his unwavering commitment, insight, and care. We wish him every happiness in his retirement, confident that his legacy of excellence, inspiration, and transformative impact will continue to guide and shape our work for many years to come.

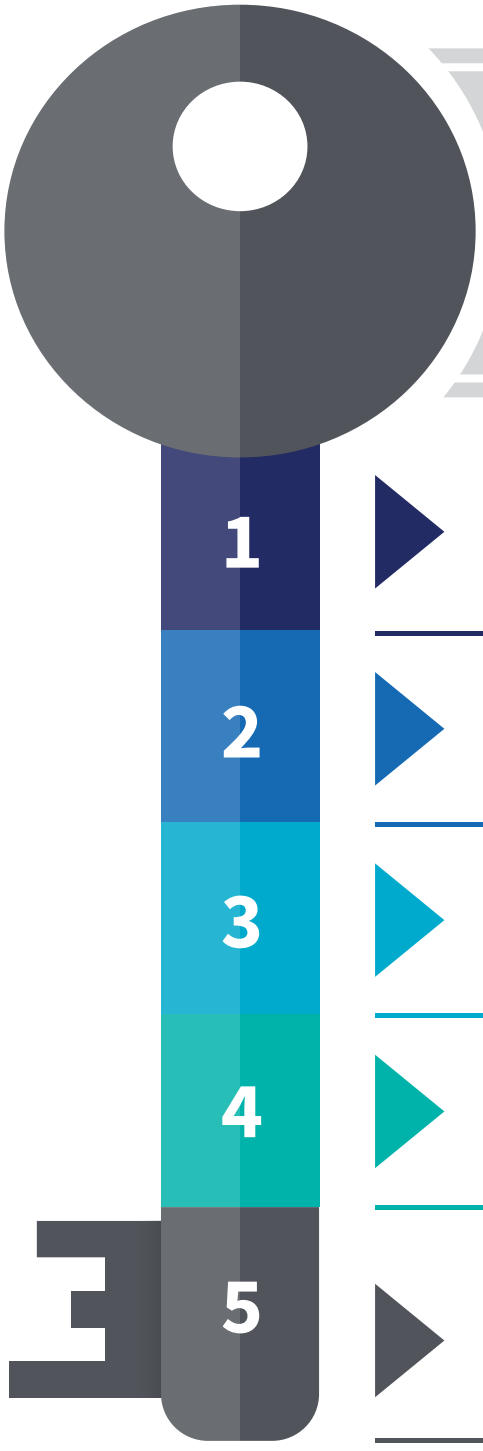
Executive Summary

This report presents a detailed account of the Co-Learning Pilot Project delivered as part of the Arts, Science and Inclusive Applied Practice (ASIAP) programme at Trinity College Dublin. The initiative was a collaboration between the Trinity Centre for People with Intellectual Disabilities (TCPID), based in the School of Education, and the School of English. Grounded in the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and inclusive pedagogy, the project aimed to create a shared academic space where students with intellectual disabilities and undergraduate students in English Studies could learn together – co-learn - in a meaningful, academically rigorous context.

The report documents the design, delivery, and evaluation of the co-learning pilot across two academic years, with a focus on the 'Irish Writing' module. It outlines the rationale, planning stages, teaching strategies, and ethical considerations that shaped the project. Drawing on a rich evidence base of student feedback, staff reflections, and qualitative data, the report explores the benefits, challenges, and transformative potential of inclusive co-learning in higher education.

Key findings highlight that the co-learning model fostered deep engagement, mutual respect, and critical thinking among all students. Staff observed enhanced pedagogical reflection, while students reported increased confidence, a sense of belonging, and intellectual stimulation. The project demonstrated that with thoughtful design and collaboration, students with intellectual disabilities can meaningfully participate in and contribute to mainstream university modules.

The report concludes with recommendations for embedding co-learning into formal academic offerings at Trinity College Dublin, identifying the institutional supports, policy developments, and further research needed to sustain and scale this approach. Ultimately, this project reimagines inclusion not as an add-on, but as a fundamental design principle of higher education.



Key Messages

1 Inclusion Works

Students with intellectual disabilities can thrive in mainstream university modules with appropriate supports.

2 Everyone Benefits

Co-learning enhances the learning experience for all students – disabled and non-disabled –and fosters deeper reflection among academic staff.

3 Genuine Inclusion

Co-learning is a serious, scalable model for genuine inclusion in higher education – note a tokenistic add-on.

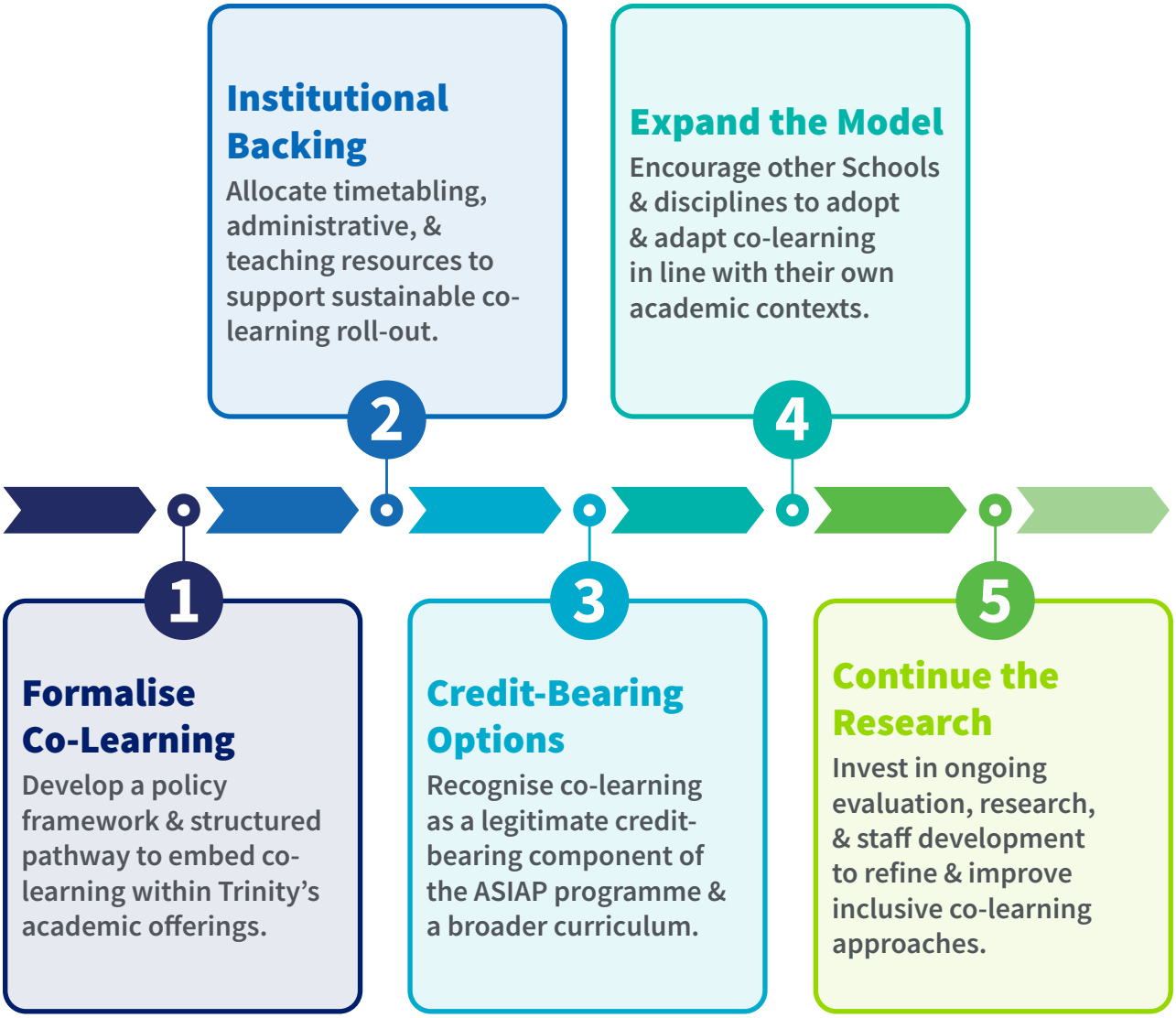
4 Innovative Pedagogy

The project demonstrates how Universal Design for Learning (UDL) can be practically implemented in real learning environments with real impact.

5 Catalysing Change

The model changes perceptions, challenges assumptions, and builds lasting relationships across student groups and disciplines.

Actions


Institutional Backing
Allocate timetabling, administrative, & teaching resources to support sustainable co-learning roll-out.
2
Expand the Model
Encourage other Schools & disciplines to adopt & adapt co-learning in line with their own academic contexts.
4
1
Formalise Co-Learning
Develop a policy framework & structured pathway to embed co-learning within Trinity's academic offerings.
3
Credit-Bearing Options
Recognise co-learning as a legitimate credit-bearing component of the ASIAP programme & a broader curriculum.
5
Continue the Research
Invest in ongoing evaluation, research, & staff development to refine & improve inclusive co-learning approaches.

Terminology and Definitions

This section clarifies key terms used in the report and explains how certain words or phrases are applied, including where multiple terms may be used interchangeably.

TCPID and ASIAP

The Trinity Centre for People with Intellectual Disabilities (TCPID) is based within the School of Education at Trinity College Dublin. TCPID delivers the Certificate in Arts, Science and Inclusive Applied Practice (ASIAP)—a course for students with intellectual disabilities, which is also the award they graduate with.

While *ASIAP student* is the technically correct description for someone enrolled in this programme, the acronym ASIAP is not widely recognised outside the immediate community. The term TCPID student is more widely understood and is therefore used more often in this report. In some cases, "TCPID students" and "ASIAP students" are used interchangeably, reflecting both the name of the Centre and the formal title of the qualification.

English Studies

English Studies students are undergraduate students enrolled in the B.A. Honours degree in English Studies. The programme focuses on the history and practices of writing in English, encompassing literary works from British, Irish, American, and post-colonial cultures. It aims to provide students with a thorough understanding of the history of these literatures while also fostering a sophisticated critical awareness and engagement with literary and cultural theory. Students in this programme study a wide historical range, including works from before 1300, and explore diverse topics such as Popular Literature and Children's Literature.

For the purposes of the co-learning pilot, the chosen module was the 'Irish Writing' module, which is technically an "open module". This means that students from other disciplines may also take the module as part of the Trinity Education Project as an elective. To avoid confusion, this report uses the term English Studies students for any undergraduate student taking the Irish Writing module and does not differentiate between B.A. Honours English Studies students and visiting undergraduate elective students.

Language and Disability

The language used to describe disability reflects different understandings of what disability means and where it originates.

Identity-first language (e.g., *disabled people*) is rooted in the social model of disability, which holds that people are disabled by the barriers, attitudes, and systems of society—not by their impairments. In this framing, "disabled" is used as a verb: society *disables* people when it designs environments, policies, and practices that exclude them. This is similar to how we might refer to "internally displaced people"—the displacement is something done to them, not an inherent trait. Using "disabled people" acknowledges that the problem lies in external structures, not within the person.

Person-first language (e.g., *people with disabilities* or *people with a disability*) places the person before the characteristic. While this approach is often linked to the medical model of disability, which treats disability as a condition or deficit, it can also be ethical and respectful. Many individuals and groups prefer this language because it emphasises that disability does not wholly define them. It can also be more suitable in certain contexts, for example, in healthcare settings or when a specific community explicitly requests it.

Typically, we follow the social model philosophy and use "disabled people" to highlight the disabling impact of social and structural barriers. However, we respect self-identified preferences—such as those of the National Platform of Self Advocates, Ireland's only Disabled People's Organisation representing people with intellectual disabilities—who prefer the term "people with intellectual disabilities." Where relevant, this preferred terminology is used.

Language shapes attitudes. Just as we would not speak of "sexism services" or "racism supports" as if the problem lay with those experiencing discrimination, we aim to use language that reflects Universal Design principles: designing systems for everyone from the outset, normalising diversity, and avoiding unnecessary segregation.

Bridging Class/Lecture

A preparatory learning session designed to support TCPID/ASIAP students before they attend the main module tutorials. Bridging classes/lectures introduce key concepts, texts, and vocabulary, ensuring that all students can participate meaningfully in the subsequent co-learning sessions.

Co-Learning

A teaching and learning approach in which students with and without intellectual disabilities participate together in the same academic module or activity, engaging as peers in a shared learning space. Co-learning is reciprocal: all students contribute to, and benefit from, the exchange of ideas, perspectives, and experiences.

Inclusive Pedagogy

An approach to teaching that values diversity and actively seeks to include all learners, particularly those from marginalised or underrepresented groups, by removing barriers to participation and fostering equitable opportunities to succeed.

Intellectual Disability

A term used to describe significant limitations in both intellectual functioning and adaptive behaviour, originating before the age of 18. In this report, we follow the preference of the National Platform of Self Advocates and use "people with intellectual disabilities" in this specific context.

PATH 4

PATH stand for the Programme for Access to Higher Education. It is a Higher Education Authority (HEA) initiative designed to improve access, participation, and outcomes for underrepresented groups in higher education. The co-learning pilot at Trinity was developed under PATH 4 Phase 1 and expanded in Phase 2, with a particular focus on embedding Universal Design for Learning.

Tutorial

A small-group teaching session, typically discussion-based, where students explore module content in greater depth. In the co-learning pilot, tutorials brought together undergraduate English Studies students with TCPID/ASIAP students in a shared learning environment.

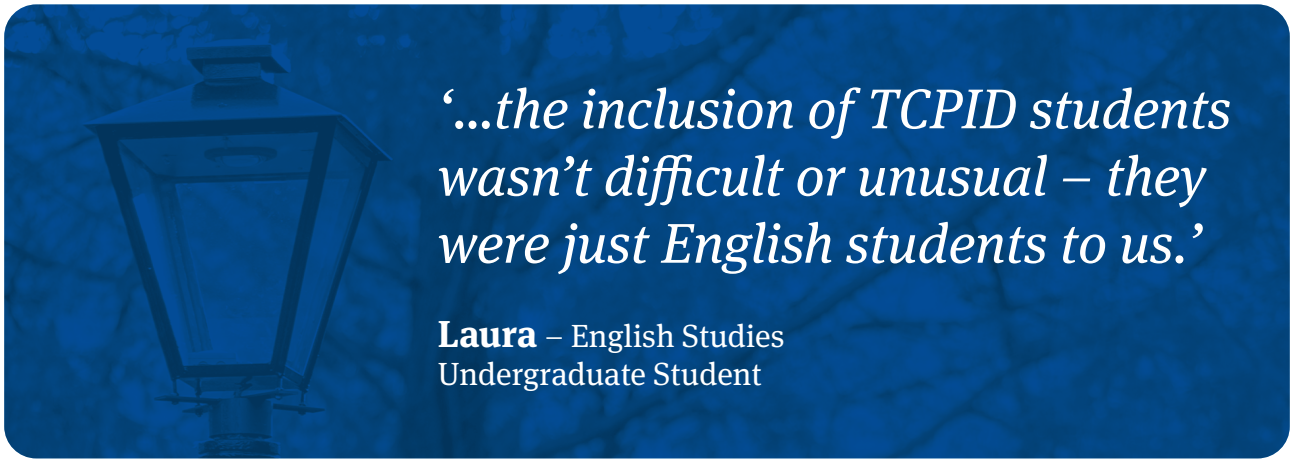
Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

An educational framework that aims to make learning accessible to all students by offering multiple ways of engaging with material, representing information, and demonstrating understanding. UDL seeks to remove barriers to learning at the design stage, rather than adapting materials reactively.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

In Irish higher education institutions, there is an increasing recognition of the need to support a more diverse student body, which includes individuals from a wide range of backgrounds, encompassing factors such as race, gender, age, class, disability status, and more. The diversity of the student population is growing, with more students with disabilities enrolling in higher education each year.



Recent data show that approximately 8% of the full-time student population in Ireland are registered with disability support services, and 17.8% of first-year undergraduate entrants report having a disability (AHEAD, 2025).

Research has demonstrated that providing accessible and flexible learning environments can significantly enhance student engagement and academic achievement for learners with disabilities (Burgstahler, 2020; Xie & Rice, 2021).

When students with disabilities are taught using accessible, inclusive materials and teaching strategies, their chances of academic persistence and success increase significantly. Research has shown that providing accessible learning environments can positively impact academic achievement and contribute to higher rates of completion for students with disabilities (Xie & Rice, 2021).

One key approach to enhancing the support for students with disabilities in higher education is through improving teaching practices. This improvement is not only about adopting specific strategies but also involves creating professional learning opportunities for educators to develop the skills and mindsets necessary for inclusive teaching.

In the Irish context, however, professional learning is often seen as an additional burden for faculty, who must balance teaching, research, and administrative responsibilities (Quirke, 2018). As such, the investment of time and effort by instructors attending professional learning workshops or engaging in co-learning initiatives is significant. These professional and social investments are essential for creating a culture of inclusive teaching and ensuring the success of students with intellectual disabilities in higher education.

The concept of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) has emerged as an effective framework for enhancing accessibility in teaching. UDL promotes the use of multiple means of representation,

engagement, and expression to accommodate diverse learning needs. By providing students with various ways to access content, express their knowledge, and engage with learning, UDL helps to ensure that all students—regardless of background or ability—have equitable opportunities to succeed (CAST, 2011, 2018). The goal of UDL is to help all students—especially those with diverse cognitive and neurodiverse needs—become expert learners who are resourceful, motivated, and goal-directed.

The co-learning project in Trinity College Dublin aligns closely with these principles, focusing on fostering inclusive learning environments where students with intellectual disabilities collaborate with peers from the School of English. By embedding UDL principles into the curriculum and pedagogy, this project aims to create a more accessible and supportive learning experience for all students, particularly those with disabilities.

However, enhancing teaching through frameworks like UDL requires ongoing professional development and a commitment to reflection and growth. Despite structural challenges within the higher education sector, examples such as the co-learning project demonstrate that meaningful, sustained investment in inclusive practice can yield tangible academic and social benefits for all students involved.

The co-learning project exemplifies how meaningful investment in inclusive education can be realised. By bringing together students from longstanding, traditional undergraduate programmes with students with intellectual disabilities, the co-learning project fosters a dynamic, collaborative learning environment. This initiative provides opportunities for all students to learn from one another, promoting a deeper understanding of diversity and inclusion in higher education.

UDL serves as the underpinning philosophy for the project, ensuring that the curriculum is accessible and engaging for all learners, regardless of their background or ability. Through UDL principles, the curriculum is designed to support a diverse range of learning needs, allowing students to engage with content, demonstrate their understanding, and participate in learning activities in ways that best suit their individual strengths. This inclusive approach ensures that students with intellectual disabilities are included meaningfully into the academic experience, alongside their peers in traditional undergraduate programmes.

In addition to exploring the experiences of students, this research investigates the motivations of staff involved in the co-learning project, examining why they chose to participate and what they hope to achieve through this inclusive teaching approach. It also looks at the reactions and opinions of undergraduate students who may have been surprised to see students with intellectual disabilities in their tutorials. Understanding their perspectives is crucial to gauging the social dynamics of inclusive learning environments and uncovering any potential challenges or misunderstandings that may arise when students with intellectual disabilities are included into '*mainstream*' academic settings across the University.

Faculty participants are encouraged to reflect on their teaching practices, share insights into the successes and challenges of implementing UDL, and collaboratively explore ways to improve the learning experience for all students. The project also evaluates the impact of these professional investments on both student outcomes and faculty development, offering valuable insights into how inclusive teaching strategies can be effectively embedded within higher education curricula. Ultimately, this research contributes to a broader understanding of how inclusive education can foster meaningful learning experiences and promote an equitable academic environment for all students.

1.1. The Co-Learning Pilot: 'Irish Writing'

This report examines a pilot co-learning initiative in English Studies, designed to foster inclusivity by integrating diverse perspectives and lived experiences. The project was a collaborative effort between the Trinity Centre for People with Intellectual Disabilities (TCPID), particularly through its Arts, Science, and Inclusive Applied Practice (ASIAP) programme, and the School of English, at Trinity College Dublin (TCD). For this pilot, the Irish Writing module within the School of English was selected as the focal point for co-learning between students from the TCPID and undergraduate students from the School of English.

The Irish Writing module is a team-taught course that introduces students to a wide range of texts within the Irish literary tradition, spanning from the eighteenth century to the present day. The module explores some of the most innovative and influential literature produced over the last 300 years, and features a diverse array of material, including works by poets, novelists, playwrights, and short-story writers. Rather than being organised chronologically, the module clusters material around four thematic concepts: Satire, History, Violence, and Place, with several lectures dedicated to discussing these issues in depth. Each thematic unit is introduced by a general lecture, followed by more specific discussions focused on individual authors or texts, in small-group tutorials.

Through this co-learning initiative, the project aims to create a dynamic academic space where students from the TCPID, who participate in the ASIAP programme, can engage meaningfully with their peers from the School of English. The goal is to enrich the learning experience for all

involved, encouraging an exchange of ideas and perspectives that enhances understanding and appreciation of the Irish literary tradition.

This co-learning pilot originated in Phase 1 of PATH 4 (Higher Education Authority, 2022a), which focused on Universal Design for Learning (UDL) to ensure that higher education environments are inclusive and accessible to all students. Building on this foundation, the project has continued into Phase 2 of PATH 4 (Higher Education Authority, 2023), becoming an important part of the TCPID's ongoing commitment to embedding inclusive practices within TCD. The initiative exemplifies a whole-institution approach to inclusion, fostering collaboration across departments and ensuring that inclusive practices are embedded not only within the TCPID but across the wider university community.

The PATH 4 Phase 2 initiative, which enhances opportunities for students with intellectual disabilities across participating higher education institutions, provides vital funding to support these efforts. By continuing to collaborate with the School of English and expanding inclusive teaching and learning practices, this project contributes to the National Access Plan's objectives to improve access, progression, and success for underrepresented groups (Higher Education Authority, 2022b). The partnership between the TCPID and the School of English provides a model for inclusive education, helping to ensure that all students, regardless of background or ability, are provided with the opportunity to thrive in higher education.

The co-learning approach challenges traditional educational models by promoting mutual learning between students and across disciplines. Rather than focusing solely on one-directional knowledge transmission within siloed disciplines, co-learning encourages reciprocal engagement, enhancing academic discourse and strengthening social inclusion. By dismantling barriers that have historically marginalised certain groups, this model creates a more representative and dynamic learning environment for all.

In the context of English Studies, inclusive education is vital. Writing is a fundamental tool for communication and self-expression, and by nature, studying literature requires an understanding of multiple approaches and perspectives of texts. Ensuring access to this discipline broadens creative and critical engagement. Through the application of co-learning principles, English Studies can embrace a more diverse range of voices, reinforcing the values of equity, representation, and accessibility in higher education.

1.2. A Landmark Collaboration

The collaboration between TCPID (School of Education) and the School of English is an exciting development, particularly as the School of English at Trinity is one of the oldest and most prestigious schools in Britain and Ireland. Having founded the first-ever Chair in English Literature on this island in 1867, the School continues to lead in the discipline, ranked 7th in Europe and 21st in the world in the QS World University Subject Rankings 2024.

Similarly, the School of Education, where TCPID is housed, is ranked within the top 100 globally in 2024. This collaboration represents a significant step in expanding inclusive practices within a historically distinguished department, demonstrating how inclusive education can be integrated into traditional academic fields like English Studies.

Trinity College Dublin's commitment to inclusive education aligns with its mission to empower students to develop four distinctive graduate attributes: independent thinking, effective communication, continuous development, and responsible action. The university promotes flexible pathways through its courses, encouraging students to branch out from their core disciplines to broaden both the depth of their expertise and their perspectives. This approach ensures diversity within research and education, and promotes the accessibility and adaptability of teaching and learning for all students as they share skills, collaborate, and effectively benefit from their peers in other disciplines.

This educational flexibility engages students in the 'social impact of research' to adopt more inclusive research practices, and it prepares graduates for successful careers and active citizenship (Academic Practice, 2021).

The electives and open modules offered in undergraduate education are part of Trinity's belief in a truly inclusive education. Trinity's flexible pathways expand students' knowledge, experience, and perspectives with courses outside of, or beyond, the normal scope of their designated programme. Students participating in co-learning similarly have the opportunity to deepen their expertise within their chosen subject areas while also engaging in meaningful academic exchange with peers from diverse backgrounds and lived experiences. This is why the co-learning initiative embraces the principles that make inclusive education at Trinity distinctive.

These principles help all participants develop the qualities, skills, and behaviours encompassed by the four Trinity Graduate Attributes:

Image: *Trinity Graduate Attributes, Trinity College Dublin*

"I'm here today to celebrate this co-learning pilot between the Trinity Centre for People with Intellectual Disabilities and the School of English here in Trinity. It's an absolutely fantastic initiative. TCPID always thinks outside the box, and once again, we see that in action—it's just amazing.

It's no wonder the School of English is ranked 21st in the world when it continues to embrace new, daring, and wonderful ideas, challenging all of us to reimagine education.

I'm absolutely delighted that there are plans to expand this initiative. Really exciting times ahead."

Dr Linda Doyle
Provost of Trinity College Dublin

Co-learning provides unique opportunities for students to participate in the Trinity Graduate Attributes. Co-learning requires students to move beyond the texts and materials in the curriculum towards a more innovative and self-reflective relationship between themselves and the way they acquire and share knowledge. It asks students to think outside of their personal or educational biases or experiences, to consider how learning from people with different abilities can foster new and unexpected approaches to learning.

Pedagogically as well, co-learning reshapes standards of teaching and delivery. It asks educators to think beyond their traditional modes of teaching and incorporate learning outcomes that more inclusively ensure that students become more independent and creative thinkers, effective and inclusive communicators, and responsibly active life-long learners. Through the integration of co-learning, this project further strengthens Trinity's vision of an inclusive, forward-thinking education system, ensuring that all students, regardless of background or ability, are prepared to contribute meaningfully to society.

2. Methodology

Studies have shown that collaborative, co-learning environments shared by students with and without intellectual disabilities benefit all involved and help to improve the overall college experience. Prioritising a student-centred approach to programme design, this research study aimed to understand the personal experiences of the students participating in this pilot, so that we can evaluate the challenges, teaching strategies, and resources needed for a permanent partnership. Hearing the voices and opinions of students, faculty, and co-learning champions in this research enables them to take an active role in advancing their own learning and belonging in shaping a programme that reflects their interests and goals, while also supporting Trinity College's Graduate Attributes and its broader aims for education and research.

2.1. Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research approach to explore co-learning experiences shared by students with intellectual disabilities and their peers in the School of English at Trinity College Dublin. A case study methodology was adopted to gain an in-depth understanding of how students with intellectual disabilities participated in an Irish Writing module alongside School of English students (Thomas, 2021; Yin, 1981, 2018). The research focused on the inclusion of students from the ASIAP programme, who opted into this module, within tutorial groups.

2.2. Participants and Sampling

Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure a diverse representation of students from different tutorial groups within the Irish Writing module (Patton, 2015). The research gathered anonymised feedback from three tutorial groups in the School of English at the end of the academic term. In the 2023/24 academic year, one tutorial group included three students with intellectual disabilities, while in the 2024/25 academic year, two tutorial groups had two students with intellectual disabilities each, and one group had none. While nine students with intellectual disabilities participated in the project, only seven students completed all components. Additionally, students from the School of English were invited to participate in focus groups in April 2024 (Year 1 of the pilot) and April 2025 (Year 2 of the pilot).

The table below provides an overview of student participant profiles:

Participant Group	Total	Male	Female
Undergraduate English Studies Students	8	2	6
ASIAP Students	9	4	5

Additionally, staff members from the School of English, the TCPID, and the School of Education contributed their perspectives on the pilot project. Their views and experiences were gathered through self-reflection and professional reflective practice, providing further insights into the implementation and impact of the programme.

The table below provides an overview of staff participant profiles:

Participant Group	Total	Early Career	Mid-Career	Long-Serving	School of English	School of Education
Co-Learning Champions	2	2	-	-	2	-
Academic Staff	5	-	4	1	2	3
Administrative Staff	2	1	-	1	-	2

2.3. Data Collection Methods

Anonymised feedback was gathered from students across three tutorial groups at the end of each academic term through open-ended feedback surveys. These surveys, which are a typical method for reflective practice (Patton, 2015; Weiss, 1972), were already in operation as part of the regular evaluation of the module. The feedback was analysed both as part of the broader module evaluation and specifically to compare the experiences of groups with and without co-learning students.

In addition to the regular feedback, focus groups with School of English students were conducted in April of each pilot year (2024 and 2025). These focus groups provided a deeper exploration of students' perspectives on co-learning, allowing for a more detailed understanding of their experiences and reflections on the collaborative learning approach.

The data collection process also included self-reflections on professional practice by staff members in the School of English and the Trinity Centre for People with Intellectual Disabilities (TCPID), School of Education. These reflections were collected through structured prompts and informal discussions, providing valuable insights into the implementation and impact of the pilot project from both academic and professional perspectives.

Staff members shared their experiences of co-teaching, integrating inclusive teaching practices, and collaborating across disciplines. The reflections offered critical analysis of the successes and challenges faced during the project and provided valuable feedback on the impact of the pilot on pedagogical approaches, professional development, logistical challenges, and long-term educational outcomes.

This combination of student feedback, focus group discussions, and staff reflections ensured a comprehensive evaluation of the pilot, with insights drawn from multiple perspectives to guide future developments of co-learning initiatives (Newcomer, 2015).

2.4. Data Analysis

All collected data, including anonymised feedback, focus group discussions, and staff reflections, were transcribed verbatim to ensure an accurate and comprehensive record of participants' responses (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017). The transcriptions were then subjected to a rigorous thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns, key themes, and underlying insights. An inductive coding approach was employed to allow themes to emerge naturally from the data without imposing predefined categories. This approach ensured that the analysis remained grounded in the participants' own perspectives, providing a rich, nuanced understanding of the co-learning experience.

The analysis process began with familiarisation with the transcriptions, where the researchers read through the data multiple times to gain a broad understanding of the content and context. Following this, an initial round of open coding was conducted, where meaningful segments of the data were highlighted and assigned preliminary codes. As the coding progressed, these initial codes were refined and grouped into broader themes, reflecting the various aspects of the participants' experiences. This iterative process involved continuous comparison across data sources, revisiting the transcripts, and adjusting the themes to ensure they accurately represented the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

To enhance the efficiency and organisation of the analysis, NVivo software was utilised. This software facilitated the systematic management of the coded data, allowing for easy retrieval and categorisation of themes. NVivo also enabled the researchers to track the evolution of themes over time and explore connections between different data sources (student feedback, focus group discussions, and staff reflections). The use of NVivo supported a structured yet flexible approach to analysis, ensuring that all relevant insights were captured and thoroughly explored (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2011; O'Kane et al., 2021; Richards, 1999).

Ultimately, this thematic analysis process provided a comprehensive understanding of the experiences and perspectives of both students and staff, offering valuable insights into the implementation, impact, and potential future development of the co-learning initiative.

2.5. Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for the study was sought and obtained from the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Science (AHSS) Research Ethics Committee at Trinity College Dublin. Given the multidisciplinary and collaborative nature of the research, which involved partnerships between the School of English and the Trinity Centre for People with Intellectual Disabilities (TCPID) which is based within the School of Education, approval was sought at the Faculty level rather than at the individual School level. This approach ensured that the ethical considerations across the diverse disciplines involved in the project were thoroughly addressed.

Informed consent was a cornerstone of the ethical process. Prior to their participation, all individuals involved in the study—both students and staff—were provided with detailed information outlining the purpose, scope, and objectives of the research. The consent forms explicitly stated participants' right to withdraw from the study at any point, without consequence. This was reinforced through clear communication about the voluntary nature of participation. Additionally, participants were assured of the measures in place to protect their privacy and confidentiality throughout the research process.

To further ensure confidentiality, all collected data were anonymised, with personally identifiable information removed or replaced with pseudonyms. This not only protected participants' identities but also allowed for the data to be used freely in reporting findings without compromising participant privacy. The use of pseudonyms in the reporting process ensured that no individual could be linked to specific responses, maintaining the integrity of the ethical standards throughout the study.

By adhering to these rigorous ethical guidelines, the research maintained the highest standards of integrity, ensuring the respectful and responsible handling of participants' contributions and the safeguarding of their rights throughout the project (Trinity College Dublin, 2024).

2.6. Limitations

This study was limited by the small sample size, which may not be representative of the broader population of students in higher education. Additionally, the study relied on self-reported experiences and qualitative data, which may have been subject to recall bias. Despite these limitations, the findings provide valuable insights into the co-learning experience in a higher education setting.

3. How TCPID Students Connected with Irish Writing

This section explores how students from the Trinity Centre for People with Intellectual Disabilities (TCPID) engaged with Irish writing through a co-learning model alongside undergraduate peers. The collaborative environment encouraged all students to contribute personal insights, draw on lived experience, and participate actively in shared analysis.

These co-learning experiences supported inclusive discussion around complex themes such as identity, marginalisation, and power. In doing so, they demonstrated how inclusive pedagogies can deepen literary understanding while also affirming the value of diverse voices in the academic space.

3.1. Popular Culture and Historical Texts

In the Irish Writing module, students from the Trinity Centre for People with Intellectual Disabilities (TCPID) engaged in a dynamic co-learning experience alongside undergraduate students from the School of English. One compelling outcome of this initiative was the ability of TCPID students to draw meaningful connections between contemporary popular culture and Irish literature. A good example was provided when students drew links between the recent film *Saltburn* and the early 19th-century novel *Castle Rackrent* (1800) by Maria Edgeworth. This comparative analysis demonstrated not only the students' critical engagement with diverse texts but also their ability to contextualise current cultural products within the broader traditions of Irish literature and social critique.

Saltburn, a contemporary psychological thriller by Emerald Fennell, examines the dark undercurrents of privilege, obsession, and class inequality, while Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent* critiques the moral and financial decay of the Rackrent family, whose squandered wealth reflects the failings of a privileged aristocracy in 18th-century Ireland. In drawing connections between these two texts, TCPID students, in conjunction with their undergraduate peers, engaged with themes of class, power, and social disparity that transcend time periods.

The students noted that both *Saltburn* and *Castle Rackrent* utilise the motif of the corrupt aristocrat whose indulgences and neglect lead to their downfall. In *Castle Rackrent*, the successive generations of the Rackrent family squander their inherited wealth, leading to a rapid decline in status and estate. Similarly, *Saltburn* depicts a wealthy family whose superficial allure hides a deep moral rot, with the protagonist Felix drawn into their world of decadence and manipulation. This thematic parallel was especially evident in discussions of characterisation, where both Edgeworth and Fennell expose the fragility of the powerful by highlighting their moral decay and ultimate inability to maintain their societal standing.

Furthermore, TCPID students were able to reflect on the function of the outsider perspective in both works. Thady Quirk, the narrator of *Castle Rackrent*, serves as an outsider to the Rackrent family, providing a critical commentary on their actions while simultaneously displaying a mix of loyalty and moral ambivalence. In *Saltburn*, Felix occupies a similar outsider role, as his modest background contrasts sharply with the opulence and dysfunction of the wealthy family he infiltrates. This outsider lens allows for a nuanced critique of the social systems in

place, facilitating a deeper understanding of how wealth and power can distort human relationships and ethical judgement.

Through this comparative analysis, students not only demonstrated an understanding of the historical and social contexts of the texts but also explored the enduring relevance of these themes in contemporary media. The ability to connect the decadence of Edgeworth's 18th-century aristocracy with the modern-day representation of privilege in *Saltburn* underscored the continuing resonance of these issues in both literature and popular culture. This exercise exemplifies the value of co-learning, where students from diverse backgrounds and academic disciplines can collectively engage with and critically analyse cultural artefacts across time, enriching their understanding of both the texts and the world around them.

Another intriguing aspect of the co-learning initiative emerged in the comparison between James Joyce's short story *Clay*, from *Dubliners* (1914) and the contemporary character of Nanny McPhee. Although at first glance these two characters—Maria from Joyce's *Clay* and Nanny McPhee from Christianna Brand's stories—appear to belong to completely different narrative realms, both represent complex responses to societal expectations and the role of misjudgement in shaping identity.

In *Clay*, Joyce presents Maria as a seemingly inconspicuous, elderly woman who lives a life of quiet routine, shaped by the expectations of a society that marginalises those who do not adhere to traditional norms. As an unmarried woman, Maria's life reflects a social order that limits opportunities for those who fall outside of established frameworks of family and marriage. Joyce subtly critiques this social structure through his portrayal of Maria's quiet longing for connection and the emotional toll her solitude imposes on her, despite her outward stoicism. The story is poignant in its exploration of the gap between Maria's internal desires and the external social roles that confine her, offering a critique of societal alienation and the often-unnoticed lives of the elderly.

In a contemporary narrative, Nanny McPhee, as portrayed in the *Nanny McPhee* film series, similarly subverts initial perceptions. First presented as a rather witch-like figure, with physical traits such as a long nose and chin, Nanny McPhee is initially judged on her appearance, which aligns with society's tendency to assign value based on superficial qualities. However, as the narrative unfolds, it becomes clear that Nanny McPhee is not a figure of fear, but rather one of nurturing wisdom and compassion for children in need of guidance. Her external form, which evokes the stereotype of the sinister and the strange, contrasts sharply with her warm and transformative role, which ultimately redefines her character in the eyes of those around her.

The co-learning discussions led by TCPID students uncovered significant parallels between these two characters. Both Maria and Nanny McPhee are misjudged based on their outward appearances, yet both possess an internal strength that drives their actions and their impact on others. Maria's quiet acts of kindness and her emotional depth are revealed only through her interactions with others, especially in the final moments of *Clay* when the tension between her internal world and the external events becomes more apparent. Similarly, Nanny McPhee's transformative role within the family she serves is initially obscured by her unusual appearance but ultimately revealed as one of profound care, guidance, and love for the children she assists.

In addition, both figures challenge societal norms in their own ways. Maria, as a single, older woman, is a character who navigates a space within a society that often marginalises such individuals, while Nanny McPhee, despite her unconventional appearance and manner, subverts the traditional image of the governess, a role often depicted as strict and disciplinarian. Instead, Nanny McPhee embodies the transformative power of care and wisdom, suggesting that true influence is not always tied to conventional expectations of beauty, age, or authority. Through these two characters, TCPID students recognised the complex ways in which society's judgments can shape perceptions of worth and significance, even as these very individuals possess the ability to challenge and reshape those expectations.

The students in the module were particularly engaged by how both *Clay* and the *Nanny McPhee* series encourage an awareness of the hidden layers of identity and the capacity for personal transformation. In *Clay*, the subtext of Maria's life, full of unrealised potential and longing, parallels the hidden talents and kindness within Nanny McPhee, whose true nature is revealed only when the veneer of initial prejudice is stripped away. Both stories ultimately underscore the importance of looking beyond appearances to recognise the deeper, often overlooked qualities that define an individual's worth.

By engaging with these characters, TCPID students displayed a sophisticated understanding of how literature and media construct and deconstruct societal norms, revealing the profound impact of misjudgement and the possibility of transformation. This co-learning experience allowed the students to connect themes of misperception, personal growth, and the subversion of expectations across different genres and contexts, showcasing how literature—whether in the form of Joyce's modernist short story or a contemporary children's film—remains a powerful tool for reflecting on and critiquing the social constructs that shape our understanding of identity and human value. Through such analyses, the students gained insight into the power of narrative to challenge established norms, fostering a more inclusive perspective on the characters and people we encounter in both fiction and life.

3.2. Connecting with the 'Here and Now'

The recent renaming of the Eavan Boland Library at Trinity College Dublin marks a significant moment in the university's commitment to both social justice and inclusivity. This renaming, in the context of the ongoing reckoning with historical legacies such as George Berkeley's connections to slavery, is particularly meaningful given Boland's powerful contribution to feminist discourse and her advocacy for marginalised voices. The event serves not only as a commemoration of her work but also as a poignant example of the contemporary relevance of Boland's poetry, particularly in relation to the School of Education's TCPID students.

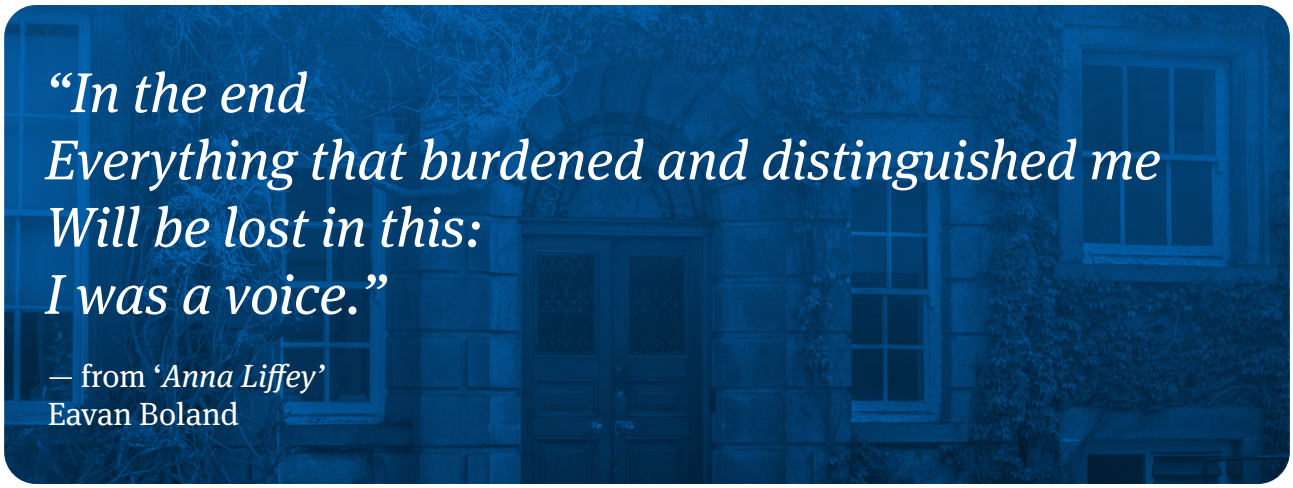
TCPID students had the opportunity to engage with Boland's poetry in their co-learning sessions with peers from the School of English, an experience that proved to be both academically enriching and personally resonant. Throughout their study, students were able to draw connections between the themes of oppression, marginalisation, and societal expectations that Boland so expertly explores, and their own lived experiences as individuals with intellectual disabilities. By engaging with works such as *Night Feed* and *Woman in Kitchen*, students reflected on how the portrayal of women's struggles and their search for identity within Boland's poems mirrored their own encounters with societal discrimination and exclusion. This exercise in critical reflection not only deepened the students' understanding of Boland's poetry but also provided a transformative space for them to connect these themes to their own realities.

The themes of oppression and marginalisation, central to Boland's work, have profound significance for the TCPID students. Boland's nuanced exploration of the complexities of gender and identity—often shaped by societal expectations and entrenched power structures—found a compelling parallel in the students' own experiences within a society that often overlooks or undervalues those with intellectual disabilities. For many of these students, Boland's poetry offered a lens through which they could critically examine their own positioning within contemporary society, as individuals who are often confined by stereotypes, discrimination, and limited opportunities. The ability to connect with the text in such a personal way not only enriched their academic experience but also affirmed the power of literature to challenge societal norms and open new spaces for dialogue and understanding.

It is particularly significant that during the 2025 renaming ceremony of the Eavan Boland Library, one of TCPID's own students had the opportunity to read Boland's poetry in a video created for Trinity College Dublin's social media platforms. This public contribution marked a moment of visibility and affirmation, showcasing the success of co-learning by highlighting how students with intellectual disabilities can meaningfully contribute to the cultural and intellectual life of the university. The video was shared across Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn and TikTok, collectively receiving over 42,000 views and achieving an average engagement rate of 3.5%—a

figure well above the higher education sector average of 0.52%. The strongest performance came via LinkedIn, where the engagement rate reached an impressive 14.7%. These metrics reflect not only the broad reach of the video, but also the strong resonance it had with audiences. As such, the student's participation stands as a powerful symbol of the broader aims of co-learning: to create inclusive spaces in which diverse voices are not only welcomed, but celebrated.

The renaming of the Library was, therefore, not just an act of commemoration for Boland's contributions to literature and feminism, but also a symbolic embrace of the values she championed—values that resonate deeply with the students at TCPID. Boland's commitment to giving voice to the silenced and oppressed mirrors the university's growing recognition of the need to amplify voices from all walks of life, including those of students with intellectual disabilities. The act of renaming the Library is a direct reflection of this commitment, as it honours both Boland's legacy and the ongoing work of inclusion and representation within Trinity College Dublin.



Moreover, the renaming of the Library represented another milestone in Trinity's efforts to address gender inequality, as it was the first building in the College's history to be named after a woman. This is fitting, especially as the current Provost, Dr Linda Doyle, is also the first female to hold this position. The resonance of this moment was not lost on TCPID students, who saw in Boland's legacy a model for how literature can challenge the status quo and offer a platform for those whose voices are often unheard.

By embracing Boland's work and renaming the library in her honour, Trinity College Dublin has not only made an important statement about the value of feminist thought but has also further cemented its commitment to inclusive education and the empowerment of historically marginalised groups.

In this way, the co-learning initiative—where students with intellectual disabilities engaged deeply with the works of major authors like Eavan Boland—reveals a dynamic process of incidental learning. These students, by studying Boland's poetry, not only gained a deeper appreciation for her literary contributions but also found personal resonance in her themes of resistance, empowerment, and the fight for visibility. Through this engagement, they began to see themselves not only as recipients of education but as active participants in the cultural and intellectual life of the university, challenging the traditional boundaries of academic space and creating new pathways for inclusion.

Equally important, this initiative fostered cross-dialogue between TCPID students and their undergraduate peers in the School of English. As TCPID students shared their unique perspectives on Boland's work, particularly the links between feminist oppression and the marginalisation of disabled individuals in modern society, undergraduate students gained a fresh and invaluable insight into issues they may not have previously considered. Several remarked that they would never have thought of Boland's poetry through this lens without the presence of TCPID students in the room, underscoring the power of inclusive education in broadening horizons and deepening understanding.

The inclusion of diverse voices in academic discussions provides benefits to all students. By engaging with perspectives that challenge dominant narratives, students are encouraged to think critically, engage in meaningful debate, and appreciate the multifaceted nature of literature and society. This connection between the work of Eavan Boland and the lived experiences of TCPID students highlights the ongoing relevance of her poetry in the 'here and now,' underscoring the enduring power of literature to transform, empower, and inspire generations.

4. Perspectives on Co-Learning from Undergraduate Students

The data from the focus groups indicated that co-learning is mutually beneficial for students both with and without intellectual disabilities (Maxwell et al., 2024). These benefits stem not only from the academic quality of the learning but also from the inclusive, accessible, and community-focused environment fostered within the co-learning tutorials.

4.1. Initial Reactions and Expectations

While students recognised some drawbacks to the tutorials, these concerns were not specific to the co-learning curriculum itself. One issue raised was the larger class size, resulting from the inclusion of TCPID students, which some felt caused occasional disruption and made the classroom environment feel more crowded. A number of students expressed a preference for smaller, more intimate settings that better support discussion, particularly in a subject like English Studies where the analysis of literature benefits from close conversation.

This feedback was anticipated, as the School of English traditionally prioritises smaller tutorial groups to encourage interaction and deeper engagement with themes. However, due to the pilot nature of the co-learning tutorial, adjustments to group size were not possible at the time. This concern was addressed in the second year of co-learning in the Irish Writing modules, where efforts were made to maintain smaller group sizes while still including TCPID students.

Students in the School of English assigned to the co-learning tutorial groups were not told ahead of the first tutorial that they would be participating in a co-learning module. Generally, students mentioned being surprised by the co-learning aspect of the tutorial. One student admitted that the co-learning aspect added some uncertainty to the '*initial wave of nerves*' inherent in attending a tutorial for a new module and new semester, but that this uncertainty was '*completely dispelled within the first ten minutes*'.

Another student who immediately liked the idea of a co-learning module commented that they already '*expect*' tutorials to be very different, so the inclusion of TCPID students did not feel out of place.

> *'… it wasn't difficult or unusual; they were just English students to us'*
> ***Laura, English Studies Undergraduate Student***

The positivity and acceptance around co-learning suggests that students were not averse to sharing learning spaces with students with intellectual disabilities but were in fact quite welcome to the idea. However, the initial '*surprise*' students felt likely reflects how students with intellectual disabilities are still relatively unknown or unexpected in shared university spaces (Corby et al., 2020). None of the students in the focus groups had had any college co-learning experiences before this module, nor had they heard of the Trinity Centre for People with Intellectual Disabilities, though they assumed that something like it existed at Trinity.

4.2. Inclusivity Compared to Previous Educational Experiences

Three of the students in the focus groups mentioned that they had shared classrooms with students with intellectual disabilities in primary or secondary school, but that these experiences were quite different from the Irish Writing co-learning tutorial. Students related that their previous classrooms (within primary and post-primary school) still treated students with intellectual disability as separate or disconnected from the students without intellectual disability, that they did not, or could not, engage with the rest of the class. The students could not say specifically why the students with intellectual disability were treated differently—whether due to special assistance needs, the teachers themselves, or a lack of school resources—but as one student stated:

> *'they'd be in the class, but they weren't treated as equally as they should have been.'*
>
> ***John, English Studies Undergraduate Student***

Another student even mentioned that with the perceived separation in primary school:

> *'I didn't really know how to talk to people [with intellectual disability] because everyone around me was treating them differently.'*
>
> ***Laura, English Studies Undergraduate Student***

In contrast, that same student remarked that in the Irish Writing co-learning module '*everyone was seen as equal entirely, like everyone's comments mattered*'. Unanimously, the students recalled the tutorials as being inclusive towards every student's voice and opinion. As one student explained:

> *'The tutorial had a lot more inclusion. There were three tables in Paul's tutorial, and you knew people with intellectual disabilities were sitting with you at the table and other students at other tables, so everyone was together. Every single day you were beside someone different, and it didn't matter who you sat by because you're going to talk to everyone anyways at some point. So there was no separation between students with intellectual disabilities at one table and students without at other tables.'*
>
> ***Siobhán, English Studies Undergraduate Student***

This statement reflects the primary goal of curating co-learning modules at Trinity College Dublin, that there be no separation between students with and without intellectual disability.

4.3. Academic Standards and Accessibility

One concern from the implementation group was that the learning material was both accessible to the TCPID students and held to the standard of academic rigour promised by the School of English curriculum. When asked about the quality of the learning material, none of the students felt that the class material was simplified. Instead, they voiced that they appreciated the teacher's approach even more than other module tutorials, though they were unsure if this was due to the teacher's own teaching style or because of the inclusion of TCPID students. The students felt that the learning was clearer and more focused. One student stated:

> *'It definitely benefited me to see that everything was accessible… for myself as well.'*
>
> ***Pablo, English Studies Undergraduate Student***

The student appreciated that class material began with the basics and worked its way to more abstract concepts, and that this differed from other tutorials that went '*straight into [texts and concepts] full force at the start which I think a lot of people struggle with at times*'. Another student agreed, saying that in some tutorials it felt like they were going in at a level they weren't ready for, whereas the co-learning tutorials felt much more student-led and student-guided.

Another student admitted that they did have a level of scepticism about the academic rigour of the tutorial groups due to its co-learning approach. They explained that during the last few weeks of tutorials, they compared notes from all of their tutorial groups in English, but noted that there was no discernible difference between the co-learning tutorial and other tutorials in terms of learning. They commented that this scepticism was instead likely caused by their own lack of experience or engagement with people with intellectual disabilities.

4.4. Structure and Environment of the Tutorials

Overall, students confirmed that, for them, one of the big successes of the tutorial was its structure and environment. Some of the students mentioned that tutorial groups for other modules could be quite '*tense*' or '*intimidating*' when expected to engage with material they were unsure of. One student, though, reflected that the Irish Writing tutorials seemed to '*reframe*' learning as a process, and that this made the atmosphere much more comfortable and inviting, which in turn encouraged them to participate.

Several students highlighted that the comfortable and safe environment of the tutorial was pivotal to their learning. Feeling secure in asking questions and engaging with the material helped them retain information more effectively. The clear and predictable structure of each tutorial was also widely appreciated. Students knew what to expect each week and were prepared in advance via email/Blackboard, which outlined the specific passages, pages, and/or concepts to be explored.

During tutorials, students were divided into smaller groups with clear instructions, before coming back together to share their discussions with the full class. One student remarked that this sense of predictability fostered both stability and openness. These reflections point to broader issues in higher education—namely, that students often feel overwhelmed or anxious in academic settings. The accessible and thoughtfully structured approach of the

co-learning tutorials helped alleviate these pressures and, from the students' perspective, enhanced their overall learning experience. This aligns with Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles, which advocate for structured, predictable environments as a means of reducing threat and distraction, thereby allowing all learners to feel secure, supported, and ready to engage (CAST, 2024).

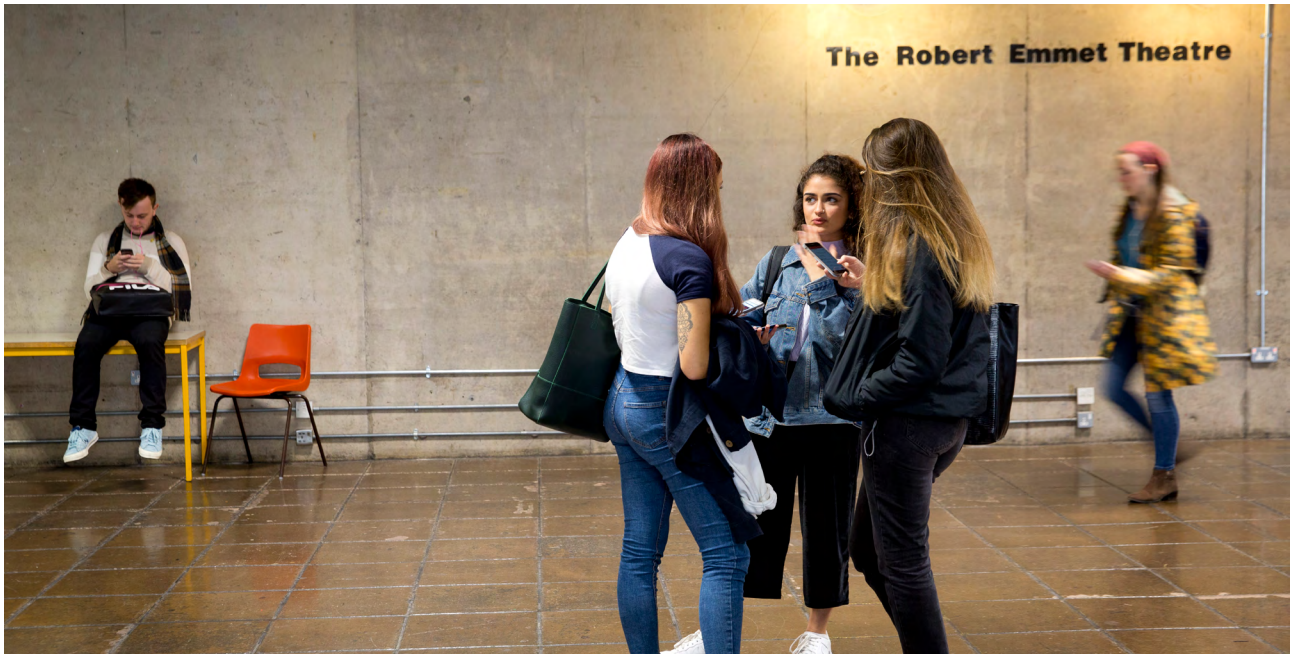
4.5. Developing Confidence Through Co-Learning

Another key theme emerging from the focus groups was that of confidence. As one student said:

> *'Leaving the classroom… after having such open and broad discussions and hearing a variety of conflicting opinions and thoughts and readings, made you realise that there's a lot of people in the room. Not everyone was a TCPID student, but there were people in that room that I've had tutorials with before and after, across different modules, and you realise that those people have the same kind of thought processes as yourself, and it demystified a lot of other tutorials in general for me.'*
>
> ***John, English Studies Undergraduate Student***

For John, this growing confidence also had a personal impact, particularly in relation to working with people with intellectual disabilities:

> *'On a personal level, it made me a lot more confident and comfortable communicating with people with intellectual disabilities… Because of my own lack of personal experience, it was something that I suppose I kind of involuntarily froze up previously.'*
>
> ***John, English Studies Undergraduate Student***



This initial shift in attitude motivated further engagement and professional development:

> *'…it's opened up a whole new avenue of understanding for me. Overall, for learning both within academia and outside of academia, I feel like this was probably the most beneficial module or/tutorial I've partaken in.'*
>
> ***John, English Studies Undergraduate Student***

Other students reported similar sentiments about feeling more confident in this tutorial due to the sharing of experiences and opinions with people of different backgrounds, experiences, and abilities. Another student, for example, commented that seeing the students with intellectual disability so openly share their ideas gave them the confidence to do the same, while another stated that they were more willing to ask questions in this tutorial because they knew their questions would be taken seriously and be responded to.

4.6. Building a Sense of Community

In addition to building confidence, students consistently highlighted the strong sense of community that developed within the Irish Writing tutorials—something they felt was missing from other modules. One student reflected:

> *'I felt that there was a sense of community that was opened by the co-learning project that wouldn't have been there otherwise… I made friends in the group.'*
>
> ***Olivia, English Studies Undergraduate Student***

Another student noted that the early emphasis on introductions—unlike their experiences in other modules—helped lay a foundation of trust and openness that made it easier to participate meaningfully in later tutorials. This initial focus on relationship-building proved key to creating a supportive learning environment. As one student described:

> *'I liked the in-class analysing—to sit in class and figure out as a group what's going on with the poem, hearing what everyone else thought—what was different and what was similar and all the different perspectives people saw it as.'*
>
> ***Grace, English Studies Undergraduate Student***

Many students echoed this appreciation for hearing a variety of interpretations and perspectives, expressing that literature felt more impactful when discussed collaboratively. The shared insight deepened their understanding and made the learning process more engaging. Two students expressed similar sentiments in referring to the Irish Writing module as '*one of the best tutorials*' and '*probably my favourite tutorial of the year*.'

4.7. Summary of Undergraduate Perspectives

Undergraduate students from English Studies reported overwhelmingly positive experiences of the co-learning tutorials. While initial concerns were raised about class size and the surprise element of co-learning, these quickly gave way to appreciation for the inclusive and engaging learning environment. Students highlighted that the tutorials were not only academically rigorous but also more accessible, better structured, and more welcoming than many of their other academic experiences.

Co-learning fostered a strong sense of community and helped students develop greater confidence in their academic participation. Importantly, it challenged existing assumptions around intellectual disability, encouraged more inclusive attitudes, and promoted peer learning as a valued part of the educational experience. Many students described the tutorials as among their most enjoyable and meaningful experiences at university, demonstrating the potential of co-learning to positively impact all students—not just those from TCPID.

5. Faculty Experiences & Perspectives

Dr Michael Shevlin
Professor of Inclusive Education
School of Education

Traditionally, children and young people with an intellectual disability have been expected to follow a predetermined trajectory that usually ends in adult day services. Often, their educational journey has been informed by low expectations for academic success. As a result, they have been unable to access many areas of knowledge that have been deemed too difficult.

Beginning in college offers a new and exciting opportunity for these young people to engage with multiple areas of knowledge in a way that they can become successful learners.

Engaging with peers without disability academically and socially has always been a core aim of the ASIAP course. How to achieve this aim meaningfully and avoiding tokenism was a challenge.

Informal conversations with Paul Delaney in the School of English opened the possibility of constructing a co-learning opportunity that would be meaningful to ASIAP students and their counterparts in the School of English. The module on Irish writers offered the opportunity for ASIAP students to learn about and engage with their heritage in a meaningful way alongside their non-disabled peers.

It is always difficult in advance to anticipate the academic outcomes of bringing together young people from quite diverse learning experiences in a common learning project. We were very aware that traditional lecture style format alone might not be suitable in enabling ASIAP students to meaningfully engage with complex ideas on an equal basis to their counterparts studying English. The bridging classes combined with small group tutorials proved to be an ideal format.

No-one could have anticipated how the ASIAP students would engage with the writings under study. It is fair to say that few if any would have predicted that ASIAP students would identify with the poet Eavan Boland who captured the oppression these young people had experienced in their lives.

This co-learning initiative has demonstrated the value of engaging with diverse standpoints and developing inclusive teaching and learning opportunities. Too often, young people who struggle with academic learning and assessment in schools are written off and denied access to many areas of knowledge. Instead, we as educators and policy makers need to challenge the orthodoxies governing how we view the learning capacities of children and young people who have an intellectual disability. As educators and policy makers we have been unduly influenced by fixed notions of ability that determine what is taught and how this is taught and who should be included. These fixed notions of ability have led to lowered expectations for these young people who have been regarded as 'educational failures'.

This co-learning initiative clearly demonstrates that these young people are more than capable of learning and engaging with complex ideas alongside their non-disabled peers when an inclusive learning environment has been developed and sustained.

Méabh Ní Choileáin
Co-learning Champion
School of English

From the first bridging class with our TCPID students, it was clear that my colleagues and I were in for a term of lively discussion, intelligent and thoughtful insights, and great enthusiasm for learning. Week after week, I was struck by how effortlessly the students delved into complex topics and drew on their individual background knowledge and lived experiences to make meaning of the course material. Our classes, which were underpinned by the work of such prominent Irish writers as Seamus Heaney, Eavan Boland and James Joyce, were energetic, and our discussions covered all manner of interesting subjects, including Irish history, class and society, sexism, and censorship. My background experience in inclusive education at primary level was beneficial to me as a Co-Learning Champion, as was the additional online training I undertook with the University College Cork (UCC) id+ Project on inclusion in higher education.

I refined my teaching resources as I got to know the students, but what required little to no tweaking was the approach to the class itself. The students simply had so much to say, and our time together flew by as they confidently engaged in discussion, often steering it themselves. In the tutorial with School of English students, there was some initial shyness, but the chill of unfamiliarity eased as the weeks passed and the group began to bond. Watching both sets of students working together over the course of a term was genuinely inspiring, and I was moved by the sincerity of their interactions. There was a chance that the objectives of the co-learning programme might have been misunderstood by the other students, and that the TCPID cohort might only have been viewed as 'guests' in the classroom—their presence a well-meaning, but ultimately hollow gesture towards inclusion. Thankfully, months of thoughtful planning by faculty from the School of English and TCPID prevented this from being the case, and the buzz of friendly chatter that filled the classroom as the weeks went by proved as much.

As a teacher, the co-learning module has challenged me to think about what it means for students to experience a work of literature. What does it mean for a work of literature to register, or even enact, an experience? How can we measure the value of this experience in an inclusive way, and adapt how we teach and assess learning to accommodate all students? In my experience as a primary school teacher, limiting assumptions about the cognitive potential of young disabled students can result in an overemphasis on such curricular areas as Life Skills in their education, at the expense of academic learning. This misguided approach to education undermines students' potential and results in avoidable gaps in their knowledge. I hope that the success of the co-learning module demonstrates to educators at all levels that our disabled students can engage effectively and meaningfully in academic learning, and that we should presume competence in them from the outset. We must be encouraging of our students, and strive to create accessible spaces and meaningful opportunities for learning for them. In our bridging classes, sparks flew as ideas and thoughts were shared between a group of people of different backgrounds and experiences, and new knowledge was co-created. This is education, and its true value can only be realised when we are welcoming and accommodating of all bodies, minds, and voices.

Before I began creating resources for the TCPID students, I met with their current teachers to get a sense of who the students

were, and what their different learning styles and needs were. I wanted to know how their other classes were structured so that I could visualise how I might approach planning for the bridging class. I then created hand-outs with UDL solutions in mind. At the beginning of every class, I explained what we would be doing so that the students had a clear sense of structure and direction from the outset. These objectives were always stated on the first page of the hand-outs in the form of a checklist.

Throughout the class, I encouraged the students to participate as much as possible and tried to build on their questions and comments to develop ideas, concepts and perspectives. I regularly encouraged the students to reflect and draw on their own background knowledge and demonstrated the relevance of this to them. In every class, the students proved that they knew more about a topic than they might have realised previously. For example, knowledge of some Irish-language words and the history of Northern Ireland enabled some students to connect on a deeper level with Seamus Heaney's poetry, while conceptual understanding of sexism and feminism grounded others in the poetry of Eavan Boland.

The hand-outs I created for the students featured large font text and imagery for context and added explanation. I found that use of relevant images (usually illustrations or photographs) prevented an over-reliance on text in the hand-outs and reinforced the students' learning. I knew that the students were good readers and that most would be willing to read aloud as part of the class. With this in mind, I wrote text in short paragraphs using clear and simple language, always putting new or challenging vocabulary in bold print for follow-up discussion or explanation. I found this to be an effective way of drawing the students in, including more students, and creating a balance of voices in the classroom. Creating a welcoming environment in which the students felt safe and confident to contribute, and in which they felt proud of their work and contributions, was the main goal of the bridging class. I believe we were successful in this regard, and that a thoughtful and flexible approach to teaching and planning enabled this. While a whole-class approach to learning suited the relatively small groups in the bridging classes, I would be curious to see if scaffolded pair-work between students might also be effective in future. Similarly, I would be interested in developing an inclusive and accessible assessment activity/assignment for the students to solidify their learning.

Dr Owen Barden
Assistant Professor
School of Education

As a new arrival to TCD, TCPID, and indeed Ireland, one of the most striking things has been the level of support the ASIAP programme has across all areas of the College. This support is reflected very clearly in the co-learning initiative. I was surprised to learn about it, because there is simply nothing like it in the UK, where I have worked in inclusion and Higher Education for over 20 years.

What is abundantly evident - from conversations with people as well as the evidence we have gathered - is that everybody who participates in co-learning benefits from it and values it. Students with intellectual disabilities value both the learning and the opportunity to share classroom and curriculum with their non-disabled peers. Non-disabled students value the perspectives

and knowledges that intellectually-disabled students bring.

Faculty value the relationships they develop and the opportunity to reflect on and enhance pedagogy. Everybody wins – when we can make it happen. The challenge now for us is fundamentally a logistical one. We know that colleagues in other Departments are keen to get involved, and the biggest barrier we face is timetabling. In a way, this is a 'good' problem, since often the main barrier to inclusion is attitudinal rather than practical.

TCD seems to have gone a long way towards removing the attitudinal barrier. Now, we need to address the practical one. If we can do that, we can anticipate seeing these benefits spread across the College.

Dr Rosie Lavan
Associate Professor
School of English

I am one of the lecturers on the Irish Writing module, and with colleagues from the School of English and TCPID, I was involved in facilitating the bridging class before the main tutorials in the first year of the pilot.

I came to the pilot with strong commitments both to developing my own skills and experience as a teacher, and to widening participation and inclusion in education. I had sought opportunities to deliver on these commitments in other roles at Trinity, notably through professional development and training, and through my administrative role as Liaison Officer in the School of English, working closely with the Disability Service in College to support and advocate for our students and ensure their diverse needs are accommodated within our programmes of study and assessment. As vital and enlightening as this role was, it did reveal to me that there are problems with the way we tend to talk about and conceptualise access and inclusion in higher education. From the very first conversations we had with colleagues in TCPID I was profoundly impressed by the ethos and approach of the Centre, and I was eager to learn from them. I would characterise this ethos and approach as pragmatic, proactive, and integrative, always ready to identify and capitalise on connections between colleagues, initiatives and opportunities – primarily and unwaveringly to the benefit of their students, but also, without fail, to the benefit of colleagues, the university, and the wider sector. I found this inspiring and refreshing.

Initial discussions of the pilot in the School of English were also very heartening, because they enabled Paul and me to have conversations with colleagues – formally the Head of School, Head of Discipline, and Inclusive Curriculum Champion, and informally with many others – about the motivation for this collaboration. This involved meaningful discussion and reflection of such issues as curriculum design, assessment and accreditation, student expectations, and staff experience and preparedness for this kind of teaching. These are issues which should always be 'live' for us as educators – and we had recently emerged from a long and sometimes challenging phase of considering them in the context of the transition to the Trinity Education Project – but thinking through the implications of committing to the pilot required us to look at them in new ways. When we took the pilot proposal to School meetings for collective approval, colleagues immediately recognised the unique opportunity it represented for the School to

be a leader for change in College and they were readily supportive.

Irish Writing could be described as one of the cornerstones of research and teaching in the School of English, and the Irish Writing module is compulsory for all first-year students. It is demanding – students read texts from a range of genres and historical periods, which raise sometimes uneasy questions about history, violence, (post)colonialism, gender and sexuality, and the way writers have negotiated and represented these issues. For precisely these reasons, though, it is a module which students tend to 'connect with' readily.

One of the first tasks for Paul and me in preparing for the bridging class and tutorials was to identify the texts to be discussed each week (there are many more lectures than there are tutorials, so we had to select texts that would be diverse enough to offer a representative sense of the range of 'Irish Writing' covered on the module). Our guiding principle in this – as for every tutorial – was that student discussion had to be the focus: our goal was to prioritise meaningful discussion. So, we chose shorter texts or extracts of texts which could be read comfortably in advance, and – in the case of the bridging class – read altogether during the class. This allowed us to place close reading – a fundamental skill in English Studies– at the heart of both the bridging classes and the tutorials. We hoped this would foster students' confidence and create both a level playing field and shared expectations: we were all looking closely at the same text, at the same time, and this invited spontaneous individual responses, and created the possibility for the group to respond to each other's ideas through their interactions.

All teaching can – and perhaps should – make us self-conscious, if that means it encourages us to be constantly reflective. I am often nervous before teaching new classes, and I feel manifold responsibilities to all my students: to be well prepared, supportive of each individual and of the group, patient, good humoured, and approachable. I want all my students to feel that my classes are intellectually interesting and valuable, and to know that whatever they bring to the classes will be of interest and value to me and their peers. Before the bridging classes began I felt these usual nerves and obligations but I was also worried about my lack of experience working with students with intellectual disabilities and felt a particular responsibility to them to ensure that I got things 'right', and to honour the trust that our colleagues in TCPID had invested in us.

However, one of the most important aspects of the pilot for me as a teacher was the fact that we approached everything collectively, and as soon as the bridging classes began this shared approach and experience made it possible, and necessary, for me to transcend my individual concerns. This is one of the ways in which the term 'Co-Learning' really comes into its own. While Paul and I have had the opportunity to co-teach classes on Irish writing in the past, there are no opportunities in the School of English for Faculty to work with postgraduates and early career researchers as we did with our Co-Learning Champions. And, because the pilot involved new experiences and contexts for learning for all our students as well, we were all in it together, and this realigned my perspectives and gave me a new sense of my position in the classroom. I mean this literally too: Paul, Méabh and I sat alongside and among the three students from Year 1 of the pilot. There was never a sense that whichever one of us was 'leading' the discussion of a text was at the front of the class talking to everyone else who was watching them. We all talked to each other, and we all listened to each other. As Méabh states, often it felt as if the time flew by because we were so absorbed in the discussion. Paradoxically, I think this is partly because we took the time to slow our discussions right down, to delve

into the detail of a text, and then to follow the students wherever that text took them.

And the students took the texts, and our discussions, to some fascinating places. They brought fantastic curiosity, insight and energy to all our classes, and an intellectual openness to the texts which was wholly revitalising. These bridging classes gave me some of the most enjoyable and rewarding experiences I have ever had as a teacher. I recall our classes on poetry with particular fondness and gratitude. Analysing poems by Seamus Heaney and Eavan Boland, two poets whose work my own research has focused on, the students were prompted to raise crucial issues about history, justice, and representation. Boland's work especially, as has been discussed above, resonated very meaningfully with their work under the Advocacy, Rights and Culture theme of the ASIAP certificate. At the same time, the students were ready to scrutinise a single phrase or image in a poem to memorable effect. Whenever I read 'Woman in Kitchen' by Boland I will think of the students' empathetic sense of the figure in that poem and their readiness to delve into the strangeness of lines like 'The lunar window of the washer'; and when I read Heaney's 'After a Killing', which confronts the specific violence of the Troubles, I will think of the students' attention to words like 'basalt' and 'mould'. Finally, and crucially, their sense of language, and the power of the writer to bring it to life, was keenly informed by their own creative work with John Kubiak, who also attended the bridging classes. Our discussions were brilliantly enhanced by the confidence and enjoyment they had taken in their own creative work, which was ongoing during the semester, and this brought real vividness to their critical engagement with the texts we studied together. It was an enormous privilege when they chose to share their writing with us.

As Owen has noted, the major barriers are logistical: chiefly the constraints of timetabling and all the problems this entails – not just ensuring compatibility between different programmes' teaching schedules, but also being able to bank on the availability of suitable teaching spaces. But as Owen also says, these are 'good' problems to have. They are not unique to the Co-Learning module and – as we've proved – they are not intractable. What really matters, and what we carry forward together with hope, pride and purpose, is the knowledge that the barriers which have traditionally stood in the way of inclusive learning of this kind at an institution like Trinity have been confronted and that the process of removing them is well under way.

Des Aston
Outreach Coordinator
School of Education

Being based in TCPID, I've always believed that students with intellectual disabilities have the right — and the ability — to engage with academic content at third level. But belief is one thing; seeing it unfold in practice is another. This pilot didn't just confirm what we hoped was possible — it went further. It showed how powerful learning can be when it's co-owned, co-created, and shared by students with different life experiences, all in the same room.

From the outset, this wasn't about parachuting students into an existing module and hoping for the best. It was about shaping a space where everyone belonged from the start. And when that's done with care, openness, and respect, the room changes shape. You feel it. Hierarchies soften, new voices rise,

and learning becomes genuinely dialogic — unpredictable in the best way.

We often talk about inclusion in higher education in abstract terms, but this work makes it concrete. It's about the reading, yes — Heaney, Boland, Joyce — but it's also about what happens *around* the reading: the spontaneous connections, the thoughtful pauses, the challenge and joy of having your own interpretations expanded or disrupted by someone else's experience. For the lecturers, it wasn't just about facilitating — it was about learning. As much as anyone else, we were figuring it out in real time, asking ourselves: What does inclusive teaching really look like when it's lived, not theorised?

There were bumps, of course. Timetabling was a headache. We needed more flexibility, more lead-in time, and stronger systems to help departments collaborate more easily. But those are solvable problems. What's harder to engineer — and what we've thankfully already got — is the buy-in. The support from academic colleagues, the goodwill from students, the shared sense of possibility: that's the real engine behind this work.

For me personally, this project has been one of the most energising and hopeful things I've been part of in Trinity. It reminded me why I do this work, and why it matters. Co-learning is not a side project. It's a glimpse of what higher education could be — and should be — when we take access and inclusion seriously, not as obligations, but as opportunities to rethink how we teach, learn, and connect.

We've started something meaningful. Now we just need to keep going.

Dr Rebecca Easler

Co-learning Champion
School of English

My role in this co-learning project was very behind-the-scenes, focusing on documentation and developing the research and data collection methodology for the ethics application through Trinity's Research Ethics Application Management System (REAMS). Because of this, I did not really get the chance to engage directly with the students in our co-learning tutorial until the very end, where I led the focus groups with the School of English undergraduate participants.

Working on the REAMS application was an entirely new experience. My research experiences have been primarily literary, archival, or historical (essentially, reading older texts), so this more pedagogy-based study was exciting; it forced me to think more deeply about inclusive research and all of the ethical considerations one must take when involving people in a study. This was generally quite challenging and required quite a bit of work and learning to figure out the specific terminology and procedures needed in an ethics application, which meant that the process took a little longer than anticipated.

Despite this, it was eye-opening to view research in this new way, especially as one of the goals of the research was to use student-driven and student-led data to build more accessible and inclusive teaching practices. Our students were both the catalysts and the benefactors of our research, which was a hugely important reminder for myself as a teacher on why inclusive teaching is so important.

Leading the focus groups, then, and being able to speak directly with the School of English students about their co-learning experience

was especially insightful and rewarding. The data we collected was aimed primarily to answer the question—did the module actually work? The students' responses not only gave us a resounding 'yes' but suggested that the principles of co-learning we applied to the module kept them better engaged in the subject, more interested, and feeling better prepared to participate in discussion. All of this contributed to a greater sense of knowledge retention learning overall. As many teachers know, it is incredibly difficult to gauge how students respond to our teaching or if what we're doing is actually helpful to their learning.

Anonymous surveys are sometimes useful, but if we get responses, they are often rather sparse in information or limited to rather vague reactions, only giving us so much to work with. However, as I was leading the focus groups, I was amazed by all the information the students shared with me, and on top of collecting the data for our project, I felt like I was trying to take mental notes on how I could apply what the students were telling me to the tutorial groups I was teaching in other School of English modules. It was one thing to know theoretically that classroom environment impacted student learning, but to hear of the positive impact our co-learning environment had on the students—directly from the students themselves and with such detail—felt like a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. And, as I was talking with the students, it became clear that they also appreciated feeling like we—the educators—were taking their needs as learners seriously.

One of the biggest takeaways, for example, was that these students felt like the co-learning environment allowed them to view learning as a process. Students stated that in some classes, they felt like their teachers expected them to know all the answers already—even with ideas they were encountering for the first time and with questions they weren't prepared for—which put an immense amount of pressure on them and didn't help their confidence. In the co-learning module, however, especially as first-year students, they were allowed to approach topics slowly and to think things through, making them more confident to test out ideas without fear of judgment. It was also heartening to hear how welcoming these students were towards their TCPID peers.

In creating a co-learning module, one of the concerns was to ensure that the materials and lessons were accessible to the students with intellectual disabilities but also still provided the students without intellectual disabilities the strong academic rigour promised them by the School of English. Even students who claimed they were initially sceptical about the co-learning classroom claimed that they felt just as challenged in Irish Writing as they did in other modules, and that the inclusion of the TCPID students benefitted their learning and confidence in the classroom.

As a teacher, these ideas cemented the significance of inclusivity, accessibility, and co-learning/UDL principles in any setting, and that truly progressing in academia requires a more complex look at teaching adaptability and student-focused pedagogy. Several other schools beyond the School of English have already begun looking at creating co-learning modules of their own, and I was enlisted to help create another ethics application for the multi-school research project similar based on the same principles and methodologies as our School of English-TCPID pilot module. This gives me a strong sense of hope for the future of co-learning at Trinity. It means that other schools are not only interested in applying the principles of co-learning but in involving students with their own learning process.

Dr Paul Delaney
Associate Professor
School of English

The genesis for this idea was a conversation with Michael Shevlin in early 2022, in a stairwell in the Arts Building. In the course of that exchange, Michael and I happened to share our frustrations over the barriers that exist in College, that separate students in TCPID from their undergraduate peers. We talked about the opportunities that are lost as a result of this separation of students, and we discussed the need for greater spaces for students from different programmes to come together, to share experiences, and to learn with, about, and from one another.

This serendipitous meeting provided the basis for several conversations over the following months, between Michael, John Kubiak (from TCPID), and me. And this, in turn, culminated in a meeting in the spring of 2023, where we were joined by Des Aston (from TCPID) and Rosie Lavan (from the School of English). At that point, the idea of the co-learning project was born. Funding from the HEA allowed us to appoint two postgraduate students, Méabh Ní Choileáin and Reb Easler, to assist with the project, and to serve as Co-Learning Champions.

From the outset, everyone involved agreed that we were not going to do something tokenistic. Nor did we wish to create space where students from either programme – from TCPID or from English – felt uncomfortable, or where anyone came away from the project thinking that their larger educational experience had been compromised. To this end, we set about designing a structure that connected what first-year students from TCPID already knew, and what they were learning as part of their ASIAP programme, with what their peers in English were reading as part of their first-year BA studies. The School of English's first-year Irish Writing module was chosen as the module that would house the co-learning project for a number of reasons, including the simple fact that it engages with material that is part of the cultural heritage of students from TCPID.

Like all first and second-year modules in English, the Irish Writing module is taught through a combination of large lectures and small-group tutorials. Tutorials typically consist of between eight and twelve students, and are taught by colleagues, postdoctoral researchers, or PhD students at an advanced stage of their research. The Irish Writing module attracts a sizeable number of students (c.220) each year, so the School of English runs approximately eighteen to twenty tutorial groups to facilitate this. The tutorial system is a vital strand in the undergraduate programme in English, as it is there that students get the opportunity to engage closely with literary texts. Tutorials also give students the space to express their own thoughts, develop critical skills, and learn from one another. From the outset, we agreed that TCPID students should be included in these small-group tutorials, and that they should be placed alongside other first-year students taking Irish Writing. I was charged with teaching the relevant tutorial groups.

Key to the co-learning project was the construction of a bespoke series of bridging classes, which preceded the weekly tutorials, and which were given to TCPID students only. As Rosie notes, the bridging classes were designed and taught collectively. They were brilliantly led by Méabh, who was assisted each week by Rosie and by me; John (in Hilary Term 2024) and Des (in 2025) also participated, and this ensured that a reassuring link was available to TCPID students partaking in the project. In these classes, we got to know the students, gained their trust, and worked

closely with them. Students were introduced to ideas that were subsequently explored in the shared tutorial groups, with background information on authors provided, and selected passages from literary texts discussed. This was carefully done, and teaching materials were adapted in accordance with UDL principles. The bridging classes gave TCPID students the opportunity to become familiar with a selection of texts, to spend time with those texts, and to think about what the texts meant to them before they met first-year English students in the tutorial groups. Crucially, it also helped to give TCPID students the confidence to take their ideas into the shared space of the tutorial.

The co-learning project began in pilot form in the 2023-24 academic year, with three first-year students from TCPID signing up to take the module on an audit basis. Those students participated in the bridging classes and all three were allocated places in the same tutorial group. The project continued in 2024-25, with six students from TCPID auditing the module. All six students attended the bridging classes, with four of the six students also participating in the tutorial groups in English; in this instance the students were split into two groups, with two students from TCPID sharing spaces with students from English in two separate tutorial groups.

Attendance and retention rates were superb across all the groups in both years. Feedback from the students involved – from TCPID and from English – was wonderful, and no one indicated that their learning had been impaired or negatively impacted. In strictly academic terms, this was borne out in the English students' mid-term assignments and their end-of-year exams, with no difference perceptible in the marks that were awarded to students who had been part of the co-learning project. At the same time, in broader pedagogic terms, many students – from TCPID and from English – commented upon how the project enriched their year's studies, encouraging them to think about broader questions relating to education, inclusion, representation, and ability.

I began the co-learning project with a desire to learn about the barriers that exist in College, and that separate student cohorts from one another. I also wanted to confront my own assumptions about intellectual disability, and to seriously consider my values as a scholar-teacher. Although I undertook training in preparation for the project, I had real anxieties about whether I was qualified to teach students with intellectual disabilities. I was unsure how to engage with such students in class, and I worried whether non-disabled students would be resistant to the idea of sharing tutorial spaces with students with intellectual disabilities, and whether I would be able to engage with students from different programmes in the same space. None of these fears materialised, and the co-learning project has been a consistently humbling and enabling experience.

Over the last two years, I have been inspired by the camaraderie that I have seen between students from different programmes, as they have come together to learn, and to spend time in each other's company. This is all the richer because the success of the project is always hard won – each year, it takes time for students to relax into the idea of the co-learning project, and to realise that what they are participating in is, in effect, just another tutorial group. At the same time, though, I am conscious that the project is much more than that, and that it carries the potential to be radically different to anything we have hitherto experienced. That potential has begun to be realised, and I believe that our understanding of education – of its parameters and its promise – is the richer for it.

5.1. Analysis of Staff Reflections

An inductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was undertaken to explore the reflections provided by participating staff members. This approach allowed themes to emerge organically from the data rather than imposing a pre-existing theoretical framework.

The staff reflections revealed a rich tapestry of experiences and perspectives on the co-learning initiative, encompassing both the pedagogical benefits and the practical challenges of inclusion. Seven interconnected themes emerged from the data, each shedding light on different dimensions of the co-learning process.

5.1.1. Belief in Academic Potential and Presuming Competence

A central theme was the explicit rejection of deficit-based assumptions about students with intellectual disabilities. Staff articulated a clear belief in their academic potential, aligning with the principle of presumed competence. This perspective challenges historical narratives of intellectual disability in higher education, which have often positioned such students on the margins (Barnes, 2012; Barnes & Mercer, 2010).

One staff member reflected that "*disabled students can engage effectively and meaningfully in academic learning, and we should presume competence in them from the outset*," signalling a pedagogical stance grounded in high expectations. This belief was reinforced through concrete examples, such as students' insightful engagement with complex literary texts—challenging stereotypes that academic rigour is incompatible with inclusive education.

By positioning students with intellectual disabilities as capable contributors to the intellectual life of the classroom, staff reframed inclusion not as accommodation for deficits, but as recognition of existing strengths. This stance echoes the social model of disability (Oliver, 1981; Oliver, 1990), which shifts the focus from individual limitations to the removal of structural and attitudinal barriers.

5.1.2. Co-Learning as Mutual Enrichment

A second theme concerned the reciprocal benefits of co-learning for all participants. Staff described how students with and without intellectual disabilities gained academically, socially, and personally from shared learning environments. This aligns with research on *Contact Theory* (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 1998), which suggests that sustained, meaningful interaction between diverse groups can reduce prejudice and foster mutual respect.

One participant observed that "*everybody wins – when we can make it happen*," highlighting that co-learning enhanced both learning outcomes and social connection. These benefits were not one-sided; English studies students were exposed to alternative perspectives and ways of thinking, enriching their critical engagement with course material.

Such findings mirror evidence from inclusive higher education studies (Grigal et al., 2012) that inclusive classrooms can foster transformative learning (Mezirow, 1997) for all students, prompting them to re-evaluate assumptions and embrace diverse viewpoints.

5.1.3. Designing for Inclusion – Structure, UDL, and Accessible Pedagogy

The reflections underscored the importance of intentional, inclusive course design from the outset. This was not about retrofitting existing modules, but about building inclusion in at the design stage. Several staff members explicitly referenced principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) (CAST, 2018; Quirke et al., 2023), ensuring that materials and activities were accessible to all students.

Examples included adapting handouts with large-font text and visual supports, and using bold print for challenging vocabulary—approaches that align with UDL's emphasis on multiple means of representation. As one staff member put it, this was "*about shaping a space where everyone belonged from the start*," reinforcing the idea that inclusive pedagogy is proactive rather than reactive.

The literature consistently supports the view that UDL benefits all learners, not only those with identified disabilities (Rose et al., 2002). By embedding accessibility into the course structure, staff ensured that no group was "*accommodated*" as an afterthought—an important shift towards genuine equity.

5.1.4. Shifting Perspectives and Professional Growth

Participation in co-learning prompted staff to engage in deep professional reflection, often challenging their own prior assumptions about intellectual disability. Several described a shift in their understanding of what inclusion in higher education can mean, echoing the concept of critical reflection in teacher development (Brookfield, 2017).

For example, one participant noted that the experience encouraged them to "*think more deeply about inclusive research and all of the ethical considerations*," while another described confronting their own preconceptions and considering their values as a scholar-teacher. These moments of reflexivity mirror the findings of Kershner (2014), who argued that inclusion requires not only structural change but also shifts in educator mindset.

The reflections suggest that co-learning operated as professional learning for staff as much as it did as academic learning for students, expanding their repertoire of inclusive pedagogical strategies and reinforcing their commitment to social justice in education.

5.1.5. Building Relationships and Classroom Culture

A strong theme represented the social and relational aspects of co-learning. Staff consistently described how trust, mutual respect, and a sense of belonging were critical to the success of the initiative. Initial shyness gave way to sincere and respectful interactions, with "*hierarchies softening*" and new voices emerging in classroom discussions.

This aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory of learning, which emphasises the role of social interaction in cognitive development. It also reflects research on inclusive classroom climates (Hockings, 2010), which highlights the importance of creating spaces where students feel psychologically safe to participate.

In these accounts, relationships were not an incidental by-product of co-learning, but an intentional outcome—fostering a "*genuinely dialogic*" environment in which all students could contribute meaningfully.

5.1.6. Practical Barriers

While the reflections conveyed a strong endorsement of inclusion, they also pointed to structural challenges, most notably timetabling constraints. This theme illustrates that barriers are often logistical rather than attitudinal—a finding consistent with previous research on inclusive programme delivery (Fuller et al., 2004).

Staff noted that the most significant difficulties arose from aligning schedules across different cohorts, and that greater institutional flexibility could help overcome these issues. As one participant described, the barrier was a "*good problem*" in that the will to include was present, but systems were not yet fully supportive.

5.1.7. The Power of Shared Intellectual Engagement

Finally, staff highlighted the intellectual richness of engaging with the same challenging texts. Working on a shared academic stimulus enabled students to contribute equally, deepening discussion and fostering critical thinking. Several accounts described "*sparks*" of insight when ideas were exchanged across different perspectives, illustrating that the inclusion of students with intellectual disabilities was not a dilution of academic standards, but a broadening of intellectual horizons.

This finding is supported by literature on dialogic teaching (Alexander, 2020), which posits that rich classroom dialogue emerges when diverse perspectives are valued and encouraged. Here, shared intellectual engagement became both a unifying factor and a driver of higher-level thinking for all students.

5.2. Summary of Faculty Reflections

The staff reflections present a coherent and optimistic narrative about the value and feasibility of inclusive co-learning in higher education. They illustrate that when inclusion is embedded at the design stage, and underpinned by a belief in the academic potential of all students, the benefits extend beyond the intended group to enrich the learning experience for everyone. The primary challenges identified were logistical rather than ideological, suggesting a strong institutional foundation on which to build further inclusive practices.

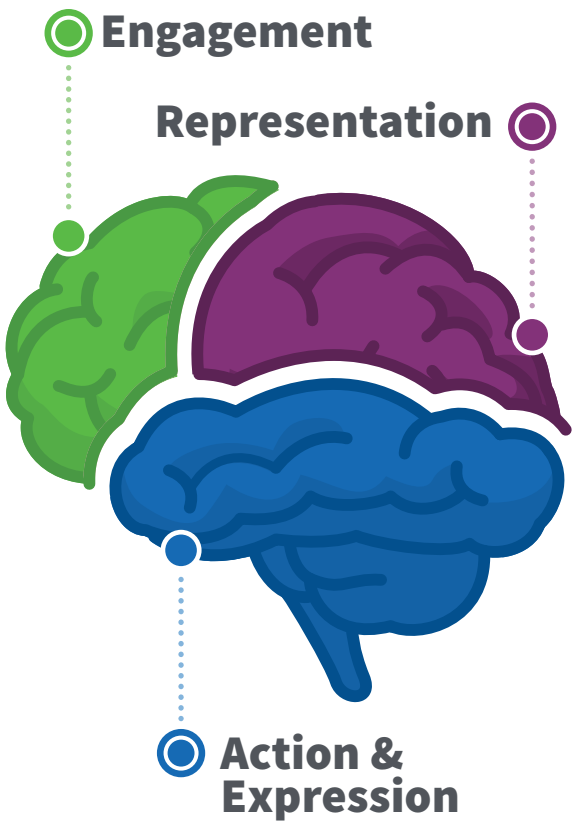
The analysis reinforces the view, supported by the literature, that inclusion is not merely about physical presence in the classroom, but about active participation, intellectual contribution, and the creation of shared learning journeys.

6. Designing Inclusive Learning Environments

This section outlines the creation of learning environments that prioritise accessibility and inclusivity for all students, with a particular focus on those with intellectual disabilities. Drawing on Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles (CAST, 2018), the design process involved close collaboration with teaching staff and students to ensure materials and teaching strategies responded effectively to diverse learning needs. By integrating accessible digital platforms, clear instructional structures, and culturally relevant content, the environment was intentionally crafted to reduce barriers, foster engagement, and encourage meaningful participation (Boothe et al., 2018; Fovet, 2021). The following subsections explore the practical application of inclusive design, the role of sociocultural agency, and the broader implications for teaching and learning within TCPID and the broader Trinity community.

6.1. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) Principles

In the development of teaching materials for the bridging class, consultations were carried out with existing TCPID teaching staff to better understand the individual learning styles, educational backgrounds, and support needs of students. This early engagement ensured that the materials and teaching strategies were aligned with current best practices in inclusive education. It also laid the groundwork for an approach that would be responsive and adaptive to the diverse needs of the students, consistent with the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) (CAST, 2018).



A key element of our co-learning pilot was the decision to use Blackboard Ultra as the chosen Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). The adoption of this newer version of Blackboard, as opposed to retrofitting an older platform, represented a positive step forward in terms of accessibility and user experience. Trinity College's commitment to upgrading to Blackboard Ultra provided a unique opportunity to build inclusive, accessible materials from the ground up, ensuring the platform was optimised for all learners.

The design of the materials was influenced by the UDL framework, which advocates for the provision of multiple means of representation, engagement, and expression (CAST, 2011, 2018). Each week, students accessed teaching materials on Blackboard Ultra through a consistent template that ensured familiarity and clarity in navigation. This consistency not only reduced cognitive load (Kennedy & Romig, 2024)—critical for students with

varying learning needs—but also helped students engage with the content in a structured manner. The weekly learning topics included the title of the text being studied, the relevant author, and the year, allowing students to immediately engage with the material in an organised and predictable way.

To support cognitive load reduction and vocabulary development, visual imagery of the authors was incorporated each week. The images varied depending on the time period in which the author lived, helping students situate the text in its historical context. For example, artistic portrayals of historical authors who predated photographic technology were used alongside modern photographs of contemporary authors in high-definition, colourised images. This use of multiple means of representation (CAST, 2018)—through visual imagery—served as an effective strategy to aid understanding and foster deeper engagement with the texts.

In line with UDL's goal of creating accessible learning experiences, these visual cues, combined with the structured format provided by Blackboard Ultra, supported students in making connections between their prior knowledge and new content, reinforcing learning through multiple modes of representation (CAST, 2018).

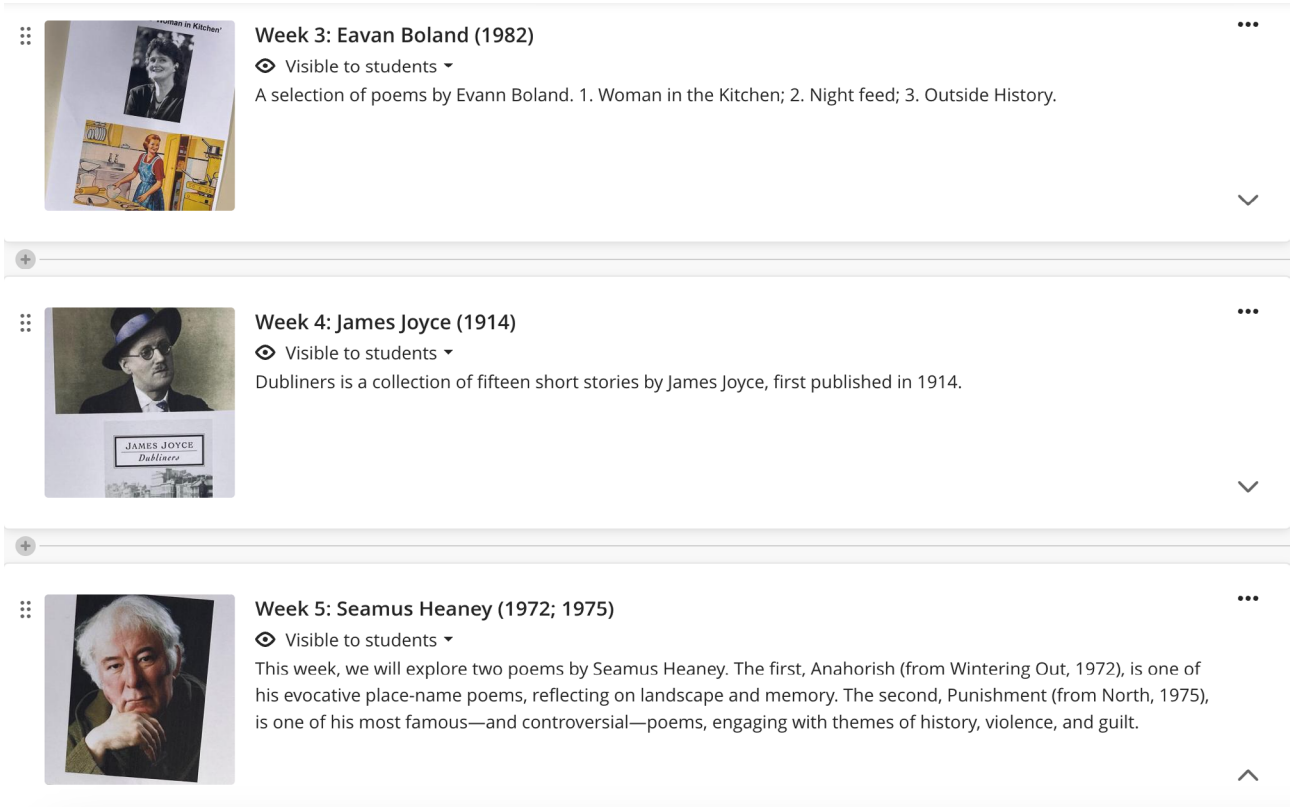


Image: *Screenshot of weekly learning topics on Blackboard Ultra*

All teaching resources were created in alignment with the principles of Universal Design for Learning, aiming to reduce barriers to learning through clear formatting, visual reinforcement, and simplified language.

Key ideas were presented through a mix of text, imagery, and class discussion, allowing learners to access content in a variety of ways.

Lessons incorporated opportunities for student-led questions, reflections, and knowledge-sharing, which encouraged deeper participation and motivation.

Students were invited to engage with material orally, visually, and reflectively, supporting different strengths and preferences.

Inclusive curriculum design within the co-learning module was informed by key UDL principles, particularly the provision of multiple means of representation and engagement. In practice, this meant that learning materials were both accessible and anticipatory of diverse learner needs. A physical handout was distributed at the beginning of the bridging lecture and made available in digital format via Blackboard Ultra several days in advance. Drawing on recommendations from literature regarding cognitive accessibility, these handouts featured large fonts, uncluttered layouts, and meaningful visual imagery to support comprehension and reduce cognitive load (Sweller, 2011; Kennedy & Romig, 2024; Mayer, 2009).

New or potentially challenging vocabulary was introduced with intentional scaffolding. Highlighted in bold within texts, these terms were then revisited during class discussions and embedded in learning activities – an approach supported by Hall et al. (2021) who found that explicit, scaffolded teaching strategies benefited both students with intellectual disability and their peers. Presenting content in manageable chunks, through short paragraphs written in plain English, further supported varied literacy levels in the group – a key concern in inclusive higher education (Morgan & Moni, 2013).

Each session opened with a clear checklist of objectives to guide students through the class structure and goals. This practice aligns with UDL's emphasis on supporting executive functioning and self-regulation, and it mirrors findings from Carter and Hughes (2006), who advocate for clear instructional organisation to enhance participation among students with intellectual disability. Additionally, contextual relevance was embedded throughout instruction – through the use of culturally familiar examples such as Irish-language references and contemporary social topics – an approach that supports learner engagement and relevance, as identified in the UDL framework.

Oral participation was actively encouraged, with space created for students to contribute from personal experience. This pedagogical choice emphasised the role of peer interaction in inclusive settings (Downing, 2008). Students with intellectual disabilities drew connections between personal and cultural knowledge and the academic content, such as interpreting literature through the lens of Irish historical narratives or popular cultural references. This type of contextualised learning, grounded in students' lived experiences, reinforced engagement and deepened comprehension.

Although designed with the needs of TCPID students in mind, these teaching strategies modelled universally beneficial practices. When UDL principles are applied across a learning environment, they reduce the need for individual accommodations by embedding accessibility into the design itself (Li et al., 2020). The co-learning pilot demonstrated that structured support, multimodal resources, and intentionally inclusive design not only facilitated meaningful participation for students with intellectual disability but also enhanced the learning experience for all participants.

6.2. Sociocultural Agency and Investment

In the context of our co-learning pilot, the concept of sociocultural agency (Peirce, 1995; Wenger, 1998) offered a lens through which we could better understand how instructors and students alike engaged with learning materials and teaching strategies. Sociocultural agency refers to the way individual actions are interconnected with broader community goals. In this setting, the learning community itself becomes central to how students and instructors invest their time and effort into making the learning experience more accessible and inclusive. As individuals engage in shared goals, such as improving accessibility or fostering better understanding, they invest not only in their personal development but also in the success of the community (Peirce, 1995).

For instance, when instructors participated in developing and adapting teaching materials for the co-learning pilot, they were making investments in both their own professional development and in the success of the community (Wenger, 1998). These investments were visible in the changes they made to the course design, the way they engaged with students, and their commitment to ensuring that all students, particularly those with intellectual disabilities, could access the learning content meaningfully (Xie & and Rice, 2021).

As sociocultural agents, instructors became part of a larger community of practice, working together to improve inclusivity in higher education. These investments were not just about immediate outcomes but were also about building long-term changes in the educational culture (Peirce, 1995). In the same way, students in the TCPID pilot were actively contributing to the community's goals, making investments in their own learning by engaging with the accessible materials and offering feedback that could help improve future content.

Students responded positively to the inclusive and accessible materials. Many demonstrated improved confidence in classroom participation, and there was an observable increase in the students' ability to connect personal knowledge with new content. For instance, some students used their understanding of Irish cultural history to interpret literary texts more meaningfully, evidencing the effectiveness of contextualised learning approaches. This aligns with the idea of community-based investments in learning, where both students and instructors shape the learning environment through their active participation (Wenger, 1998; Xie and Rice, 2021).

6.3. UDL and Learners with Intellectual Disabilities

The integration of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) into teaching practices is consistently framed in the literature as a catalyst for creating more inclusive, participatory learning environments, particularly for students with intellectual disabilities. Across the research base, several key themes emerged that have also been reflected in our co-learning module at TCPID: the critical role of structured support and scaffolding, the transformative impact of peer collaboration, the need for faculty development, and the broader benefits of inclusive teaching for all learners.

Firstly, the literature emphasises that inclusive education for students with intellectual disability is most effective when it is supported by structured instructional strategies and proactive scaffolding. This is not about simply placing students with intellectual disability into mainstream settings, but about deliberately designing learning experiences that anticipate and address diverse needs (Hall et al., 2021). Within our co-learning module, we observed that when tasks were broken down clearly, expectations were communicated explicitly, and multiple ways to access materials were provided, all students – not only those with intellectual disability –

were more engaged and able to contribute meaningfully. These practices echo the systematic application of UDL principles highlighted in the research, reinforcing the idea that proactive planning benefits the whole learning community.

Another strong theme in the literature is the significance of peer supports and collaborative learning environments (Carter & Hughes, 2006; Downing, 2008). In our co-learning project, peer learning relationships were not just supportive extras; they were central to the co-learning model. Opportunities for students to engage in mutual learning—learning from and with each other—created a genuine sense of community, promoting social belonging and increasing academic participation for students with intellectual disability. The literature underscores the idea that peer interactions can enhance both academic outcomes and social inclusion – outcomes we consistently witnessed throughout the module.

Positive attitudes towards UDL and inclusion alone do not guarantee effective practice; rather, faculty need targeted, ongoing professional learning that connects UDL theory to practical classroom strategies (Li et al., 2020). In the co-learning pilot, this was supported in two key ways: academic staff undertook professional development through the Digital Badge for Universal Design in Teaching & Learning offer (AHEAD, 2024) and postgraduate students, and postgraduate students who worked as Co-learning Champions enrolled in a micro-credential focused specifically on including people with intellectual disability in higher and further education (id+ Futures Project, 2025). These parallel training pathways strengthened the implementation of inclusive teaching practices, ensuring that both educators and facilitators were equipped to contribute meaningfully to the co-learning environment.

Finally, a common thread in the literature is the recognition that UDL is not simply a strategy for supporting students with disabilities, but a framework that enhances educational quality for all students (Fovet, 2021; Hall et al., 2021). We found that designing for inclusion – providing choices in how students engaged, represented knowledge, and demonstrated learning – elevated the experience for everyone in the classroom, not just those with intellectual disability. Universal Design thus fulfilled its promise not as a series of isolated adjustments, but as a foundation for more dynamic, responsive, and inclusive pedagogy.

Taken together, the literature and our experience suggest that meaningful inclusion through UDL is not achieved solely by making making individual accommodations after the fact. Instead, it is achieved by reimagining the design of teaching itself, proactively crafting environments where diversity is expected, welcomed, and celebrated. Our co-learning module stands as one small but powerful example of what becomes possible when inclusive design principles are fully embraced.

7. What Next? Developing and Formalising the Co-Learning Model

Building on the successes and insights of the co-learning pilot, this section outlines the key steps and considerations for further developing and embedding the co-learning approach within Trinity College Dublin. It highlights the practical requirements for formal integration, the institutional support needed to sustain inclusive teaching, and future opportunities for research and collaboration to enhance and expand the model.

7.1. Summary of Key Takeaways from the Pilot

The co-learning pilot at TCPID has highlighted the powerful impact of inclusive pedagogical approaches rooted in Universal Design for Learning. Collaborative development of accessible teaching materials, peer-supported learning, and a focus on cognitive accessibility contributed to improved engagement and participation for students with intellectual disabilities and their peers alike. The pilot also emphasised the importance of staff training and institutional commitment in embedding these practices effectively. Overall, the project demonstrated that inclusive design benefits all learners, not just those with specific support needs.

7.2. Formal Integration

To transition the co-learning model into formal credit-bearing modules, a structured curriculum framework must be developed that clearly defines learning outcomes, assessment criteria, and progression pathways. Inclusive assessment strategies should be embedded to fairly recognise diverse learner strengths. Further development of teaching resources and scaffolding will ensure consistency and accessibility across both existing and future modules. Staff professional development remains critical, with ongoing training to support co-learning facilitation and UDL application. Collaboration with academic departments will be essential to align co-learning modules with institutional standards and academic regulations.

7.3. Institutional Support

Successful formalisation will require strong institutional support, including endorsement from academic leadership and resource allocation for staff training and curriculum development. Investment in accessible technologies and platforms, such as Blackboard Ultra, will underpin the delivery of inclusive materials. Cross-departmental collaboration within Trinity College Dublin can foster a culture of inclusive practice, supported by dedicated administrative structures and policies that prioritise equity and accessibility.

7.4. Future Research and Collaboration Opportunities

Future research could focus on longitudinal tracking of student outcomes to assess the sustained impact of co-learning, including academic progression, social inclusion, and self-efficacy. Collaborative partnerships with other institutions and organisations could enable knowledge exchange and scale inclusive pedagogies beyond TCPID. Exploring the adaptability of the co-learning approach across diverse academic disciplines and student populations would also provide valuable insights for broadening inclusive education practices.

8. Conclusion & Recommendations

The co-learning pilot between the School of Education's Centre for People with Intellectual Disabilities and the School of English represents a significant step forward in embedding inclusive education within the fabric of higher education at Trinity College Dublin. The reflections from participating staff, when analysed thematically, paint a consistent and compelling picture: inclusion, when designed intentionally and underpinned by the presumption of competence, benefits all participants—academically, socially, and personally.

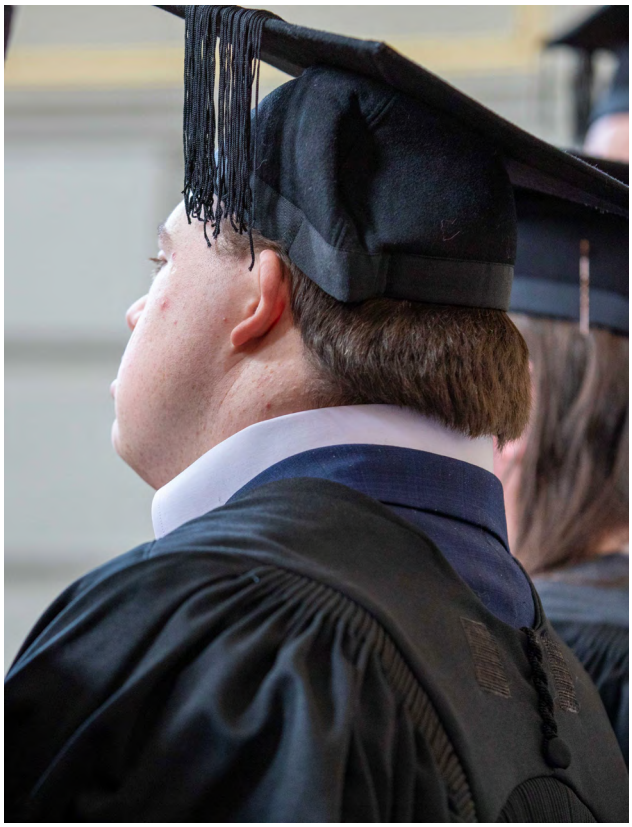
The evidence gathered through this pilot project challenges long-standing deficit-based assumptions about the learning capabilities of students with intellectual disabilities. Staff reported that these students engaged meaningfully with complex literary material, contributing unique perspectives that deepened discussion and enriched the learning experience for their non-disabled peers. This finding reinforces existing research that inclusive higher education can enhance the intellectual environment for all students, not merely those for whom the initiatives are targeted.

Importantly, the reflections revealed that the success of this project was not accidental. It was the result of intentional course design—grounded in Universal Design for Learning principles and philosophy—that ensured accessibility from the outset, and of an ethos that valued all voices in the classroom. The bridging classes, structured learning supports, and proactive relationship building created a climate of trust, respect, and curiosity. In this environment, hierarchies softened, barriers diminished, and genuine co-learning emerged.

While the attitudinal foundations for inclusion at Trinity are strong, the reflections make clear that logistical challenges—particularly timetabling—remain the most significant obstacles to scaling-up such initiatives. These barriers are practical rather than philosophical, and therefore surmountable with strategic institutional planning and cross-departmental collaboration.

Ultimately, this project offers a model for what higher education can become when inclusion is not treated as an add-on, but as an organising principle. It demonstrates that inclusive co-learning is not only possible but transformative, shifting perspectives, fostering mutual enrichment, and expanding the intellectual horizons of all involved. The challenge now is to sustain this momentum, address the structural barriers, and embed co-learning opportunities more widely across the university.

In doing so, Trinity College Dublin has the opportunity to position itself as a leader in inclusive higher education—not simply meeting obligations of access, but reimagining the very nature of academic learning and what it means to belong to an academic community.



9. References

Academic Practice. (2021). *Developing your Trinity Elective Descriptor: Pedagogic Considerations*. Trinity College Dublin.

AHEAD. (2025). *Disabled Students Engaged with Support Services in Higher Education in Ireland 2023/24*. AHEAD Educational Press.

Alexander, R. (2020). *A Dialogic Teaching Companion* (1st Edition ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351040143 (Towards dialogic teaching: Rethinking classroom talk.)

Allport, G. W. (1954). *The nature of prejudice*. Addison-Wesley.

Barnes, C. (2012). Re-thinking Disability, Work and Welfare. *Sociology Compass, 6*(6), 472-484. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9020.2012.00464.x

Barnes, C., & Mercer, G. (2010). *Exploring Disability*. Polity Press. https://books.google.ie/books?id=V7qJlWqcbrcC

Boland, E. (1995). *Night Feed*. Carcanet Poetry.

Boothe, K. A., Lohmann, M. J., Donnell, K., & Hall, D. D. (2018). Applying the Principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in the College Classroom.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Brookfield, S. D. (2017). *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher* (2nd Edition ed.). Jossey-Bass.

Burgstahler, S. E. (Ed.). (2015). *Universal design in higher education: From principles to practice* (2nd ed.) Harvard Education Press.

Carter, E. W., & Hughes, C. (2006). Including High School Students with Severe Disabilities in General Education Classes: Perspectives of General and Special Educators, Paraprofessionals, and Administrators. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, 31(2), 174-185. https://doi.org/10.1177/154079690603100209

CAST. (2011). *Universal Design for Learning Guidelines version 2.0*.

CAST. (2018). *Universal Design for Learning Guidelines version 2.2*. http://udlguidelines.cast.org

CAST. (2024). *Address biases, threats, and distractions*. https://udlguidelines.cast.org/engagement/interests-identities/biases-threats-distractions/#:~:text=Charts%2C%20calendars%2C%20schedules%2C%20visible,novel%20in%20highly%20routinized%20activities

Corby, D., Taggart, L., & Cousins, W. (2020). The lived experience of people with intellectual disabilities in post-secondary or higher education. *Journal of Intellectual Disabilities*, 24(3), 339-357. https://doi.org/10.1177/1744629518805603

Downing, J. E. (2008). *Including students with severe and multiple disabilities in typical classrooms: Practical strategies for teachers* (3rd ed.). Paul H. Brookes Publishing.

Edgeworth, M. (2008). *Castle Rackrent*. Oxford University Press.

Fennell, E. (2023). *Saltburn* T. Ackerley, M. Robbie, & J. McNamara; LuckyChap Entertainment, Metro Goldwyn-Mayer, Lie Still, MRC.

Fovet, F. (2021). Developing an Ecological Approach to the Strategic Implementation of UDL in Higher Education. *Journal of Education and Learning, 10*(4). https://doi.org/10.5539/jel.v10n4p27

Fuller, M., Bradley, A., & Healey, M. (2004). Incorporating disabled students within an inclusive higher education environment. *Disability & Society, 19*(5), 455-468. https://doi.org/10.1080/0968759042000235307

Grigal, M., Hart, D., & Weir, C. (2012). A Survey of Postsecondary Education Programs for Students With Intellectual Disabilities in the United States. *Journal of Policy and Practice in Intellectual Disabilities, 9*(4), 223-233. https://doi.org/10.1111/jppi.12012

Hall, C. G., Carter, E. W., McCabe, L. E., Lee, E. B., & Bethune-Dix, L. K. (2021). Teaching College Students with Intellectual Disability: Faculty Experiences with Inclusive Higher Education. *Journal of Inclusive Postsecondary Education, 3*(1). https://doi.org/10.13021/jipe.2021.2730

Higher Education Authority. (2022a). *National Access Plan, A Strategic Action Plan For Equity Of Access, Participation And Success In Higher Education 2022-2028*. Ireland.

Higher Education Authority. (2022b). PATH Strand 4, Phase 1. *Universal Design Fund. Supporting inclusive universally designed higher education environments for all students. Implementation Guidelines.* Ireland.

Higher Education Authority. (2023). *PATH Strand 4 Phase 2: Enhancement of Course Provision in Higher Education for Students with Intellectual Disabilities*. https://hea.ie/assets/uploads/2023/06/PATH-4-Phase-2-Overview-of-Courses-subject-to-change.pdf

Hockings, C. (2010). *Inclusive Learning and Teaching in Higher Education: A Synthesis of Research*. H. E. Academy.

id+ Futures Project. (2025). *SS6810: Including people with intellectual disabilities in higher and further education*. University College Cork. Retrieved 14th August from https://www.ucc.ie/en/ss6810/

John Sweller, P. A., Slava Kalyuga. (2011). *Cognitive Load Theory*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4419-8126-4

Jones, K. (2005). *Nanny McPhee* L. Doran, T. Bevan, & E. Fellner; StudioCanal, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, Working Title Films, Three Strange Angels, Nanny McPhee Productions.

Joyce, J. (1992). *Dubliners*. Wordsworth Editions.

Kennedy, M. J., & Romig, J. E. (2024). Cognitive Load Theory: An Applied Reintroduction for Special and General Educators. *TEACHING Exceptional Children, 56*(6), 440-451. https://doi.org/10.1177/00400599211048214

Kershner, R. (2014). What do teachers need to know about meeting special educational needs? In L. Florian (Ed.), T*he SAGE handbook of special education* (2nd Edition ed., pp. 841-857). SAGE. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446282236

Leech, N. L., & Onwuegbuzie, A. J. (2011). Beyond constant comparison qualitative data analysis: Using NVivo. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 26(1), 70-84. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0022711

Li, Y.-F., Zhang, D., Zhang, Q., & Dulas, H. (2020). University Faculty Attitudes and Actions toward Universal Design: A Literature Review *Journal of Inclusive Postsecondary Education 2*(1), 1-20.

Maxwell, N., O'Callaghan, E., & Leane, M. (2024). Inclusive education for people with intellectual disabilities in the higher education sector: teaching methodologies and practices of translating rights into practice. *Pedagogy and Social Work Magazine, 13*(1). https://doi.org/10.33115/udg_bib/pts.v13i1.23026

Mayer, R. E. (2009). *Multimedia Learning* (2 ed.). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511811678

Mezirow, J. (1997). Transformative Learning: Theory to Practice. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, 1997*(74), 5-12. https://doi.org/10.1002/ace.7401

Morgan, M., & Moni, K. (2013). Literacy strategies used by adults with intellectual disability in negotiating their everyday community environments. *Australian Journal of Adult Learning, 53*, 411-435.

Newcomer, K. (2015). Carol H. Weiss, Evaluation Research: Methods for Studying Programs and Policies. In M. Lodge, E. C. Page, & S. J. Balla (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Classics in Public Policy and Administration* (pp. 0). Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199646135.013.37

Nowell, L. S., Norris, J. M., White, D. E., & Moules, N. J. (2017). Thematic Analysis:Striving to Meet the Trustworthiness Criteria. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 16*(1), 1609406917733847. https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406917733847

O'Kane, P., Smith, A., & Lerman, M. P. (2021). Building transparency and trustworthiness in inductive research through computer-aided qualitative data analysis software. *Organizational Research Methods, 24*(1), 104-139. https://doi.org/10.1177/1094428119865016

Oliver, M. (1981). A New Model of the Social Work Role in Relation to Disability. In J. Campling (Ed.), *The Handicapped Person A New Perspective for Social Workers?* Radar.

Oliver, M. (1990). *Politics of Disablement*. Red Globe Press. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-20895-1

Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods. Integrating Theory and Practice*. (4th ed.). SAGE.

Peirce, B. N. (1995). Social Identity, Investment, and Language Learning. *TESOL Quarterly, 29*(1), 9-31. https://doi.org/10.2307/3587803

Pettigrew, T. F. (1998). Intergroup contact theory. *Annual Review of Psychology, 49*, 65-85. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.49.1.65

Quirke, M., McCarthy, Patricia, Mc Guckin, Conor. (2018). "I can see what you mean": Encouraging higher education educators to seek support from "outside agencies" to aid their work with visually impaired learners. *AISHE-J: The All Ireland Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 10(1).

Quirke, M., Guckin, C. M., & McCarthy, P. (2023). *Adopting a UDL Attitude within Academia: Understanding and Practicing Inclusion Across Higher Education* (1st Edition ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003137672

Richards, L. (1999). *Using NVivo in Qualitative Research*. Sage.

Rose, D. H., Meyer, A., Strangman, N., & Rappolt, G. (2002). *Teaching every student in the digital age : universal design for learning*. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Thomas, G. (2021). *How To Do Your Case Study*. SAGE.

Trinity College Dublin. (2024). Trinity Policy on Good Research Practice.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in Society Development of Higher Psychological Processes*. Harvard University Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvjf9vz4

Weiss, C. H. (1972). Evaluation research: methods for assessing program effectiveness. In: N.J.Prentice-Hall.

Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity* [doi:10.1017/CBO9780511803932]. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511803932

Xie, J., & Rice, M. F. (2021). Professional and social investment in universal design for learning in higher education: insights from a faculty development programme. *Journal of Further and Higher Education, 45*(7), 886-900. https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2020.1827372

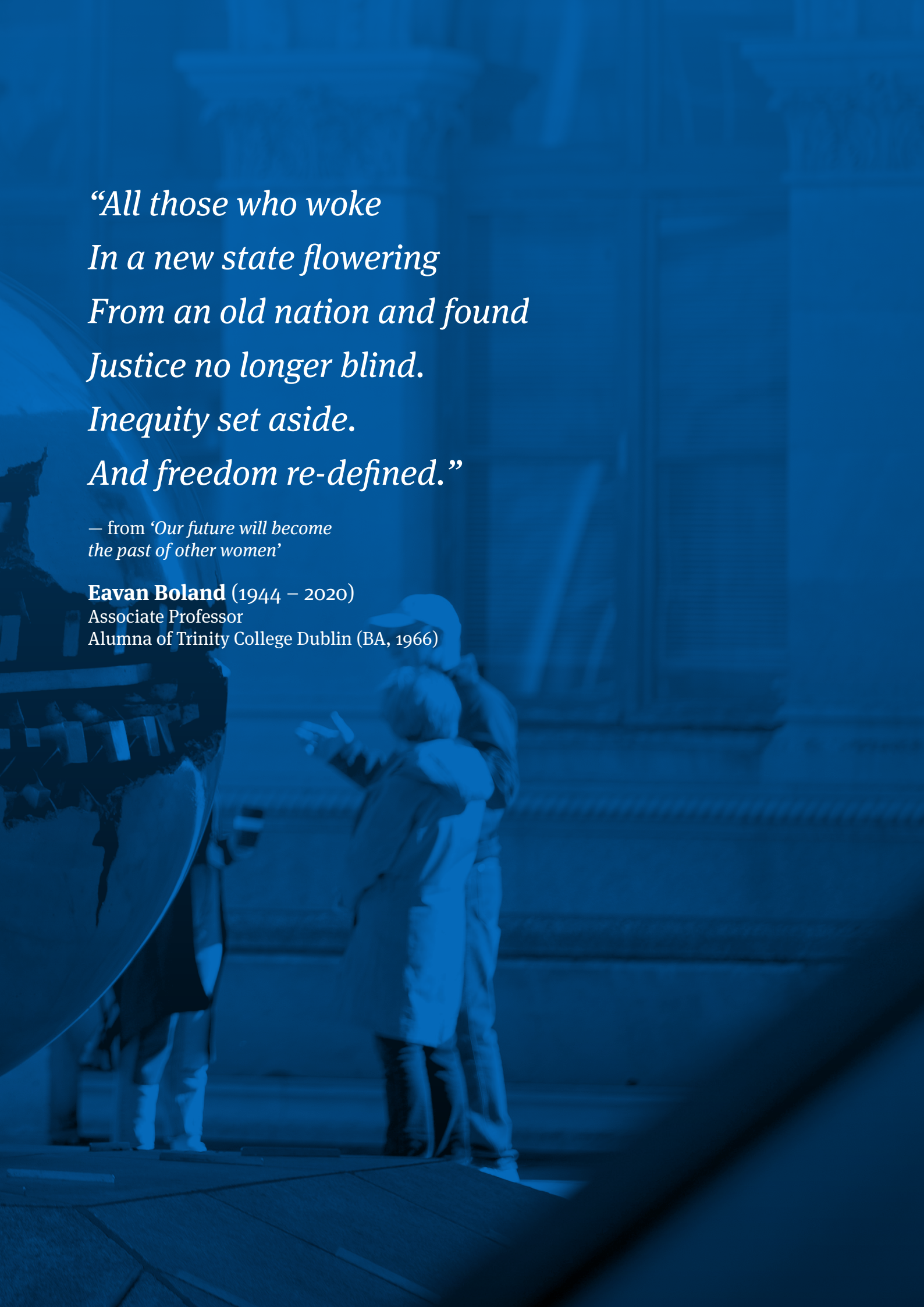
Yin, R. K. (1981). The Case Study as a Serious Research Strategy. *Knowledge, 3*(1), 97-114. https://doi.org/10.1177/107554708100300106

Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications : design and methods / Robert K. Yin* (Sixth edition. ed.). SAGE.

ISBN:
978-1-911566-56-4

eISBN:
978-1-911566-57-1

SCAN HERE



“All those who woke
In a new state flowering
From an old nation and found
Justice no longer blind.
Inequity set aside.
And freedom re-defined.”

— from *‘Our future will become the past of other women’*

Eavan Boland (1944 – 2020)
Associate Professor
Alumna of Trinity College Dublin (BA, 1966)

Trinity College Dublin
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath
The University of Dublin