TEACHER'S GUIDE WITH TIPS

How to contribute to inclusive and accessible education

ECIΩ

leren zonder belemmering

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WHAT WORKS FOR FEW STUDENTS, WORKS FOR ALL

'If you ask me about what makes a good teacher, I immediately think of a professor I had at university. Her lectures were very clearly structured. At the start of the lecture, she always showed a table of contents. Thanks to her appealing examples and visuals, I was less easily distracted. She also enunciated very clearly and I liked that she always provided a recap at the end. Furthermore, she made her presentations available in advance, which helped me enormously.'
Noëlle, Computer Engineering student

According to the Minister of Education, Culture and Science, good-quality education starts with good-quality teaching. Martha Meerman, lecturer in Differentiated Human Resource Management at Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences, researched the interplay between study success, diversity and the role of teachers. She found that teachers were crucial to the study success of their students. Their subject matter expertise and didactic and teaching skills can play a decisive role, provided they allow for the diversity of their students by being flexible in their teaching.

'*Teaching has little effect if the teacher overlooks the differences between individual students*' - **Ms Meerman argues.**

Out of all students in Dutch education, 30% have special needs. The most common (disabilities) special needs are on dyslexia, mental health issues and chronic illnesses. 10% of these students are in some way hindered by these mostly hidden special needs.

10% are obstructed by these, often invisible, functional limitations. Many support questions are also the result of obstacles encountered by students in the field of family care, gender transition, sexual orientation, pregnancy or young parenthood and loneliness. Students+ are students with special needs.

Roelien Wierda, lecturer in English at NHL University of Applied Sciences, responsible for renewing the curriculum: - '*My teaching is based on the principle* "*what works for few, works for all*". *In other words: if something works for a limited number of students, it usually works for all of them. I make no distinction between students after the fact — by granting students with dyslexia extra time, for example — but I determine my target group and what I can offer them at the start.*'

This guide contains a number of practical tips for teachers to promote accessible and inclusive education. It has been compiled by ECIO, the Dutch expert centre on inclusive education, for and with students with special needs, in consultation with teachers from the higher education sector. Like many of their colleagues, these teachers strive to provide their students with a good-quality education and set high standards for themselves. To them, a focus on diverse teaching is essential. At the same time, they agree that what works for few students, works for all. It is usually the case that all students benefit from these tips, not just students with special needs.

The tips concern four different activities:

1   Preparing a lecture and teaching
2   Supervising tutorial groups
3   Supervising students
4   Administering assessments and exams

The tips for these activities are described on two levels:

A. Curriculum design and preparation
B. Education in practice

A broad tip is followed by specific examples and/or an explanation (for students with special needs).

Alongside their teaching role, teachers play an important part when it comes to noticing the barriers experienced by students with special needs and referring them to assistance services, such as the student counsellor. This topic is not covered in this guide. For more information, please visit www.ecio.nl/en.

DIVERSITY, INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AND ACCESSIBILITY

Anyone who wants to study should be able to study. In order to offer opportunities for all, higher education should be as accessible as possible and there should be no unnecessary impediments. It should also allow for an increasingly diverse student body. Students with special needs often struggle to complete their degree programme successfully and on time. They often need to work harder and/or have a lower loadability than students without special needs.

Whereas some of these hindrances are related to specific needs, others are common among the majority of students both with and without special needs, e.g. a lack of concentration, chronic fatigue, a different way of processing information, struggling with planning, psycho-social symptoms or difficulties with group assignments. Students with special needs indicate that they struggle most with memorising course materials, preparing for and sitting exams, keeping up during lectures and writing theses. Eventually, a significant number of these students drop out, while others incur lengthy study delays. However, teachers can reduce the drop-out rate and study delays by making minor alterations to course materials, exams and teaching methods.

EXCLUSIVE   INCLUSIVE

THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER

Roy Erkens is a lecturer in Evolutionary Biology at Maastricht University. A few years ago, he made a conscious decision to stop giving large-scale lectures for the subject he taught at the time. In his opinion, good-quality teaching required getting to know his students personally. He now works for the Maastricht Science Programme. His teaching methods motivate students to reflect on what they already know and what they still need to learn.

> **Roy:** '*The final destination is the same for everyone, only the first part of the journey is different. My job is to ensure that the course is organised in such a way that everyone can learn in their own way.*'

This is Roy Erkens' contribution to making education more accessible – also for students with special needs. The first step towards inclusive and accessible education is to recognise and appreciate that there are differences. The next step is to let these differences inform the teacher-student relationship and the educational process.

> '*For me, it is all about the relationship with my students, which I build by showing an interest and trusting them, by meeting with them and forging connections. Once a relationship is in place, students will come to you with their questions and you can target each individual's needs. For this to work, a teacher needs to be genuine, pay attention to each student's learning process and wellbeing and be capable of continuous self-reflection. While individual teachers play a key role, they also function as a team. It is essential to coordinate well with colleagues.*' - **Sabine Reinaardus, lecturer in Social Work, Windesheim University of Applied Sciences**

Tips: curriculum design and preperation

You can already start making a difference to students when preparing the curriculum. When designing a course, think about its content, learning objectives, working methods to be used, teaching aids, etc. If you use diversity as your starting point, you will make different choices that will increase the quality of your teaching for all students.

1 Preparing a lecture and teaching

- Know your target group: make a description of the prospective students who might enrol in this subject. Be mindful of potential differences between them.
  - For instance, do you know which students have special needs and what facilities are available to them?

- Use various teaching methods and visual supports in addition to written explanations.
  - Dyslectic students are more likely to think visually. They process visual information better and faster than purely linguistic information.

- Include links and references to background information in your course materials.
  - For example, annotations that reinforce the core message.

- Ensure that the syllabus is ready well ahead of time and set aside time to go through the syllabus in advance, if required.
  - This gives dyslectic students or those who use reading software the opportunity to adjust the layout, have the content read out to them or implement other modifications, so that they are well prepared for the course.

- Think about ways to increase your students' involvement.
  - Most students with ADD or ADHD are easily distracted. Use lectures that match their interests, humour, variety and clear interim assignments to boost their motivation to learn.

2 Supervising tutorial groups
(supervising seminars/self-study/projects)

- Offer well-structured presentations, assignments and background information.
  - Most students with autism like all their self-study assignments to be structured the same way, e.g. background, objective, instructions, product, review. Otherwise, they may spend a lot of time having to discover the right structure for themselves.

- Encourage students to learn from each other.

- For example, make their notes available for everyone to view. More visually-oriented students often structure their notes in the form of a mind map. This opens up a different way of looking at the information and stimulates mutual involvement and motivation.

- Divide course materials into small sections to keep matters more manageable and help students with their planning.
    - Students who struggle to create a structure for themselves benefit from course materials that are well-organised and conveniently structured, use clear language and instructions, contain step-by-step guides, etcetera.

- Use digital course materials and ensure that they are accessible.
    - This matters to students with a visual or aural disability. For accessibility, consider using clearly laid-out websites, subtitled videos and image captions.

- Offer support with setting goals and priorities.
    - Planning is an important executive function. Students with ADD, ADHD or autism may procrastinate because they do not know how and where to begin or how to plan.

3 **Supervising students**
(one-on-one, during work placements, theses and graduation assignments)

- Teach students cognitive skills and learning strategies and support their executive performance where required.
    - Students with special needs may exhibit weaker executive functions (e.g. inhibitions, inflexibility, inability to plan, poor working memory), but there are certain technological solutions, such as apps, that can help them improve in that regard. Provide detailed written and/or oral feedback at regular intervals. Offer students the opportunity to hand in large assignments piece by piece in exchange for feedback. This forces students to become more productive, motivates them between deadlines and helps them take the next step.

- Reflect on your role as supervisor: which tasks are/are not within your remit and what kind of knowledge, attitude and skills should you possess?
    - '*Most teachers pretend that nothing is wrong and that they do not see my prosthesis. I do not really mind, as I do not want to draw attention to it myself. However, I would appreciate it if they asked me how I was doing or if I was struggling with anything from time to time, to show their concern.*' - **Eva, Skin Therapy student**

- Encourage students to find a work placement in good time.
    - For students with physical or mental health issues, finding a suitable work placement can be difficult. Focus on the student's qualities, without losing sight of their special needs. Giving due consideration to the special needs and finding a way around it can be an enormous help when looking for a suitable work placement.

- Have students hand in subproducts before a deadline.
    - By dividing the work into smaller blocks, students keep more overview and that works often motivating. For students with concentration problems this can be very helpful. Also this can help if, for example, someone has taken care of a sick family member. Usually the family caregiver can therefore not look or plan too far ahead. That is why it is nice if

students are allowed to produce sub-products, than that they have to work towards an important deadline. It can be highly beneficial to students who struggle to concentrate.

- Organise peer support for students. Bring students who encounter similar setbacks together.
  - '*A key breakthrough for me came when I was called into the student counsellor's office because I had failed a maths exam again. She approached me as someone who was capable of passing the exam, as long as I learned in a different way. She advised me to contact a fellow student who also had dyscalculia. It turned out to be the right move! Because there was a mutual understanding of what we were doing wrong and why, I no longer felt I was simply too dumb. It also provided us with the motivation to sit through the tutorials and make the assignments. In the end, we both passed. Looking at what students are capable of, rather than victimising them, really is the way forward. I also benefit from my dyscalculia and dyslexia in some ways. As proper spelling will never be second nature to me, I have to learn everything by heart, so I still know all the spelling rules. Moreover, I have learned to devise my own strategies and think outside the box. I still benefit from it every day!*' - **Joris, Biology student**

4   Assessments and exams

- Spread exams, handover dates and other deadlines in consultation with teachers of other subjects (although much will be set in stone in your institution's assessment policy, try to be flexible where you can – this goes for all assessment and exam tips).
  - On average, students with autism spend an additional 4.4 hours per week on their studies. Students with dyslexia spend an additional 3.5 hours per week. Spreading deadlines makes studying easier, also for them.

- Administer formative exams throughout the year.
  - Include a self-test for every chapter. This will enable students to gauge what they know and make adjustments as needed and it provides motivation and structure.

- Administer various types of exams, using a mixture of question types.
  - For instance, students with autism may loose themselves in the details of multiple-choice questions.

- Provide clear information (brief and to the point) about how students will be assessed and why.
  - This could be in the form of a document with learning objectives, assessment methods, dates and all other information about competence assessment. This provides students with clarity and structure.

TIPS: EDUCATION IN PRACTICE

Offering accessible education means ensuring a suitable offer for all students. Among other things, this requires a clear teaching philosophy, hard decisions regarding the course offer, rich learning environments, attention to the quality of teaching, an eye for the individual and a pedagogic and didactic approach that allows all students to develop their talents.

1 Preparing a lecture and teaching

- Present the content of your course in different ways.
    – As each student processes information differently, there is no single optimal way of offering information (e.g. spoken word, text, images, audio). Unless you allow for this, some students will run into difficulties.

- At the start of the course, provide students with an overview of the content of each lecture.
    – This will ensure that students who need to skip a lecture know what they have missed, which helps prevent stress (which exacerbates problems) and forces them to think about finding alternatives for the lecture they skipped.

- Make any PowerPoint presentations and digital materials available to students before the start of the lecture.
    – Some students like to prepare for lectures at home allowing them more focus during the lecture itself.

- Make use of online lectures and e-learning (with subtitles to make them even more accessible).
    – This will enable students who are otherwise unable to attend, e.g. because of hospital appointments, to keep up with the lectures.

- At the start of each lecture, provide an overview of the lecture's subject matter. Refer to this overview throughout the lecture.
    – Many students find this type of structure useful. Also consider visualising the overview or allocating a dedicated slide in your presentation. In addition, many students benefit from repetition and highlighting key points.

2 Supervising tutorial groups
(working groups/self-study/supervise projects)

- Explain assignments verbally and set aside time to provide additional information and answer questions.
    – Also make sure that you are available for questions and support at a later stage. Some students lack the flexibility to adapt to new circumstances, such as the need to change plans when assignments go wrong or proceed differently than expected.

- Supervise students during activities that require them to work as part of a group (as opposed to individual activities within a group).
  – Students with autism may find it very helpful to receive specific information about students' desired and expected behaviour.

- Be aware of the learning environment and how it can distract/motivate students.
  – Consider such factors as temperature, humidity, lighting, acoustics and other sensory stimuli. Students with respiratory ailments, for example, may struggle not only in class, but also afterwards (due to fatigue).

- Promote the active use of course materials.
  – Think about (optional) interim exams, quizzes, discussions or summarisation exercises, for example. These can be individual or group assignments.

- Encourage students to remain involved in various ways.
  – Think about e.g. providing multiple options, reducing stimuli and making the subject matter as relevant as possible.

3   Supervising students
(one-on-one, during work placements, theses and graduation assignments)

- Organise weekly discussion sessions during which a small group of graduate students discuss their progress.
  – Throughout the graduation phase, students are under considerable pressure. It may be beneficial for them to hear that they are not the only ones who struggle, to receive tips from fellow students or to attend regular meetings.

- Help students decide how to talk about their special needs, what to share with/keep from fellow students, teachers, work placement supervisors, etc.
  – '*From time to time, I felt frustrated because my fellow students did not always keep my special needs in mind. I usually solved this by explaining what I could and could not do and how they could help me. Most classmates responded rather well to that.*' - **Job, International Economics student**

- Help students draw up a plan.
  – '*I know I struggle with planning and structure, so I told my thesis supervisor straight away. She found a good way of supervising me. She provides me with a structure by using a lot of visual information, for example by making a model of the research question and linking different theories to it. We draw up plans together and she indicates which strategies I can use to do this. She also gave me a small time-management workshop.*' - **Amber, Social Sciences student**

- Offer tailor-made work placement supervision.
  – Generally, students with special needs experience the same setbacks during their work placements as students without special needs and they prefer to complete their placements normally as much as possible. At the same time, research has indicated that students with special needs in particular struggle with the heavy workload, the long working days/weeks and the commute to and from the work placement. This has resulted in a large number of

them suffering from stress, fatigue and anxiety. You should therefore strive to tailor your supervision to the individual student, keep in regular touch and make clear arrangements about the type of support you will be offering.

4 Administering assessments and exams

- Allow the use of exam tools.
    - For instance, students with dyscalculia may benefit greatly from the use of scrap paper (in order to write down intermediate steps), formula tables (for statistics) and/or a calculator.

- Set aside plenty of time for students to answer exam questions and write down their answers.
    - Many students with dyslexia find exams extremely stressful and struggle to think clearly.

- Use combinations of flexible assessment methods.
    - '*What I appreciate about the teaching methods here is that you are assessed based on your completion of the objectives. These objectives are clear, so I am not judged for writing long texts littered with spelling mistakes, for example. I can use my graphical and creative skills to show that I have mastered a subject. The entire basic structure of the degree programme takes into account the most efficient manner to prove your capabilities.*'- **Guido, teacher-in-training (Biology)**

- Formulate your assignments and questions clearly, unequivocally and in line with the learning objectives.
    - Students may struggle to understand what is being asked of them, so consider using different formats for your exam questions (e.g. text supported by a graph, written and oral explanations).

FURTHER READING

In addition to the tips provided by students and teachers, the following sources have been consulted:

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Website www.accessibility.nl

Colofon

Teachers are of crucial importance to the study success of their students. This guide contains a number of practical tips for teachers to promote accessible and inclusive education. It has been compiled by ECIO, the Dutch expert centre on expertise for students with special needs, in consultation with students and teachers from the higher education sector. Like many of their colleagues, these teachers strive to provide their students with a good-quality education. To them, a focus on diversity is essential. At the same time, what works for few students, works for all. It is usually the case that all students benefit from these tips, not just students with special needs.

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About ECIO

ECIO, expert centre on inclusive education, supports universities, colleges and VET institutes in order to help make education accessible to students with special needs, and to contribute to the wellbeing of students who experience obstacles due to, for example, learning disabilities, physical or sensory impairments, mental vulnerability, chronic illness, family care, gender transition, sexual orientation, pregnancy or young parenthood and loneliness. Contact us if you have any questions about inclusive education and student wellbeing.

Years of experience and expertise
For over 75 years, we have devoted ourselves to facilitating learning without obstacles. We can help your organisation to:
- develop policy concerning inclusive education and student wellbeing
- boost expertise in these fields among your organisation's employees
- inform students about the possibilities for studying without obstacles.

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