

THE ENGAGED UNIVERSITY: Towards a framework for inclusive learning for older adults based on their experience as part of the Intergenerational Learning Programme at Dublin City University (DCU).

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Older adult participation in formal and informal learning in the higher education sector is rapidly increasing due to an ageing population. According to Cruce and Hillman (2012) higher education institutions have been slow to respond to these demographic changes due to the lack of empirical information regarding the educational preferences of older adults. Furthermore sensory, physical, cognitive impairments associated with the ageing process may hinder initial involvement as current higher education learning infrastructures are designed for a younger student population.

The Intergenerational Learning Programme (ILP) at DCU has grown from a small project into a recognised programme which has reached over 2000 older people since 2008 and involved over 800 DCU students in teaching and volunteering activities. The aim of the programme is to embrace the wisdom, knowledge, competence and skills of older people from the wider community by offering them participation in teaching, learning and research opportunities on campus.

This innovative programme evaluated the reciprocal benefits of older and younger people learning together through creative opportunities to engage together both on campus and online. Its impact has had far-reaching benefits for both the older and younger people in terms of enriching their personal and professional development. This is chiefly through the development of confidence- building and the acquisition of communication and leadership skills and in the transfer of information technology skills shared by the younger students in return for life experience exchanged by the older students. The simplicity of the implementation of this programme lends itself to ease of transferability in other higher education institutes.

Through reflective practice and empirical explorations as tutors and researchers in ILP we have tried to formalise what makes the programme inclusive for older students.

We have created guidelines under the following topics

1. Getting to know you - guidelines for recruitment, registration information from practical details to personal information.
2. Physical Learning Environment and Communication
3. Pedagogy and learning strategies for older adults
4. Accessibility of learning materials and methods for older adults
5. Intergenerational learning and integration strategies

We have planned a consultation event with key stakeholders including older and younger students, policy community, academics, NGOs in ageing and inclusion

sector. Following this event we will publish our guidelines which will form an evolving framework of inclusive learning for older adults. We would like to advocate that similar holistic programmes which benefit both older and younger people in higher education can be implemented in other higher education institutes for the greater good of society.

References

Cruce, Ty M., Hillman, Nicholas W (2012) Preparing for the Silver Tsunami: The Demand for Higher Education Among Older Adults, *Research in Higher Education* (2012) 53: 593-613