IDEA-NET

Guideline Toolkit

How to set up an Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access (IDEA) office

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Contents

Foreword

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The IDEA-net project stands for "Expanding the network of Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access (IDEA) practitioners in higher education through institutional capacity building". The project is funded by the European Union (EU) and it builds on partners' existing stakeholder network, good practices, and extensive research in the field of IDEA as well as the social dimension of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). The consortium is composed of the Erasmus University Rotterdam (EUR), as the coordinators of the project, University College Dublin (Ireland), University of Belgrade (Serbia), University of Ljubljana (Slovenia), University of Zadar (Croatia), ECHO – Expertise Center for Diversity Policy (The Netherlands) and KIC - Knowledge Innovation Centre (Malta).

Abstract: This Guideline Toolkit is a practical resource for professional, faculty and management staff in higher education who wish to develop and progress inclusion and access in their institution. The Toolkit also offers guidance and suggestions on how to create a centralised support network to promote a coherent and inclusive framework.

Introduction

Introduction

Globally the student population is becoming increasingly diverse and more reflective of the society's population mix. Staff, both in professional services and in academic positions are also becoming more diverse. Higher education institutions (HEIs) are no longer seen as the sole preserve of elite groups. The doors to higher education are now open to everyone, with the range of entry groups being significantly extended. In some countries, quotas are becoming more common and financial support is becoming more readily available.

HEIs globally have recognised the need to ensure equitable access, participation and completion for their students; in addition, the need for equitable promotion for staff is becoming more clear. This has also been a policy priority for national governments and supra-national bodies such as the European Commission. This requires institutions to become more inclusive, creating an inclusive culture in which everybody can thrive and feel at home. For this to happen, changes to the system are needed. Systemic changes take time. Some of the essential tools to reach change include building awareness, knowledge and skills, changing practices, and being accountable. While working on systemic change, institutions simultaneously need to offer support for individual progress.

A systematic way to take on the challenges of embedding access and inclusion for all students and staff is by setting up an IDEA (inclusion, diversity, equity, access) office. This is a complex challenge, but by taking "one bite at a time", the road to setting up an IDEA office becomes more clear[1].

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1   Making Inclusive Higher Education a Reality: Creating a University for All." 20 Apr. 2023, https://www.routledge.com/Making-Inclusive-Higher-Education-a-Reality-Creating-a-University-for-All/Kelly-Padden-Fleming/p/book/9781032182599. Accessed 5 Oct. 2023.

This toolkit, created by IDEA-net project partners, is aimed at HEIs who wish to set up their own IDEA offices and provides a framework to help guide your institution in the first steps towards this goal. Furthermore, it provides information on setting up initiatives and/ or collaborations on the journey towards an IDEA office. The audience for this toolkit may be an individual interested in this area or a group of colleagues working together for change. We don't expect that all readers will be in a position to set up a full IDEA office but wish to highlight some of the changes which could be made on the journey towards this ultimate goal.

Throughout the document we will also address the idea of a "plus one" which is a phrase used for small, active changes that can be made while working towards the "bigger picture", which, in this case, is an IDEA office[2]. Systems change takes sustained effort, resources, vision and support. Many individuals who work in the area of access and inclusion or who are interested in progressing this area are already overburdened and timepoor and this must be acknowledged from the outset. This plus one approach allows for the introduction of small meaningful changes that together create a momentum towards positive change without leading to burnout of those seeking to effect change. Institutional support is required to bolster this bottom-up approach and support the individuals driving this agenda.

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2 "Adopt the Plus-One Approach - eCampusOntario Pressbooks." https://ecampusontario.pressbooks. pub/app/uploads/sites/2477/2022/03/T.-Tobin-K-Behling-Reach-Everyone-Teachi-Everyone-Universal-Design-for-Learning-In-Higher-Education-Chapter-5.pdf. Accessed 26 Oct. 2023.

A note on language, terminology and cultural factors

In this guideline toolkit you will see that we refer to equity rather than equality. In some countries and in other languages this distinction may not be clear. However, it is important to note that this is a deliberate choice by the authors. Equality means everyone is treated the same way or provided with the same resources or supports, regardless of any differences in abilities or context. Equity means everyone is provided with what they need to succeed and acknowledges that people are starting from different places, have varying contexts or resources. What we strive for is equity in the provision of opportunity for all staff and students and equity in the approach to supporting success for everyone.

You will see that we refer to groups traditionally under-represented in Higher Education. This is language familiar to the authors in their jurisdictions. These groups may be referred to as minority groups, disadvantaged groups, diversity groups or groups who feel less belonging. We encourage you not to be disheartened if we use a different terminology to what you are familiar with locally - we offer these guidelines as something you can adapt and build on in your own context. If you feel the language or terminology should be changed before presenting these to your senior leadership then please feel free to do this.

Similarly, the terminology used to describe or categorise these groups does differ significantly in different countries. For example, for disability some prefer person-first language and some don't. Neurodiversity is a group sometimes included in disability and sometimes categorised differently. You may be familiar with the term 'mature student' but this group may also be called second-chance students, students returning to education, older learners or sometimes learners who are working. You may also see reference to 'foreigners', migrants, international students or staff, non-domestic, refugees, asylum seekers, international protection applicants. The term 'foreigners' or non-nationals are both seen as problematic in the author's country but could be used elsewhere without issue. Language carries with it powerful associations either negative or positive and again, we encourage you to make this document meaningful for your own work.

In some countries LGBTQ+ groups are included in the work of IDEA and in others the focus may be on sexual preference and/or gender identity without using this broader term. Language can be polarising and at times the fear people have of saying the wrong thing can mean they avoid engaging in conversations around this topic. We encourage you to be patient in this work and not discourage conversations which may ultimately move this work forward within your institution. Intention is key as is the opportunity to educate your colleagues without creating a culture of fear around discussing these topics.

You may notice an absence of some areas which are prioritised in this area in your context. We have tried to provide as much guidance as possible but have chosen, for example, not to address the area of "social safety" which is a current issue discussed in some partner countries but unknown in others.

What is an IDEA office?

The objectives of an IDEA office include:

— Providing a centralised, generally supported and visible statement of intent that the institution promotes and practices inclusion.

— Development and application of inclusion policies and procedures for all those in higher education institutions, identifying and removing barriers for people from underrepresented groups (both students and staff).

— Provision of awareness raising activities, information, training, and support to the HEI community, including staff and students as well as participation in embedding and promoting inclusive practices (such as Universal Design) in all aspects of studying and working.

Ideally, an IDEA office is a single cohesive unit, office, or internal/specific area in the university which consists of a multidisciplinary, diverse team, with team members that can act in a dedicated capacity in a specific area of access or inclusion work, whether it be development of HR policies, the execution of policy and scientific research, communication, or first line assistance for students, and might include tutors, disability support specialists, outreach officers, mature student advisors, and more. An IDEA office provides centralised leadership on access and inclusion, initiating change, and eliminating duplication of effort across other services and providing a single point of contact for service users and the institution. The location of the physical office should preferably be central and in a building that is accessible for all students and staff[3]. Accessibility of the office is not a requirement for setting up the office but it should be among the primary priorities once it is set up.

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3 "(PDF) Guidelines to Establish an Office of Student Accessibility ...." 27 Feb. 2022, https://www. researchgate.net/publication/358855511_Guidelines_to_Establish_an_Office_of_Student_Accessibility_ Services_in_Higher_Education_Institutions. Accessed 29 Sept. 2023.
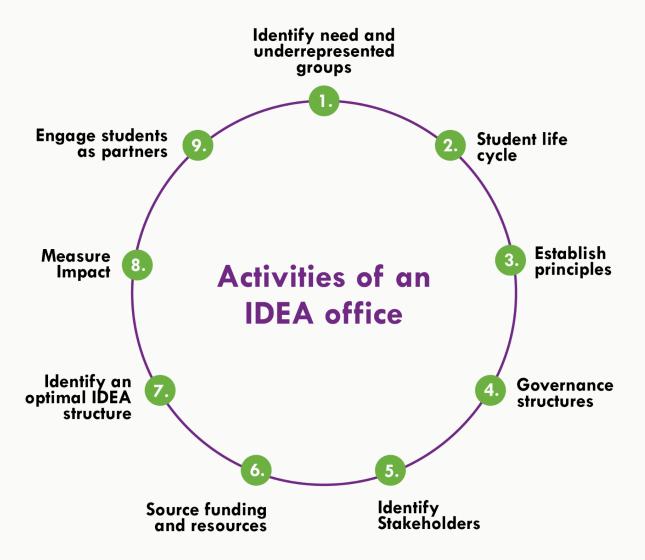
IDEA offices collaborate and co-create at all institutional levels within the university as well as with external stakeholders to improve the effectiveness of their messaging, planning, and the services they provide. Being in contact with and having access to several networks within and outside the university is pivotal. In addition, the office should continue to improve access and inclusion in their HEI and promote awareness in the university environment regarding the specific needs of individuals from underrepresented groups. The office should bring awareness to the gaps which exist in the current structures which have been identified as exclusionary by students or staff. It is important to update knowledge of access, inclusion, and diversity through the continual development of training programmes to be provided to both staff and the wider student population.

Sustainable funding streams incentivising research and evidence gathering on the impact of IDEA offices would also help to support the relevance of such offices to evolve more organically from the bottom-up. This evidence and research (both practice based and scientific), by feeding into the update and revision of IDEA policies, serves to increase the sustained relevance of policy over time.

IDEA offices should be institutional leaders and facilitate leadership on equity, diversity, access and inclusion throughout the institution, helping to embed these ideas within the university governance structures and identify factors for success (outlined below).

How to set up an IDEA office

For the initial steps in setting up an IDEA office we have broken down suggested steps in detail, to help guide you. We have also created an infographic to represent each of the activities that should be considered during this process. This is of course not a linear process but rather, a cyclical and iterative one.

Activities of an IDEA office

1. Identify need and underrepresented groups
2. Student life cycle
3. Establish principles
4. Governance structures
5. Identify Stakeholders
6. Source funding and resources
7. Identify an optimal IDEA structure
8. Measure Impact
9. Engage students as partners

Identify need and underrepresented groups

The first important step in setting up an IDEA office is to identify the groups of students and staff in the University who experience barriers in their education or work and may require extra support, change in the system, and/or are underrepresented. It is important to note that the groups identified will depend on institutional context and can change over time. Underrepresented groups may be identified through national policies, national census data, legislation, sectoral plans or other publications[4]. These groups may also be identified through information gathered within the institution or national census data.

These groups typically include people (students and staff) with disabilities (including, but not limited to, physical, sensory, learning and other invisible disabilities), those who may be socioeconomically disadvantaged, first-generation students, ethnic minorities, sexual and gender underrepresented groups, mature students, staff who are carers, international groups, and Traveller/Roma communities, etc.

For these groups, it is recommended to gather quantitative and qualitative knowledge on the current population (numbers, experiences) at your own institution.
In addition, stakeholders (organisations, networks) that also work with, or on topics relevant for, these underrepresented groups could be identified and contacted, to enable possible collaborations.

This step should include consultation with relevant groups in your institution. You may wish to reach out to the areas listed in section 4 and 5 below on governance and stakeholders. We would suggest getting permission to send an institution wide communication as it may be difficult to find people working alone on this topic and similarly it may be challenging to predict who will be able to support the work or provide resources. A wide-reaching communication strategy and accompanying work with those you know of should produce a comprehensive awareness-raising that you are working towards this goal.

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4 "National Access Plan, 2022 to 2028 - Government of Ireland." 31 Aug. 2022,
   https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/b156c-national-access-plan-2022-to-2028/. Accessed 29 Sept. 2023.

Identify inclusion activities over the student life and employee cycle

The life cycle of students and staff differ. First, we elaborate on the student life cycle. Afterwards, elements of the employee cycle are included. Of course, there is a certain overlap on applied principles, so reading both parts is advisable.

The student life cycle refers to the process that students undergo from pre-enrolment through retention and student engagement and then finally graduation and post undergraduate achievement. Once the student life cycle is understood, your IDEA office can better create student support services and improve on campus access and inclusion. Effectively managing this life cycle is crucial for better learning outcomes.

2.1. Outreach/ Engagement and Recruitment

Outreach and recruitment programmes are practical ways to help people find out more about a university and the many ways to access higher education. Working with a range of community members (stakeholders), such as socio-economically disadvantaged schools or summer schools, is an excellent way to assist prospective students in exploring the possibility of university life. Outreach and engagement can help, through talking and researching within groups, the barriers that potential students may face when coming to university such as coming from low income backgrounds.

Outreach and engagement with the wider community can also inform potential students of the different access routes to education, such as mature student pathways, or specific pathways centred around disability or socio-economic backgrounds.

A "plus one" for engaging with the potential student population could be to allow for open days for prospective students to tour the university, preferably engaging representative role models to do these tours.

2.2. Application and Admission

During this time, the IDEA office could provide information on how to apply to university, engage with future students, and provide significant support on the various routes of entry into university for underrepresented groups. The IDEA office could actively engage with stakeholders within the university such as the application or programme offices to promote the office services during a students application process.

Once a student is notified of the outcome of their application, the IDEA office will provide support on the next steps, such as setting-up information sessions for IDEA students before beginning university.

A "plus one" for application and admission could be to create an online "How-to" guide addressing simple steps on getting started in university.

2.3. Orientation and Enrolment

This step includes administrative, academic, and extra-curricular activities that the student can participate in during the early stages of their university life. During this time, an IDEA office may decide to provide additional orientation programmes to aid the transition to university for underrepresented groups and individuals who came to university through different access routes. University prospectuses should also have information about the IDEA office and access routes to education embedded in its publications.

A "plus one" for orientation and enrollment could be to have specific events to welcome new students and ease the transition into university life.

For example, in UCD, there is a yearly event called the Access and Lifelong Learning Welcome, or ALL Welcome, which is a day filled with different activities, such as information sessions, quizzes and tours, aimed at first year students who have come to university through an access pathway. The ALL Welcome provides incoming students with the opportunity to meet peers and settle into university life, and also provides them with the chance to learn about personal, social, financial, and academic support available to them as a new student.

Another example is the Pre Academic Programme of the Erasmus University Rotterdam. All first-year bachelor students are invited to participate in a three week summer course (a combination of online and on campus) designed to help prepare for their first study year academically, from setting goals to dealing with set-backs. The presence of diverse role models and group-work with fellow students are also important factors in helping students establish a sense of belonging, especially for those who might face additional struggles or who are the first in their families to go to a university. As a result, PAP has proven to help participants significantly improve their study results and reduce dropout rate.

2.4. Studentship

These are activities which the student can engage in which will help them develop their interests, knowledge and skills. They can be broken down into academic interests, such as lectures and tutorials; the student life which involves both the social and the lifestyle aspects of being a student; and community engagement which will get the student involved in extracurricular activities to help fully engage with student life.

A "plus one" that an IDEA office can work towards for studentship could be to organise coffee mornings for different programmes to allow students the chance to talk to their peers and make meaningful connections. Another example from the Erasmus University Rotterdam is the student council SCEDI (Student Council Equity Diversity and Inclusion), which are selected students that are committed to fostering a more inclusive campus environment in which the interests of our diverse student body are represented. By representing the 'unheard student voice' these students can connect policy makers with the interests of a diverse student body, and at the same time, they are offered a community.

2.5. Career Preparation

Career preparation is a continuous activity which occurs throughout a student's time in university. An IDEA office can help prepare students for post-university life and provide information on potential careers etc. The office can also liaise with career offices within the university to help organise career fairs and events.

A "plus one" would be to prepare students for employment pre-graduation through internships, placements and mentorship programmes.

2.6. Graduation

The final stage in the student life cycle when students successfully complete their university education.

In addition to the student life cycle, it is important to engage with Alumni as this can help an IDEA office find potential stakeholders who can serve as possible future employers, mentors, outreach partners etc. and engage more with the community in improving access and inclusion in the institution.

A "plus one" would be to provide opportunities for graduates to engage with Alumni activities post graduation e.g. outreach with potential students or mentorship for current students.

2.7. Attracting, promoting, and retaining employees in your institution

If, as a university and IDEA office, a lot of thought has gone into attracting diverse students, it is important that staff are representative of the student pool, so that students can identify with support staff and faculty. So attracting and retaining (diverse) talents in the organisation is important.

There are three steps in the Human Resources (HR) cycle that would need specific attention;
— Recruitment and selection
— Engage and promote
— Exit

Getting the right people necessitates starting with asking the right question: what expertise, experience and knowledge is missing from the team? Who are you looking for with the vacancy? Based on this information, draft the vacancy text. A common pitfall is to look for a person who fits the image of the person who has just left the position. It is also common to look for someone who looks like you, as a member of the recruitment team. It comes down to keeping a diverse team composition in mind.

Below you can find some tips to make your recruitment and selection process objective:

→ Make your vacancy text inviting to as many groups as possible by:
— Using gender, SES background, cultural neutral language;
— Involving different people in drafting the text; and
— Including a Diversity & Inclusion Statement, in which you explicitly mention and welcome diverse groups.

→ Determine on the basis of available talent (in society at large, or the surrounding of the location of your institution) what will be the target groups of your organisation, i.e. groups that are available but not present in among your staff so you want to hire. Tips for completing this include:
— Tailor the recruitment and selection strategy to these characteristics (online there are tips for different groups);

— Consider including minimum targets per target group in the recruitment.

→ Guarantee equal opportunities by organizing the selection process as objectively as possible, for example by:

— Monitoring neutrality by discussing each other's considerations openly, critically and empathically;
— Involving different people in the selection process;
— Using a fixed pattern during the selection interview;
— Evaluating on the basis of objective criteria in an evaluation form.

Similarly, evaluate the engagement, promotion, exit processes from the perspective of possible biases or blind spots. Examples are investigating the composition of committee members on diversity characteristics in internal committees for promotion. Are there mainly men, or white people? What are the characteristics of the student member? This could give valuable insights in who interprets and applies the promotion criteria and who has the power to make decisions about promotions. Another example is performing gender pay gap research, and not only investigating salary but also bonuses and supplements.

A 'plus one' can be a family friendly brochure. The Erasmus University Rotterdam has produced a family friendly brochure where leadership and employees can read all that EUR offers for (new) parents and caretakers.

Establish principles

Establishing principles for the IDEA office can help create a whole-institution approach to mainstreaming and embedding access and inclusion in a university.

An IDEA office can establish principles by addressing the staff (including human resource staff) and student population directly. For example, the creation of an online anonymous survey issued to the entire campus asking individuals "what an inclusive university would look like" could help identify areas which need improvement and help shape principles.

Furthermore, principles can be established through communication with the wider community, making sure underrepresented groups are heard, and knowing what groups you want to target. It is important to have an idea how you want to tackle inclusion, diversity, equity and access issues, as these will help shape basic principles which can help frame institutions specific principles.

The development of these principles should be informed by national access plans and policies on access and inclusion, as it adds to the power and support for the principles.

The following principles were adapted from the UCD University for All principles in collaboration with IDEA-net project partners, and are here as an example which can be used and adapted to be more institution specific[5]:

— Our university believes that quality education and research cannot be achieved without inclusion, equity and diversity.
— Everyone has the right to equitable participation and engagement in Higher Education.
— Widening Participation means ensuring all students can access Higher Education and that they have an equal opportunity to progress and succeed within and beyond university.
— Our student body entering, participating in and completing Higher Education should reflect the diversity of the population.
— The entire university community has a responsibility and role in mainstreaming inclusion.

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5 "Toolkit For Inclusive Higher Education Institutions." https://www.ucd.ie/all/t4media/0274_UCD_ TOOLKIT_1118_ONLINE_LR.pdf. Accessed 29 Sept. 2023.

To achieve a "University for All" we must engage with everyone - students, faculty, practitioners, community partners, educators, researchers and policymakers.

One area which may be addressed in the principles is inclusion in your HEI's curriculum. IDEA being visible in the curriculum through initiatives like decolonising the curriculum can be another way to ensure that you are creating cultural change through diversifying the educational experience of your students and making faculty aware of the need to do this. UCD's Unlocking Inclusion Toolkit includes guidance on how this might be achieved. As well as looking at content, Faculty should examine how they are teaching and we would recommend embedding the Universal Design for Learning framework in capacity building initiatives.

Another example can be found on www.eur.nl/IDEA, which states that EUR strives to be an inclusive university that:

— attracts and retains talented students, faculty and staff broadly representative of the diverse perspectives in society.
— is active in eliminating implicit and explicit barriers that prevent the full participation of all members of the academic community.
— is active in developing policies, procedures and practices that promote that inclusive culture.

This is coupled to four values to guide the vision above. Firstly, freedom of speech for everyone is indisputable, and it is encouraged to express ideas and opinions, civilly. Secondly, competitiveness and innovation is enhanced by diverse backgrounds, perspectives, knowledge and experiences of our students, faculty and staff members. Thirdly, social equity, inclusion and dignity as a right for all members of the EUR community, and society as a whole. Lastly, harassment and discrimination in any form have no place at EUR. Being bystanders to harassment and discrimination is not to be tolerated either.

Identify governance structures/ prerequisites to enable success

One key enabler for success is linking in with existing university related structures such as academic programme boards, schools, support services such as HR, student services or the communication department, university management teams and governing authorities. Rather than creating entirely new structures in the pre-work for setting up an IDEA office we recommend reviewing existing structures and identifying possible governance mechanisms. For example, an IDEA office might report directly to a University Management Team, or become a 'sub-group' of that team with representatives from official discipline boards, or have a satellite IDEA team member (working in both units). These structures should be embedded in the workings of IDEA rather than detached, disconnected or independent.

We would suggest doing a local exercise to establish the pros and cons of various governance structures to identify where the best fit is for your IDEA office. This will depend on your local principles and goals for this work. For example, if your primary goal is to support staff inclusion then HR would be a good fit but if students are your goal then perhaps your student recruitment or support services would be a better fit. You may decide you need to multi-pronged approach or an initial working group structure to bring together the current services. When doing this exercise you should ask yourself the following questions:

— Where might I be able to access additional resources for IDEA?
— Does the current remit of this area align with the goals of IDEA?
— Are the individuals working in this area interested in IDEA?
— Is this area staff or student focused and does this align with our local ambitions for IDEA?

Identify stakeholders

Stakeholders are persons, groups or organisations with a vested interest, or stake, in the decision-making and activities of an institution or project. Stakeholders will vary according to context and location etc. When establishing an IDEA office, it is important to identify potential stakeholders who would support and advise on the development of projects to improve inclusion, diversity, equity and access in the University. Stakeholders can provide varying levels of support based on their positions such as: acting as networks/bridges to underrepresented groups within and outside institutions, support based on knowledge (both internally and externally), and support by position/power (internally and externally).

Students and staff are key stakeholders which you should consider identifying. Student groups as stakeholders could include the Student's Union, undergraduate and graduate students, graduates and taught/ research programme students etc., while faculty and staff groups could include college principals, heads of school, professors, graduate school directors, as well as resource/community/advocacy groups, and many more.

A Faculty Partnership programme, which would involve a collaboration between the IDEA office and teaching and learning departments (these are usually educational units within institutions which lead on provision of teaching professional development programmes for faculty, development of teaching policies, assessment strategies or educational tool development), would provide another structure to support and accelerate the implementation of IDEA topics throughout the University.

Furthermore, a community partner programme can be an excellent way of providing activities for external stakeholders to engage in outreach activities in order to learn more about university life and all the potential access routes. Community partners could include adult education services; community organisations for ethnic minorities, Roma/Irish Traveller communities, and individuals with disabilities; and Further Education and Training colleges etc.

Getting the word out to stakeholders about what you are doing is important, but their engagement goes the extra mile in not only enhancing awareness about the IDEA office, but also instilling a sense of ownership, willingness, and sense of belonging from stakeholders to contribute to realising and developing your IDEA policy. It should be beneficial for all partners.

Source funding and resources

Before addressing funding and resources, it is important to focus on the concept of "not letting the perfect get in the way of the good", as small steps and changes ('quick and easy results') can make huge differences to student and staff support and inclusion in higher education. Try to think about some "plus ones" that can be used to make small improvements to wellbeing while awaiting things like funding etc. "Plus-one" can help keep motivation and show progress. An example of this would be to work with diverse students and staff as partners on communication campaigns to tackle discrimination or promote accessibility awareness.

Funding and resources can be a significant challenge in universities. When setting up an IDEA office, depending on the infrastructure available, sourcing financial resources may be needed to carry out required changes to improve accessibility and create a cohesive office unit. In the pre-work it can be useful to review all possible funding sources both internal and external. Linking in with your institution's financial officer or Bursar can assist with this process. You may be able to avail of internal grants or bursaries through other institutional areas - it is important to think creatively about how you can utilise resources through research funds, internal competitions and also resources gained through direct approach to institutional management. Starting with a single action or plus one that requires some funding it is advisable to create a project plan or proposal which sets out specifically the aims, objectives, potential impact and budget for the initiative before making an approach or application. External funding such as Erasmus+ and other national and international funding sources should also be considered. You might also explore the option of joint funding applications with other institutional units, external or communication organisations or other partner institutions.

It is important to communicate the vision for the IDEA office and its access initiatives and seek support from an Academic or Administrative Senior Leader, for example, College Principals, the Dean and Director of the institution. Funding and overall support might be sought from national governmental budgets for widening participation or more general innovation projects. More locally, funding could be identified through the governance structures and shared across disciplines or departments in the university.

In the absence of financial support, it may still be possible to source human resources and re-allocate colleagues, even partially, to the work of IDEA. This could result in the development of a network of colleagues across the institution with a shared vision and work plan. This embedded hub and spoke team model can create awareness in local areas while work is being done to create a central IDEA office.

For example, for physical campus changes carrying out an audit of the University's infrastructure will allow for the identification of the renovations and changes needed and will provide information on the size, timescale, impact, and funding needed to enact the desired changes. However, while these changes can be costly, it is advantageous to collaborate with larger projects, and remediation works with dedicated funding, in the University to make effective changes such as retrofitting automatic doors, the addition of ramps and accessible toilets etc.

Identify an optimal IDEA structure

Structure

As mentioned, an IDEA office should ideally be one cohesive unit. One location in which people can source their needs makes the inner workings of an IDEA office much smoother. However, we understand that in all contexts this may not be possible.

As such, if an IDEA office works across various units within a university, it is crucial to have good communications between each of the structures to enable ease of project management and realising the vision of inclusion.

A "plus one" to assist communication between IDEA structures could be to have regular staff meetings addressing the daily operations of the office while working towards a single cohesive space. Also, having a dedicated person with each unit or discipline, can create a network where knowledge and best practices can be shared.

Staff skills

Identifying existing staff members and employing new staff can help shape the structure of an IDEA office. This depends also on the main function of the IDEA office. An office can be an expertise centre, its focus being on evaluating existing policies, procedures and practices on bias/exclusion and offering expertise and advice to the relevant units responsible for creating and executing the policies within the organisation, in which case there is no critical role in actual provision of student or staff facing services. For this type of office, you need preferably academically educated professionals, with expertise on particular IDEA related topics (mechanisms of exclusion, biases, education system, change management, student engagement, inclusive HR etc). If the office has a more student (or staff) facing role, team members benefit from experiences in the area of provision of support, with a focus interaction with students, provision of advice and training to individuals, mentoring, teaching etc. In both an expertise centre and a direct student support service, administrative and communication skills and a good knowledge of current policies are advised. Bachelors degrees in areas like social science and psychology could also benefit the unit from a student support perspective.

Staff can undergo continual professional development training in areas like, but not limited to, assistive technology, sensitivity training, and people management while working in an IDEA office.

In addition to the aforementioned staff roles, an IDEA office should also be innovative and strategically involved in setting up initiatives including outreach and recruitment, policies and strategies, and the continual improvement of support and services. The type of IDEA office depends on the needs of the institution.

Students should have the opportunity to meet IDEA staff members one-on-one to discuss their needs and dictate what reasonable accommodations they may need, and staff should be able to determine the best way for students to fully engage with university life.

Develop a system for measuring impact

The depiction and dissemination of data on staff and student participation in a university is a crucial approach to understanding the university population and helps to build and mainstream access and inclusion on campus.

For the collection of data, it is important to consider the under-represented groups in the student and staff population, the mechanisms in which the data is gathered and how it is analysed and used, and the desired targets. The data should also consider admissions and participation data, student progression and completion rates, outward mobility, and graduation outcomes, as well as employee diversity, hiring policies and practices, satisfaction information, progression and promotion and exit information. Additionally, gathering data on which access routes students have come through can better measure equity across the student population. It would be vital to determine which data is the most useful and how it should be presented, for example, gender balance, migration background, disability, intersectionality of student or staff groups etc[6]. Data collection should always comply with relevant legislation and respect the rights of staff and students in relation to disclosure. Anonymous data collection methods should be considered where appropriate.

An IDEA office should have a continuous improvement process and/or an internal evaluation system which could be owned or based on a quality assurance standard, for example, carried out through regular accessibility audits.

As an IDEA office, you can carry out research, such as regular questionnaires, focus groups and information seminars to continuously receive input from both students and staff about the status quo of the university. In conclusion, both qualitative and quantitative data are important. Furthermore, IDEA office-related questions/ statements could be included in institutional self assessment exercises and quality reviews.

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6 "University for All Data, Metrics, and Evidence 2020-2021." https://www.ucd.ie/universityforall/t4media/Fleming,%20Padden,%20Kelly%20-%20Who%20Counts.pdf. Accessed 29 Sept. 2023.

Engage students and staff as partners

The IDEA office should encourage the participation of students and staff. For students, the contribution they make in their engagement with the IDEA office should be rewarded with academic credits and/or payment. It is important that the cost of advocacy is recognised in terms of time but also the emotional labour that can go along with being a representative of an under-represented group in a university. Staff should be involved as collaborators and co-creators in developing policies and overall development of services and approaches to IDEA. This can be done via facilitation of resource groups or advocacy (for instance a network for only women or members of the queer community within your organisation). It is also possible to provide targeted events, activities, workshops and training, focussing on getting voices and concerns heard and offering networks and support for navigating the barriers within the system.

In addition to students as stakeholders, their role in the university should be embedded in a multitude of activities. Continuously involving the student voice can offer a different perspective on inclusion in your institution, providing insight into the good practice currently ongoing and exploring how local areas can improve their practice.

Student unions and different student bodies and organisations are crucial structures within the university as they can directly communicate the changes the students want to see to higher authorities and can work closely with IDEA structures and programmes. In return, these groups will help the IDEA office to devolve responsibility across the campus.

Students can be included in a variety of different programmes including, but not limited to, focus groups, student partnership programmes, student internships, and regular student feedback surveys.

Access leaders and inclusion advocates could speak in focus groups to highlight the understanding of the staff or student experience of inclusion in the university. In particular, the areas that are addressed in such focus groups include: representation, expectation, communication and support in the university.

Representation   **Expectation**   **Communication**   **Support**

Concluding Tips

Concluding Tips

Devolve responsibility across the university

Integrating inclusion, diversity, equity and access into the everyday life of a HEI, so that it permeates all faculties and departments is an excellent way of devolving responsibility so that these topics are not just the responsibility of the designated access office.

For example, an oversight committee, which is aligned with academic structures and reports to the institutions management group, can be assigned the responsibility of overseeing work to embed and mainstream IDEA. This could include a senior academic, for example, that would hold the chair position on the committee, while membership is drawn from senior faculty, relevant policy and support services.

An oversight committee could be tasked with organising focus groups for discussions around the further devolving of responsibility in respective faculties in order to pilot a more bespoke plan where each faculty would have more input into access and inclusion policies in the university.

Devolved responsibility will look different in each institution depending on existing structures and roles. Alongside an oversight committee with programme representation it may also include a local representative or IDEA partner who has responsibility for supporting or advising particular diverse groups such as students or staff with disabilities, low income students or other specific identified groups. You may also have staff members who engage in outreach activities beyond the institution or a group of staff engaged with IDEA-related research projects. Devolved responsibility could also include enrolment planning for each programme ensuring that IDEA pathways are included in these discussions and negotiations. You might also identify staff who would act as mentors and role models for students or staff supported through IDEA initiatives.

Supporting staff and students together or separately

When setting up an IDEA office you will need to determine whether underrepresented staff and students will be supported through the same structure and mechanisms. A single point of contact and service will allow for clarity of purpose and easier 'brand identity' and recognition for the IDEA office. It will also ensure parity of esteem for staff and students in the work of IDEA.

The challenge of a combined service may be the differing governance structures between staff and students. Funding and resources are often segregated for staff and students and this may result in different tiers of support. One way to combat these challenges would be to have a subunit within the IDEA office to support staff with a 'dotted line' reporting structure to the university's Human Resources unit to ensure clarity of reporting responsibilities.

Last consideration would be to separate actual front office services to students and staff from the more innovative and policy related tasks of a so-called IDEA expertise center. Being able to give advice, initiate and devise policies, by working together with the organisational units that are already tasked with offering services, makes that the whole institution becomes responsible for being inclusive, as these services are not 'tucked away' at an IDEA office. Having policy experts, both for students and staff, together in an IDEA office, provides the benefit of identifying systemic barriers of exclusion and bias within the system and culture of an institution, and gives weight to the provided advice.

Examples of Good Practice

To be considered an example of good practice, a university may:
— Have sufficient activities to support equal access, inclusion, and diversity.
— Support a wide range of equity groups.
— Continually propose innovative initiatives and projects , as input for policies to embed inclusion.
— Be a cohesive service or have plans in place to become a cohesive service.
— Have a detailed evaluation and dissemination process when it comes to analysis of both student and staff data.

During the IDEA-net case study collection, there were many universities whose access and inclusion offices were carrying out excellent work. Presented here are just a few examples of those universities. Lodz University, Oulu University, Trinity College Dublin, and the University of Sassari Italy, are only a sample of the cases identified as examples of good practice. Also included are two project partners, UCD and Erasmus University Rotterdam.

Lodz University: Lodz University was identified as an example of good practice as it has several ongoing initiatives (academic support, gender equality, diversity project, discrimination prevention team) and supports a wide range of equity groups (disabilities, low-income, LGBTQ, ethnic minorities, refugees/migrants, health conditions that do not have disability certificate). They also have a wide range of activities for access and inclusion and access plans and disseminate their data through both quantitative and qualitative evaluations.

Oulu University: Oulu University has an excellent number of activities to support access and inclusion, while also supporting a wide range of equity groups. While they are not one unit yet they plan to interlink their different units and functions, and they also disseminate their student data through both qualitative (surveys) and quantitative (statistical indicators) means.

Trinity College Dublin: Trinity College Dublin has a cohesive access unit which supports many equity groups, has plenty of activities to support access and inclusion alongside binding policy and action plans etc., and has an excellent and detailed means of evaluation.

University of Sassari, Italy: The University of Sassari, Italy supports a wide range of equity groups (disabilities, low-income and first-generation students). They also have developed a suite of activities to support access and inclusion in the last two years and have a formal qualitative evaluation process.

University College Dublin, Ireland: The UCD Access and Lifelong Learning centre are committed to creating an inclusive, equitable learning experience for every student. There is a wide range of support for students who come to the university through different access pathways including: disabled students, mature students, part-time students, students from low-income backgrounds, etc. The Access and Lifelong Learning centre is one unit with multiple services including student support, disability support, outreach and engagement and the University for All project team. In addition to ongoing initiatives and activities to improve equity, inclusion and diversity on campus, UCD Access and Lifelong Learning has a formal evaluation process, compiling both quantitative and qualitative data which is disseminated through numerous data publications and case studies with regular reports being made to higher authorities.

Erasmus University Rotterdam: The IDEA Center is a successful office, it is composed of around 20 diverse content experts. The IDEA Center has a mandated budget in order to be able to operate and test its policies and activities. The IDEA Center has a multidisciplinary and integral approach, thus not taking isolated measures, that focus on one part of the problem, but not the whole system. For instance, only working in diverse recruitment of staff, while not providing a welcoming and inclusive working culture. You will get diverse staff in, but they will leave soon again, because they are not welcomed and valued, they do not feel at home. Apart from this, the IDEA Center works closely with the Executive Board of the University and has an easily recognizable and findable location on campus. IDEA Center develops, implements and integrates policy within existing organization processes and departments, makes sure the latest knowledge and data driven developments are integrated within the organization and provides expertise and advises units, employees and students and the Executive Board.

It has dedicated resources and satellite team members (example: one inclusive human resources specialist, working both at IDEA Center but also at the HR department; another colleague, communications specialist, who divides time between the IDEA Center and the marketing and communication department of the University – this person makes sure the organisation uses inclusive communication, language, and visuals).

The university has a wide range of support for students from various different backgrounds (Pre Academic program, soft landing, student engagement activities) and has a multitude of initiatives such as the Gender Equality plan and Beyond 25/25 - Towards Inclusive Academia.

Challenges and possible solutions

Opposition from Conservative Groups

— Solution: Discuss IDEA goals openly and engage in conversation and debate rather than avoiding it
— Solution: Look to HEI leaders or national leaders to support your work
— Solution: Look for common ground if possible but don't expect to change everyone's mind with this work.

Funding

— Solution: Start with staff resources
— Solution: Look outside of the university for external funding
— Solution: Start small and grow - focus on proving impact
— Solution: Think circular and repurpose existing resources, or use freely available Assistive Technology (AT) etc.

Competing Priorities

— Solution: Vary approach - data, student voice, impact studies. Data as a 'burning platform': using data to help people see the dire consequences of not changing
— Solution: Leadership support

Collaboration

— Solution: Start with willing colleagues - don't let the perfect get in the way of the good
— Solution: Establish a Community of Practice

Staff Overwhelm or Burnout

— Solution: look for ways to reward this work through promotion pathways or award schemes
— Solution: promote the plus one approach so staff know they aren't expected to create massive changes overnight

Take-home message

Takeaways to create a university for all

Seize the day and begin

Have courage and accept imperfection

Adapt for your own context and start where you can

Provide Universal Design development opportunities for all stakeholders

Apply Universal Design across the institution

Recognise the central role of student supports

Use and adapt the Toolkit for Inclusive Higher Education Institutions

Use the Implementation Framework as a guide

Use data and storytelling tailored to your audience to create a sense of urgency

Engage with the entire university community