



**INNOVATION AND SOCIAL LEARNING IN HIGHER
EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS**

2016

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The ISOLEARN Project

ISOLEARN Project, co-funded by the European Commission through the Erasmus+ Programme / KA2 – Strategic Partnership, aimed to support and improve the quality of higher educational offer addressed to hearing/visual-impaired students in order to enhance their accessibility to HEIs.

For achieving this aim, the Partnership developed the following outputs:

1. The *ISOLEARN Handbook*, that represents a set of guidelines for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) on how ICT based methodologies and learning tools should be designed and delivered for the specific target groups of visual and hearing impaired (V/HI) students;
2. The *ISOLEARN Quality Label* establishing quality criteria and indicators to assess the accessibility level of the academic programme and the services provided by HEIs;
3. The *Export Facilitator Professional Qualification Prototype*, designed according to the lifelong learning European criteria and in consideration of the target groups' specific needs. This is an example for HEIs on how to train students and support their employability and social inclusion even after they finish the university studies.

Project Consortium

The Project, coordinated by the *Aberta Universidade* (Portugal, www.uab.pt), has been implemented (from October 2014 to September 2016) in cooperation with the following Partners:

- *ACAPO Association*, Portugal
www.acapo.pt
- *APS Association*, Portugal
www.apsurdos.org.pt
- *Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation*, Portugal
www.gulbenkian.pt
- *EFFEBI Association*, Italy
www.asseffebi.eu
- *Folkuniversitetet Uppsala*, Sweden
www.folkuniversitetet.se
- *Univesity of Ljubljana*, Slovenia
www.uni-lj.si
- *UNINETTUNO University*, Italy
www.uninettunouniversity.net

The Handbook

The *ISOLEARN Handbook* has been designed with the aim to:

- a. support HEIs in developing appropriate courses, methodologies and services in line with the V/HI people learning and social needs;
- b. enhance the accessibility of V/HI students to HEIs;
- c. guarantee better rates of success for V/HI students in their university career;
- d. promote the V/HI students' mobility and employability across Europe.

In consideration of these objectives, the Handbook target groups are:

- Higher Education Institutes and students;
- National/Regional Associations and European networks of hearing/visual-impaired people;
- Visually and hearing impaired students;
- Research Centres for Technology applied to Educational Science;
- National and European Public Authorities involved in designing, implementing and evaluating policies directed to the target groups.

ISOLEARN Analysis results

ISOLEARN Project provides an accurate trans-national analysis, based on *national desk researches* and a *survey* involving V/HI students and HEIs representatives.

The analysis aimed to:

- a. identify the awareness and practices on accessibility strategies at the University in the participating countries;
- b. identify the V/HI students learning needs and the useful ICT-based instruments & tools to deliver an appropriate educational offer;
- c. collect good practices related to the type of support provided by Universities (selected and involved by the Partners in the survey) to V/HI students in line with their learning needs.

From the analysis emerged that the V/HI students are still facing several challenges in their university experience, mainly related to the inappropriateness of educational courses, learning materials and examinations; and also to the competences of the HEI staff (including professors, supporting and administrative staff) they have to interact with.

Students expressed the need to improve the current services offered by HEIs to support their accessibility, and provided some recommendations for the educational courses and materials adaptation, mainly based on ICT solutions.

The recommendations have been translated by the ISOLEARN partners in the *ISOLEARN Quality Label*, that includes quality

indicators and criteria for HEIs to assess the accessibility level of the academic offer addressed to V/HI students.

Technology enhanced learning

The ISOLEARN Handbook describes how ICT-based learning instruments and tools should be designed and delivered to promote inclusion of visual and hearing-impaired students in HEIs. This is a functional approach in order to support the target groups' educational and social inclusion.

Nowadays almost all forms of learning use technology to enhance the learning process.

Technology offers the chance to adopt solutions to better answer to the specific needs of each student and particularly of those who used to have limited access to Educational Systems in the past. Thus, technology is a crucial tool to overcome barriers and promote inclusion.

As for visually-impaired people, for example, the accessibility of pedagogical and scientific contents through amplified or digital materials can really support these students in the learning process.

Technology contributes also to establish a cooperative learning environment, fundamental for the students' integration within the HEIs environment. ICT attributes to the professors the role of *mediator* in the learning process and recognizes, at the same time, also the relevance of many other actors that intervene in the teaching-learning process, including the HEI supporting / administrative staff, the students' classmates and families.

Furthermore, most of these actors are also involved in the adaptation of the educational process.

Technology, by showing the capacity to revolutionize the teaching-learning process, requires indeed important transformation at various levels and stages of the teaching-learning process, starting from the proposal of the educational offer. These main stages can be synthesized as follow:

1. *Course conception*, HEIs should provide institutional-level strategy in order to define standards, aims and services in order to grant access to students with different learning needs. The strategy should refer to: Accessibility policy; Information accessibility; Courses accessibility; Support and training to faculty and teaching staff.
2. *Pedagogical approach to curriculum and course design*, concerns the definition of a set of principles for curriculum development, addressing Goals, Methods, Materials, Assessment.
3. *Course content product*, refers to the content design to ensure that key information is equally perceptible to all learners.
4. *Course delivery*, is focused on the Web content technology implementation, covering both the technological and the pedagogical aspects.
5. *Learners' Evaluation/Assessment*, concerning the specific settings and technology provision can be envisaged for V/Hi students.

The ISOLEARN Consortium developed concrete guidelines and recommendations on how to design and deliver an accessible learning offer based on ICT tools for each of these 5 stages (*ISOLEARN Handbook, Part II - Technology enhanced Learning*).

It should be underlined that the guidelines are more focused on the accessibility of the didactics content, rather than on the physical accessibility since these aspects are usually regulated by national laws and policies.

Methodology proposed to implement inclusion strategies

The Consortium approach is based on the vision that 'inclusion should not be just a question of willingness'.

To become a reality, inclusion of visual and hearing students in HEIs must be promoted through real policies that should be discussed and implemented widely in each HEI, involving all the academic staff in a top-down approach.

To support the implementation of this recommendation, the ISOLEARN Partnership invites the universities staff to reflect on the level, and thus the appropriateness, of the accessibility their university guarantee to the visual and hearing impaired learners, at different stages of the learning process.

ISOLearn Quality Label, a checklist including quality criteria to assess the accessibility level of the academic programmes and the services is proposed as self-evaluation tool.

In order to support the visual/hearing impaired students' learning in HEIs study courses, quality indicators are identified per each stage of the course *Policy / Strategy of the course, Conception and Delivery of the course, Learners' Evaluation and Assessment*. Per each stage are also proposed quality indicators of the *Strategic Planning* and the related *Daily Management of Operations*.

The indicators are both general and specific according to the particular impairment (visual or hearing) of the students and their real learning needs

For each question universities can choose one of the five options of answers proposed: *Not executed; Not planned but occasionally executed; Partially planned and executed; Planned and systematically executed; Planned, systematically executed and evaluated*.

The *ISOLEARN Quality Label* should be considered mainly as a tool to raise awareness and promote policy discussions within universities, in order to promote and increase the effectiveness of inclusion policies of the Institutions for visual and hearing impaired students.

The ISOLEARN Quality Label

Indicators about the Policy/Strategy of the Institution regarding Inclusion
Strategic Planning
1.1 At the level of the strategy or policy guiding documents of the HEI, is it clearly stated the need to support the inclusion of these students?
1.2 Does the total budget of the HEI dedicate a percentage to promote the inclusion of these students, by guaranteeing the access to the necessary resources to achieve it (e.g. special equipment; psychological support; training, etc.)?
1.3. Is the participation of representatives of these students promoted, at the decision making level?
1.4. Does the HEI promote partnerships with associations/organisations representing these students disabilities aiming at:
a. Ensuring quality staff training?
b. Acquiring knowledge of technological advances?
c. Assessing the quality of the support services provided?
1.5. Is the teaching staff advised on how to create an inclusive environment?
1.6. Are positive attitudes among colleagues and the teaching and non-teaching staff promoted?
1.7. Is the student union involved in the inclusion of these students?
1.8. Are KPIs that clearly monitor and control the different levels of services and teaching offered to these students promoted?

Daily Management of Operations
1.a) Is there an office dedicated to the support of students with special educational needs?
1.b) Is there trained staff to provide all the support that these students might needed?
1.c) The academic community is regularly trained on the needs of these students in order to develop higher educational good practices?
1.d) The teaching staff is advised on the needs of these students and on the adjustments to teaching strategies and materials?
1.e) Is there a professional who provides individualized educational support?
1.f) Are the different levels of services and teaching offered to these students regularly monitored, through KPIs dedicated to this issue?

Indicators regarding Course Conception
Strategic Planning
2.1. Is it assured that each course is in line with the requirements to guarantee the inclusion of these students?
2.2. Is the consultation of these students as to the adjustments that need to be guaranteed both on an individual and collective basis, to assure their inclusion, promoted?
2.3. Are procedures to monitor regularly the course's developments and the daily offer defined, in terms of the inclusion policy adopted?
Daily Management of Operations
2.a) Are the adequate conditions to information accessibility for these students made available in all classes?
2.b) Is the academic community involved in the specific courses where these students are enrolled trained?
2.c) Are these students regularly consulted regarding possible needed improvements of accessibility conditions?

Indicators regarding the Delivery of the Course
Strategic Planning
3.1. Is the adequate follow-up of the course delivery and of teaching practices by a trained professional promoted?
Daily Management of Operations
3.a) Are course/class materials, including copies of the content of presentations delivered in advance to these students?
3.b) Do students have an assistant to take notes in classes?

**Specific Strategic Planning indicators and Daily Management of Operations
for the Delivery of the Course
specifically addressed to HEARING IMPAIRED STUDENT**

Strategic Planning for HEARING IMPAIRED STUDENT

3.2.1. Is it assured that all information transmitted orally is made accessible?

3.2.2. Is the visual presentation of information (graphs, diagrams, illustrations, etc.) enhanced?

3.2.3 Are captioning in videos and transcription of recordings making use of oral language, including environmental sounds whenever relevant to the understanding of the context, making clear who is speaking if there is more than one person, provided?

3.2.4. Is the use of the FM signal amplification system enabled, when needed?

Daily Management of Operations for HEARING IMPAIRED STUDENT

3.c.1) Is there a specialized reference professional with competence in sign language, to welcome, accompany and guide these students and raise awareness of their teachers?

3.c.2) Is there sign language interpretation whenever it is asked for?

3.c.3) Given that the HI student can only look at a stimulus at a time, does the lecturer make sure that the view of a particular material and its explanation do not occur simultaneously?

3.c.4) Is the use of voice to text processors allowed during classes?

**Specific Strategic Planning indicators and Daily Management of Operations
for the Learners' Evaluation/Assessment for courses
addressed to VISUAL IMPAIRED STUDENTS**

Strategic Planning

3.3.1. Is it assured that all information transmitted visually is made accessible?

3.3.2. Is it assured that visual presentation of information (graphs, diagrams, illustrations, maps, etc.) is described verbally and/or made available in advance with embossed or text versions?

3.3.3. Is it assured that the content presentations follow the legibility guidelines needed for VI students?

3.3.4. Is audio-description of videos that do not make use of oral language provided?

3.3.5. Is proof reading by VI students of scanned course materials undertaken by the services promoted?

3.3.6. Is it assured that libraries and similar services are equipped with assistive technology (hardware and software) that allow VI students to access information via Braille, audio, digital or magnification?

Daily Management of Operations

3.d.1) Are materials in alternative formats (Braille, large print, audio, digital, tactile representations) delivered, whenever they are asked for?

3.d.2) Can the VI student choose the best place to sit in a face-to-face classroom?

3.d.3) Are VI students allowed to have access to electrical supply to run assistive technology in the classroom?

3.d.4) Is the use of voice recording allowed during classes?

3.d.5) Is secure storage space for the assistive technologies used by the VI student made available?

3.d.6) Do VI students have an assistant on study visits and field trips and in group study exercises?

3.d.7) Are professionals involved in handling the adaptation of materials trained in the usage of the hardware and software needed for that purpose?

3.d.8) Is there an experienced O&M instructor, in case of need, to help VI students to become familiar with the campus and surrounding area?

Indicators for Learners' Evaluation/Assessment
Strategic Planning
4.1. Are individual plans drawn up, jointly with the student, the teaching and the support staff, covering possible adjustments to be made to the regular methods of assessment in face of the special needs of these students?
4.2. Is it assured, whenever possible, that these students are entitled to be evaluated by continuous assessment instead of end of semester/year exams?
Daily Management of Operations
4.a) Is tolerance time granted on written tests/exams? 4.b) In the above situation, whenever the additional time to an exam makes it excessively long, is it divided into parts to be sat separately?

Specific Strategic Planning indicators and Daily Management of Operations for the Learners' Evaluation/Assessment for courses addressed to HEARING IMPAIRED STUDENTS

Strategic Planning

4.3.1. Are alternatives to the assessment made orally, as class participation, presentation of papers, oral examinations, etc., offered?

4.3.2. Are alternatives to assessment which requires listening and responding to audio input offered?

4.3.3. Depending on the nature of the course, is the possibility for the evaluation to be made by writing shorter written productions and sign language interpretation assured?

Daily Management of Operations

4.c.1) Is a sign language interpreter provided in evaluation situations, whenever the student feels the need?

4.c.2) Is content knowledge valued over grammatical competence in written assignments, considering that it does not correspond to the natural language of deaf students?

Specific Strategic Planning indicators and Daily Management of Operations for the Learners' Evaluation/Assessment for courses addressed to VISUAL IMPAIRED STUDENTS
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Strategic Planning

4.4.1 Is the possibility of VI students to be evaluated by alternative exams assessing different skills foreseen, when interpretation of visual content is key to success in the conventional exam?

4.4.2 Is it assured that, in written exams, charts, graphs and other visual information are converted into text?
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4.4.3 Is it assured that VI students are allowed to use assistive technology when other students are not permitted to use ICT?
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Daily Management of Operations

4.d.1) Are VI students allowed to set oral exams instead of written ones?

4.d.2) Are VI students allowed to record oral responses to written questions?

Indicators for the Evaluation of the Course
Strategic Planning
5.1 Are there procedures to evaluate the course that include KPIs regarding the inclusion of disabled students?
5.2 Are there evaluation procedures that consider the results of the evaluation feedback on the improvement of the course offer for the next year, comprehending the inclusion of disabled students?
5.3 Is it usual that the evaluation procedures implemented comprehend improvements on the level of inclusion of disabled students?
Daily Management of Operations
5.a. Are gaps on KPIs referring to inclusion, originating correction measures?
5.b Are procedures defined to open the new course offer, considering the correction measures decided to improve the inclusion level of the course?

MANIFESTO

to promote inclusion of visually and hearing-impaired students in HEIs in the EU

Inclusive Education for disabled people

Inclusive education of people with disabilities is often framed in terms of human rights or justice. Notwithstanding, the economic dimension for educating people with disabilities is also very relevant. Lack of appropriate education remains the key risk factor for poverty and exclusion of any person, whether they are disabled or not.

One of the key Europe 2020 targets is to have 'at least 20 millions fewer people in or at risk of poverty and social exclusion'. In addition, the 4th of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals stated in UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is "Guaranteeing equal and accessible education by building inclusive learning environments and providing the needed assistance for persons with disabilities".

This shows the great importance social inclusion has at European and International level and it demonstrates the strong need for: trans-national cooperation among Member States; an integrated approach involving Higher Education Institutions and relevant stakeholders such as policy makers, associations and NGOs; political measures for promoting and supporting social inclusion Europe wide.

Actions urge to foster social inclusion guaranteeing access to Higher Education to everyone.

Key challenges regarding inclusive education for hearing and visually impaired people

- promote access to tertiary education to support their employability and quality of life;
- foster inclusive ICT based learning programmes addressed to a wide range of beneficiaries;
- enhance and give recognition to individual capacities;
- develop integrated and common European policies on inclusive education.

Recommendations

Taking into consideration the European and International policies addressing inclusive education, and the related key challenges,

we propose

to take action in the following areas:

1. Integrated policies

A systemic approach in defining and provide EU policies, guidelines, recommendations and implementation instruments regarding inclusive education, allowing the adoption of a common view and action at Member States and HEIs level.

2. Awareness

The creation of a EU level umbrella network for universal access to Higher Education, involving teaching and not academic staff,

policy makers, stakeholders for the dissemination and exchange of good practices at Member States and Institutional level.

3. Financial resources

Support inclusion programs with an appropriate budget at HEI and Member State level. In any case, to define at Member State level a minimum fixed percentage of annual income of HEIs to be devoted to inclusion of students with different learning needs.

Innovative and Social Learning for HEI

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www.isolearn.net



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