



Services to people with disabilities in the mainstreaming environment in Europe

EPR survey

The survey items are designed to gather information about services to people with disabilities in the mainstreaming environment offered by members of EPR. In this study we are interested in learning about programmes and good practices that support inclusion of persons with disabilities in the mainstreamed environment in any of the following areas: early intervention, education, vocational training and employment, housing services and social care. Please note that, for each of these areas, we are only looking for **practices that support inclusion**.

By 'mainstreamed environment' we mean the common society, that is, environments that are not segregated or targeted to special groups. A regular school, the open labour market or a community facility that is opened to the general public are examples of 'mainstreamed environments'.

If your organisation offers several of these programmes or services, please select the one you consider more innovative or most successful and complete the survey. If you would like to provide information about an additional programme/service you can also do it by completing another survey (maximum two programmes/ services).

There may be some items in the survey that are not applicable for the selected programme or service. In these instances, please indicate "not applicable".

Although the term "programme" is used in this survey, it can be replaced with "service" or "practice" in all occurrences.



Organisational Information

Name of the Organisation: National Learning Network
(Rehab Group)

Country where the organization is located: Ireland

Title of the Programme/Service/practice: Education Support Service
Learning & Assessment

Contact Information (Include the name and relevant contact data for the primary contact person who can provide technical expertise regarding this Programme):

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Study Criteria	Description of the Study Criteria
I. Programme Information	
I (a) Goal of the Programme/service	<p>State the goal of the Programme/Service in clear terms.</p> <p>In 2003, the National Learning Network (NLN) and the Institute of Technology, Blanchardstown (ITB) through a shared understanding of inclusive education practices and an awareness of the types of difficulties encountered by college students, collaborated and developed an inclusive academic support service on the campus of ITB.</p> <p>The primary goal is to provide an inclusive education support service for all students at the Institute of Technology, Blanchardstown (ITB), a mainstream Higher Education Institute, regardless of whether students have a diagnosed disability. The service strives to promote students' independence and encourage them to develop the skills to see them through their time in college. These skills range from general study skills to anxiety management, social skills and confidence building. The goal is to empower the students to learn these specialist skills in order to self-manage their difficulties and prepare them for employment.</p> <p>The Assessment Service provides a profiling service annually to all first year students at ITB. Each student receives feedback on their learning profile (learning style and learning strengths and weaknesses), in addition to advice and strategies on effective study methods.</p>



	<p>In addition to accommodating students with medical and other support needs that have been referred by Student Services, the Learning & Assessment Service team also provides support to the entire student population, so that any student who needs support is welcome to come to the service to make an appointment.</p>
<p>I (b) Outcome Measures of the Programme</p>	<p>State the Outcomes Measures for the children/adults involved.</p> <p>Evaluation is a central practice in all our inclusive learning support services.</p> <p>A recent study undertaken by staff at the service was exploratory in nature, and aimed to construct a profile of the frequency of service use, characteristics of service users and the precipitating factors which influenced students' decisions to seek the assistance. There were two sources of data. Service use data from the 2009-2014 period were used. Data from the 2013-2014 student evaluation survey were also analysed (n=44).</p> <p>To quantitatively analyse data, non-parametric tests of difference, Chi Square and crosstab analyses were used. These analyses explored the profile of students who used the service.</p> <p>To qualitatively analyse data, content analysis was used to categorise and explore the reasons why students sought to access the service.</p> <p>In addition to this the 2013-2014 student evaluation survey was both qualitatively and quantitatively analysed. Students were prompted to complete the survey and there was a response rate of 35%.</p> <p>A Profile of Service Users</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 552 students used the service between 2009 and 2014. • 53% of the students who attended were female, representing a fairly even gender split. • 42% of those attending had one or more of over 30 different diagnoses. Each diagnosis was associated with a particular profile of learning needs. • 58% did not have a formal diagnosis. • The age range of students accessing the service was 18-57 (M=27.02, SD=8.55). <p>The service continuously analyses trends in service use and gathers feedback both quantitatively and qualitatively. Evaluation serves to guide the service in its adaptation and development to meet students' needs and is essential to maintaining a high standard of service delivery</p> <p><i>Outcome measures may be qualitative or quantitative. There may be organisational outcomes that are used to measure the outcome performance. These measures may include number of clients, length of time in the Programme, level and types of participation/community engagement..</i></p>



<p>I (c) Theory used for the Programme</p>	<p>State the theoretical principles that underline the programme/service.</p> <p>The service recognises the need for a biopsychosocial model of support to be made widely available for students across the campus. By adopting a model such as this the service recognises that biological, psychological (which entails thoughts, emotions, and behaviors), and social (socio-economical, socio-environmental, and cultural) factors all play a significant role in human functioning and thus academic achievement in the context of a person's difficulties, disability or medical condition. Students with disabilities should be made aware that their academic life is often intertwined with their social and emotional wellbeing, and therefore engaging with supports on all of these levels can create positive change. The NLN service has found that an assessment of psychosocial functioning as part of the initial meeting with a student provides a valuable indicator of the type of support needed. Providing a service informed by research and grounded in psychology allows students to seek help in relation to their perhaps less visible difficulties and access low intensity interventions to improve wellbeing, coping, self-esteem and confidence; manage stress and anxiety, and foster social interconnectedness.</p> <p>For students with a mild to moderate level of psychosocial difficulties, the NLN staff employ low-intensity interventions tailored to meet the student's needs, which support achievement of academic potential; improvement of well-being and development of connectedness with their peers. Where psychological distress is pervasive or complex and needs are high, staff refer the student to a mental health professional in order for them to access intensive support. These low-intensity psychological interventions are drawn from a number of psychological approaches with a strong evidence-base. In order to provide the student with a set of functional and beneficial coping strategies, key concepts from the Wellness Recovery Action Planning approach are used, namely the "Wellness toolbox" (WRAP; Copeland, 2002). Wellness tools may include recognizing personal strengths and developing coping strategies - fundamental factors for achieving success (Nalavany, Carawan, & Rennick, 2011). For students whose emotional difficulties are rooted in negative thinking patterns, APs draw from Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT; Beck, 1967). CBT is used to address the thought processes and assumptions that underlie their difficulties, a strategy that is particularly helpful at targeting an individual's beliefs about his or herself, others, and the world. It works to solve current problems and change unhelpful thinking and behaviour that antecede and perpetuate psychosocial difficulties.</p> <p>Managing, regulating and coping with emotions is also targeted, using skills such as distress tolerance and mindfulness, drawn from Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT; Linehan, 1987). Mindfulness is a well-established and evidence-based intervention which is not only effective in reducing stress for students (Beddoe & Murphy, 2004; Rosenzweig et al., 2003; Shapiro, Schwartz, & Bonner, 1998), but can also significantly improve reading comprehension, working memory capacity, and focus (Mrazek et al., 2013).</p> <p><i>Examples may include rights-based approach; person-driven</i></p>
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	<p><i>planning; family-driven planning; self-determination. Please specify whether theoretical principles specifically include community participation and engagement with mainstream society.</i></p>
<p>I (d) Year Programme was initiated and milestones in development</p>	<p>Identify the date when the Programme started.</p> <p>NLN Assessment Service has been providing a student support service for the Institute of Technology Blanchardstown (ITB) since September 2003 to date. The service, which originated in a number of successful projects, has grown from strength to strength over the past 12 years, so much so that both ITB staff and students perceive NLN staff as being an integral part of the day-to-day student services within ITB. The highly qualified team currently working in the service have the competencies and skills to provide a number of services that are necessary for a diverse student population, from supporting students with general study skills to supporting students who experience stress, anxiety, and more serious mental health difficulties.</p> <p>Services have evolved from needs identified through screening and profiling of student's own perceptions of their learning strengths and weaknesses and learning styles and preferences.</p> <p>This partnership allows for profiling of all First Year ITB students and the provision of specialist and general support to students during the entire calendar year (including academic holidays). Each individual student receives feedback on his/her learning profile and receives advice and strategies for supporting him/her with study at the beginning of their first year in the college. There is a high uptake on the voluntary screening and profiling exercise which is offered online as part of induction. Students receive immediate printed feedback on their learning styles with some suggestion about how they should best study. The data from this exercise is analysed, and, approximately 10% of the cohort will be deemed to have possible difficulty without support or intervention and will be invited to visit the service for verbal feedback which usually leads to a series of support meetings. There is exceptionally high uptake on this initiative, which ensures that those most likely to be vulnerable in the essential early weeks of the new course will be supported and reassured from the earliest possible opportunity.</p> <p>A further benefit of this screening and profiling exercise is that any lecturer may request a group learning styles profile report, which will indicate ways in which the group will best respond and make suggestions to the lecturer in respect of delivery.</p> <p><u>PACTS (2004-2006)</u> As mentioned above this service originated in a number of projects, one of those being the PACTS Project (Partners Collaborating in Training for Individuals with Specific Learning Difficulties). As a result of shared concerns, agreement was made between the National Learning Network, the Institute of Technology Blanchardstown and the Dyscovery Centre, Cardiff, Wales to explore how individuals with specific learning difficulties could be provided with services that would identify their needs and offer support and remediation. The lack of awareness and training for professionals, parents and employers was also identified as a key area needing to be addressed on a large</p>



	<p>scale, and it was decided to make a joint application for Interreg funding to collaboratively create mainstream networks to address these two main issues. The aim of the project was to empower individuals with specific learning difficulties to achieve their potential. This project aimed to increase access to third level/college/ university education and employment for individuals who may have had conditions that precluded them from achieving their academic goals.</p> <p><u>SIF (Strategic Innovation Fund) 2007-2009</u> The overall aim of this project was to initiate and support the transition to widespread use of inclusive teaching and learning methodologies based on work done to date in research-based pilot initiatives. The project had two key objectives: Objective 1. Disseminate the expertise and training material on specific learning difficulties, developed during the PACTS project, to a number of academic disciplines and institutions. Objective 2. Develop and deliver modules using inclusive learning methodologies.</p> <p>A more recent initiative in ITB is that of “<u>Improving the First Year Experience</u>” which is one of the recommendations made in the Higher Education Strategy to 2030 (Department of Education and Skills, 2011). NLN contributes to the First Year Experience Working Group in ITB. One of the primary goals of this working group was to set up a peer mentoring programme on campus for first year students. A pilot programme was run during the first semester of the 2014-2015 academic year and it was very successful with positive feedback from both staff and students. As a result of this success, the programme has been expanded and is being run again in the current academic year for a larger group of first year students.</p> <p><i>Support information may include milestones, turning points, main changes to improve the practice. Please specify whether these developments increased community participation and engagement of your clients in mainstream society.</i></p>
<p>I (e) Staffing patterns of the Programme</p>	<p>Identify the number of staff by titles and responsibilities.</p> <p><u>Educational Psychologist</u> The Educational Psychologist has an upper second class honours degree in psychology, a Higher Diploma in Education, and a Masters in Professional Educational Psychology The Educational Psychologists responsibilities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Screening of all in-coming referral information and carrying out appropriate assessments where necessary. • Supervision of other psychologists in the service • Liaise with student support services staff in ITB. • Screen large cohorts of students for SpLD’s, analyse the results, providing feedback and recommendations to academic staff on the outcome of such screening • Attend and present at relevant conferences and seminars and regularly provide seminars and workshops to academic staff. • Carry out relevant research related to work in the service • Provision of seminars for students in areas of learning including essay writing, research skills, academic protocols,



report writing, thesis writing, examination and study techniques, and others as required.

- Provision of learning support for third level students in the form of individual and small group tutorials
- Liaison with academic, administrative and support staff on protocols and procedures for supporting individual students with disabilities and specific learning difficulties including reasonable accommodations in examinations, assessment and learning.

Assistant Psychologist

The Assistant Psychologist typically has an upper 2nd class honours degree in Psychology as well as a Masters in a specific area of psychology or Applied Psychology. The Assistant Psychologist's responsibilities include:

- Holistic assessment of academic, social, and emotional needs of students, and completion of Learning and Academic Needs reports confirming to standards required by the academic institution and Higher Education Authority.
- Co-ordinates and monitors academic, social and emotional supports
- Liaises with academic staff, Student Support Services, Examinations Offices and Academic Departments in making appropriate accommodations in relation to the examination process, including continuous assessment, project / dissertation submissions
- Liaises with colleagues in Student Support Services in relation to supports for students presenting with a range of disabilities / specific learning difficulties / mental health difficulties and others;
- Provides training to internal and external groups on a range of topics such as disability awareness, cognitive skills, academic and mental health needs in educational settings and working with diverse student populations.
- Prepares reports on the above activities for the Institute and for external funding agencies.
- Administers some psychometric tests, analysis and report writing under supervision of an Educational Psychologist
- Provides holistic, one-to-one low intensity academic, social, emotional and daily living skills interventions using a variety of psychological approaches (CBT, DBT, Mindfulness, ACT, Wellness Recovery Action Planning etc.)

Bookkeeper/Admin Support (1 day per week)

General booking and administration duties pertaining to the service

In addition to these roles, the service also has access to support from various other NLN staff both in the Region and nationally i.e. the Regional Director, rehabilitation psychologists, rehabilitation officers, resource teachers and instructors. The Educational Psychologist receives regular supervision from the National Senior Psychologist.

This information will describe the number of staff positions,



	<p><i>position titles, position qualifications, and percentage of full time equivalency for each position.</i></p> <p><i>Please specify staff roles directly related to promoting community participation and engagement of your clients in mainstream society.</i></p>
I (f) Physical location of the Programme	<p>Describe the Programme's location(s).</p> <p>The service is located on the ground-floor on the Campus of the Institute of Technology Blanchardstown (ITB), Dublin 15, Ireland and is completely and easily accessible to all ITB students and staff.</p> <p>A key-underpinning factor to its success is the partnership that has been developed with ITB and the overall campus awareness and access to the service. Lecturers and administrative staff alike are offered seminars on learning styles, and a range of specialist issues that may arise, in particular with respect to Specific Learning Difficulties. Many lecturers assess their own delivery styles and match them to the needs of their current course cohorts.</p> <p><i>This information may include a description of multiple sites Accessibility and access to transportation may be included.</i></p> <p><i>Please specify whether the physical location of your programme contributes to the goal of community participation and engagement of your clients in mainstream society.</i></p>
II. Client Information	
II (a) Targeted clients admitted	<p>Identify the admission criteria including age, gender, disability, and any other qualifying characteristics.</p> <p>The service is available to the entire student population on an open door basis, that is, any student who feels that he/she needs support is welcome to come to the service at any time to make an appointment, regardless of whether he/she has a disability.</p> <p>Some examples of the different types of profiles of learners who attend the service from this perspective are as follows:</p> <p>Students with specific learning difficulties (SPLD) Students who have been diagnosed with an SPLD or think they may need to be assessed for SPLD attend the service for support. SPLD's can include Dyslexia and Dyspraxia and other related difficulties such as Autistic Spectrum Disorders and Attention Deficit Disorders. Individualised learning support is provided as well as support to promote self-esteem and confidence, and support with stress and anxiety which is particularly prevalent in the area of Autistic Spectrum Disorders.</p> <p>Students with other disabilities The service includes support and interventions to a full spectrum of disabilities, including mobility, sensory, and significant ongoing illnesses (e.g. diabetes, Chrones Disease, Cancer). Many</p>



	<p>students with disabilities may have some evidence of SPLD and it is important to incorporate this understanding into interventions that will optimise the campus experience.</p> <p>Students with social skills difficulties Students who experience difficulties with the social aspects of college life attend the service. This may be as a result of a diagnosed condition (most commonly in the area of ASD or Dyspraxia). Social skills training is provided. Specifically tailored social skills programmes have been developed each year to support individual students and groups of students. Practical strategies are used to promote positive social interactions, which in turn has an impact on academic achievement.</p> <p>Students with mental health difficulties There are a number of students with mental illnesses such as bipolar disorder, social anxiety disorder, depression, generalised anxiety disorder, schizophrenia who attend for support. For these students, it is important to have consistent support in college that are aware of their difficulty and that can support them in maintaining their recovery and managing their stress. Some of these students have overlapping difficulties in the area of SPLD also. The assistant psychologist has a very good understanding and awareness of the difficulties associated with mental health and the impact of these difficulties on a students academic study and therefore, can be very effective in putting the right supports and interventions in place</p> <p>Mature students Students coming back to education after a number of years often attend for support in relation to learning the skills needed to work at third level. These students can often have a past history of educational disadvantage, and undiagnosed SPLD. These students also may need support around anxiety management coming up to exams and support with building self-esteem.</p> <p><i>This information includes number of clients admitted on an annual basis. Identify if they are admitted on the basis of specific sociodemographic characteristics.</i></p>
<p>II (b) Number of clients currently in the Programme</p>	<p>Identify the number of current clients in the Programme.</p> <p>160 students sought support from the service in the last academic year (2014-2015). The majority of these students were first year students. The service operates on the basis that it provides more intensive supports to first year students and endeavours to empower the students to develop skills in order to be able to self-manage their disabilities / difficulties and they will be less reliant on the service for the remainder of their course. However, the service will still see students who are in their 2nd, 3rd and 4th years of study. Many students access the service in 3rd and 4th year for support with theses or dissertations as part of their Degree programme.</p> <p>It is expected that the service will see approx 160 students again in the coming academic year.</p>



	<i>This information provides the actual number of clients by the selection criteria identified in the “Target Programme clients” study criteria. Cite the time period for this data.</i>
II (d) Involvement of the Family members	<p>Describe how the family members are oriented to and involved in the Services provided.</p> <p>The profile of students attending the college includes a high percentage of students who have just completed second level school (Leaving Certificate standard) and many have had access to a range of supports at second level from low level supports to high supports. Often the family are very involved in the students’ education. The NLN service recognises the important role of the family in the students’ life and very much welcomes their involvement, while at the same time being cognisant of the fact that many of the students are now adults and may choose not to have involvement from family. Permission and consent is always sought prior to any liaison with family members.</p> <p><i>This information describes specific approaches that involve the family members in the services. This may include involvement in planning and developing the outcome measures.</i></p>

III. Programme Activities, Services and Intervention

III (a) Activities during the Programme targeted to the clients	<p>Describe the Programme activities that are targeted to the clients.</p> <p>The Assessment Service offers the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of individual and group study skills including - essay writing, research skills, referencing protocols, report writing, examination techniques • Provision of specifically tailored learning support for students with specific learning difficulties • Liaison and advisory role with academic, administrative and support staff to support a diverse student population • Provision of psycho-educational assessments as needed • Preparation of Higher Education Authority (HEA) applications (Needs Assessments) for funding on behalf of students • Preparation of Learning Agreements to provide reasonable accommodations in examinations, assessment and learning • Profiling of all incoming first years students to assess their learning profile and provide group feedback reports to lecturing staff • Provision of stress reduction techniques, relaxation tips and anxiety management for students • Promotion of positive mental health through use of educational wellness programmes informed by the Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP) programme, low intensity cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and dialectical behavioural therapy (DBT) interventions • Liaison with Student Support Services team at ITB (student support officer, careers officer, student counsellor, nurse, sports development officer).
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment of Assistive Technology requirements and training on equipment for students where necessary <p>Each assessment of needs is unique to each student and subject to change over the course of their stay on the ITB campus. Any plan co-developed with students (and/or family members or other stakeholders) will reflect the student's needs and ambitions and seek to ensure successful outcomes are achieved by the student.</p> <p>Some students make occasional and infrequent use of the services whereas others may need to avail of its supports weekly. Some avail of 1:2:1 supports, some avail of group sessions, some avail of a mixture of the different support types.</p> <p>Students are free to attend group or 1:2:1 sessions on a wide range of topics, including for example socialisation skills for students with a diagnosis of ASD, ADHD or similar. Their ability to engage more fully in the social aspects of life on campus – through sports, leisure and recreation as well as more academic pursuits – lies at the heart of NLN's approach. What the students learn in ITB from NLN equips them for life in general, and enables them to participate more fully in the life of their community and in mainstream society.</p> <p><i>These activities will be different according to the Programme. For example an Inclusive Education Programme may include support to the design of individualized educational plans, ongoing support to the educational and medical needs of the child, disability awareness-raising activities for the school community, among others.</i></p> <p><i>Describe if all clients go through the same activities or if programmes are individualised based on the clients' needs.</i></p> <p><i>Please specify how activities developed contribute to the goal of community participation and engagement of your clients in mainstream society.</i></p>
<p>III (b) Activities involving the family members</p>	<p>Describe the services and involvement of the family members and other close friends and support persons working with the client.</p> <p>The profile of students attending the college includes a high percentage of students who have just completed second level school (Leaving Certificate standard) and many have had access to a range of supports at second level from low level supports to high supports. Often the family are very involved in the students' education. The NLN service recognises the important role of the family in the students' life and very much welcomes their involvement, while at the same time being cognisant of the fact that some students may not wish to have the family involved. Permission and consent is always sought from students prior to any liaison with their family members.</p> <p>Activities that involve family members include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • involvement in an IEP process • Needs Assessment



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • meetings with academic staff • meetings with ITB support staff <p><i>This information will describe services that are provided with and/or for the family members. This may include modifications of the home, support social and recreational activities in non-education and non-work experience activities, and addressing issues of living independently.</i></p>
<p>III (c) Activities involving community partners</p>	<p>Describe services or activities that involve community partners.</p> <p>ITB's mission, www.itb.ie/AboutITB/mission.html, to increase the level of participation in third level education in Dublin North-West and to ensure that there is a relatively high proportion of "non-standard entrants", including students with disabilities is one NLN readily acknowledges given our own focus and ethos. Approximately 5-6% of students in ITB request some type of learning support from specialist staff. These facts and figures relate to those students who have been identified prior to college and gained a diagnosis. It doesn't include the other students who experience significant difficulties but for a variety of reasons have not been assessed or diagnosed. In the last academic year, 2014-2015, 61% of students who sought learning support from the NLN service in ITB did not have a diagnosis. This emphasises the strong need for such a service for students at ITB and illustrates NLN's ability to support this cohort of students.</p> <p>ITB regularly requests the services of NLN to support their relationships and involvement with local secondary schools in the greater Blanchardstown area. Groups of second level students are invited on campus several times throughout the academic year to encourage the students to consider third level as an option when leaving school. The NLN service works with these students in the form of workshops and seminars helping them investigate their learning styles, strengths and weaknesses, team building skills, communication skills and interview skills.</p> <p><i>This information will include descriptions of how education institutions, vocational and apprentice training, employers or other community service organisations, etc. are involved in an ongoing basis on your Programme.</i></p>
<p>III (d) Activities targeting community partners</p>	<p>Describe services or activities targeting community partners.</p> <p>The service in ITB operates in the context of all the other public, voluntary NGO and even commercial services that may assist students experiencing difficulties with life on or off the ITB campus.</p> <p>NLN will recommend and assist with referrals to relevant agencies and if required advocate on behalf of students so that access can be granted to them on an as-needed basis.</p>



	<p><i>This information will include descriptions of activities or practices that your organizations sporadically undertakes in order to raise disability awareness or develop linkages with education institutions, vocational and apprentice training, employers or other community service organisations.</i></p>
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IV. Public Authority/Legislative Information

<p>IV (a) Legal Basis for the Programme</p>	<p>Identify the legal framework of the programme.</p> <p>The Higher Education Authority (HEA), a functional unit within the Irish Government's Department of Education and Skills (DES), is responsible for resource allocation at third level (in higher education institutes or HEIs) based on detailed annual audits that measure each HEI's performance against published and transparent criteria.</p> <p>Each HEI is free to design and fund its services to students with disabilities. Within the allocations made by the HEA, there is some funding ring-fenced for students with disabilities. ITB is unusual in that it has also allocated core funding based on capitation to these services. This is entirely at its discretion and is justifiable based on the downstream funding benefit to ITB of students staying in college.</p> <p>NLN competes in an open competition to bid for the supply of these services to ITB, under standard EU procurement rules. NLN signs a detailed service level agreement (SLA) i.e. contract with ITB, should it prove successful in the tendering process.</p> <p><i>This information should include, if available, the rationale for this legislative Framework.</i></p> <p><i>Please specify whether the legislation contains specific references to the goal of community participation and engagement of clients in mainstream society</i></p>
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<p>IV (b) Funding base</p>	<p>Identify the source(s) of the funding for the Programme (i.e., the government agency providing the support), the percentage of expenses it covers, the rate of co-payment per client if existent, and the length of time for the funding.</p> <p>All funding for this programme comes from the HEA, through the Irish Government's Department of Education and Skills.</p> <p><i>Please specify whether there is funding targeted to support the goal of community participation and engagement of clients in mainstream society</i></p>
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V. Programme Directions

<p>V (a) Challenges with the Programme</p>	<p>Identify challenges to develop the social participation and inclusion of your clients in mainstream society.</p>
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	<p>We know from research that male students tend to be less aware of support services on offer at third level, and are less likely to use them even when they recognised that they were struggling with aspects of university life (Woodfield & Thomas, n.d.) It is our goal to encourage male students to use the NLN service and to use it wisely e.g. at the beginning of a semester and not at the last minute just before exams or when assignments deadlines are fast approaching. The challenge for NLN is to find innovative ways to proactively target male students and encourage them to access our support services effectively.</p> <p>NLN is very proud of the excellent track record it has established with the students on ITB since 2004 but we recognise that more could be done to support them. NLN has excellent relationships with employers through its network of fifty centres across Ireland however a brokerage service for students with disabilities is not permitted nor required by the ITB or HEA. Whilst similar services have been operated by HEIs for many years in the UK, across all HE and FE sectors, this has not yet been established within the Irish educational system.</p> <p>This information may include organisational and individual challenges. These challenges can be organisational, structural, person and/or community related challenges that your Programme faces to improve social participation of your clients in mainstream society.</p>
<p>V (b) Opportunities with the Programme</p>	<p>Describe the opportunities that are available for the students and the organisation for developing and implementing the Programme.</p> <p>NLN is continuing to pursue opportunities to run this and similar programmes on other FE and HE campuses across Ireland, subject to participation in and success in bidding in tendering competitions.</p> <p>NLN is investigating the opportunity to have past participants on the programmes (either graduates or returning students) engage with the first year students to not alone explain the benefits but also pass on their own learning.</p> <p>NLN is actively exploring the option of creating an online community of practice, initially around assistive technology (AT) that would cater not alone to students seeking help, but to all the stakeholders in this space. By offering this online, NLN could tap into a wealth of experience/expertise latent in “champions” scattered across all the campuses / in every community in Ireland.</p> <p>NLN is engaged currently in one multi-campus research project on supporting students in HE with mental health issues. This project is being run in conjunction with the Association for Higher Education Access and Disability (AHEAD) and has captured the attention of the HEA. It is hoped this research will inform better service design.</p> <p><i>This information should include organisational, structural,</i></p>



	<p><i>person and/or community related opportunities that your Programme has to improve social participation of your clients in mainstream society. .</i></p>
<p>V (c) Suggestions for strengthening the Programme</p>	<p>Identify specific recommendations that will benefit other organisations that are replicating the Programme.</p> <p>It is recommended that the programme develop accordingly with students' ever-changing needs. One way in which the service could be improved is to provide more online support for the students.</p> <p>NLN has very recently launched a new and exciting online NLN Student Support Hub for use by all NLN learners. It brings together in one place a very wide range of resources to assist learners in their studies, progression and development of general life skills. The Student Support Hub contains lots of bite-sized support materials including videos and educational games covering areas such as Study Skills, Job Seeking, Starting a New Job, Going to Further & Higher Education, Volunteering, Work Experience, Health and Wellbeing, Mindfulness, Understanding Stress, Internet Safety and Security, Time Management, Managing Money and lots, lots more.</p> <p>It is expected that students at ITB will be given access to NLN's e-learning platform which includes a large section on student supports.</p> <p>NLN is currently working with staff at ITB to tap into the existing ITB social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter and be able to reach students better through this medium.</p> <p>NLN is also working with ITB staff to find ways to be more proactive in building relationships with key academic staff to promote awareness and understanding of learning difficulties and disabilities.</p> <p>The single greatest lesson for any HEI looking to replicate this programme is to open access to it to any student, irrespective of whether they have a diagnosis that confer HEA funding on them, or not. Whilst a technical business case can be made for this, purely on the basis of the funding streams available to the colleges and the downstream economic benefits of students staying in college right through to graduation, opening the service to any student illustrates a commitment to an inclusive society on the part of the college. ITB is to be congratulated for pioneering this approach within HEIs here.</p> <p><i>This information may include "lessons learned", practices that have applications for other Programmes, areas of change if replicating the Programme and changes in outreach, recruitment and services with the clients and their families and their community.</i></p>
<p>V (d) Additional Programme comments</p>	<p>Please give additional information to explain what makes this practice/service/programme particularly interesting or</p>



	<p>successful.</p> <p>In 2013-2014 an online, anonymous survey was distributed to students who had accessed the service. The following key findings emerged:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• In the 2013-2014 academic year, 91% of students surveyed felt that availing of the supports available to them improved their grades.• 49% rated the service as excellent, 35% as very good, 14% as good.• 18% felt that learning to manage anxiety, stress and depression was the most useful aspect of the service• 27% felt that simply having someone to talk to was the most useful aspect of the service.• 14% felt that learning about how to better their attention and concentration was the most useful.
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