



Unilink: A Shared Service Model

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Introduction

Unilink is a confidential, practical, evidence-based occupational therapy service for students who may be experiencing mental health and/or physical and sensory disabilities. Unilink is an innovative service between the Disability Service and the Academic Discipline of Occupational Therapy at TCD. The approach used within Unilink is rooted within the Recovery Model, as espoused by A Vision for Change (2006) as well as a combination of occupational therapy theory - the Person-Environment-Occupation Model (Law, Cooper, Strong, Stewart, Rigby & Letts, 1996) and the social model of disability (Terzi, 2004; Swain and French, 2000; Barnes and Mercer, 2010).

The service has grown over the past ten years from supporting 21 students with disabilities within Trinity College Dublin in 2004-05 to over 450 students with disabilities in HEIs across the Dublin region in 2012-13.

Unilink has been recognised nationally by the Higher Education Authority (HEA), Association of Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD), the Mental Health Commission and the Oireachtas Committee on Mental Health, as a model of good practice in supporting students within college. It has a proven track record in 'Institutional Leadership' and collaboration in supporting students with disabilities. It has a formal code of governance and its mission is to enhance the quality of the student experience for students with disabilities.

Aim of the Poster

In line with the shared service approach advocated by the National Strategy for Higher Education 2030, the Unilink service has developed a shared service model with other Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) across the Dublin region and now provides a Unilink service to Dublin City University (DCU), Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT), University College Dublin (UCD) and Marino Institute of Education, with the central hub within Trinity College Dublin.

The aim of this poster is to outline the development and implementation of the Unilink shared service model within these 5 HEIs across the Dublin region.

What does Unilink do?

In response to student needs Unilink has developed a number of approaches including;

- **Occupation focused assessment** using the Trinity Student Profile (Nolan, 2011), and other OT assessment tools.
- **Individual Collaborative Meetings** focusing upon occupational performance (Physical, sensory and cognitive) in the areas of leisure, student role and activities of daily living with the person.
- Assessment of the occupation of a student and adaptations to the occupation of being a student.
- Group and individual **orientation** programmes for students with disabilities.
- **Leisure Enhancement Groups** for students on the Autistic Spectrum.
- Individual Unilink **Self-Management Programme**
- Assessment and advice on **sensory processing** needs and environmental adaptations
- Tailored **Reasonable Accommodations**

Implementation of the Unilink Shared Service Model

Figure 1: Stages involved in the Implementation of the Unilink Service within HEIs

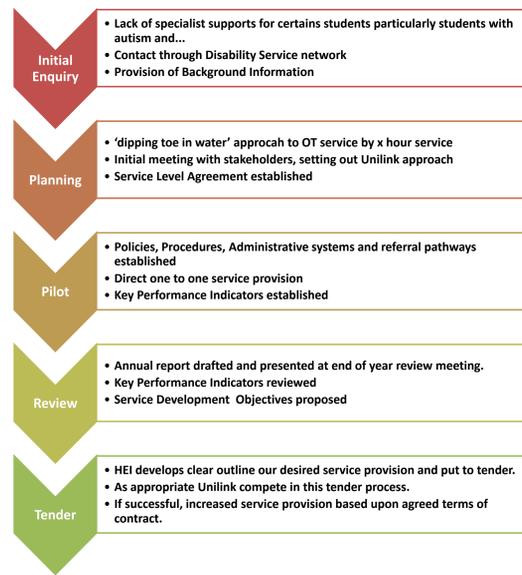


Figure 2: Key Tenets of the Unilink Service

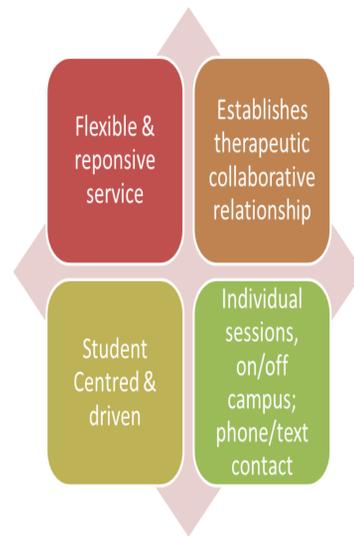
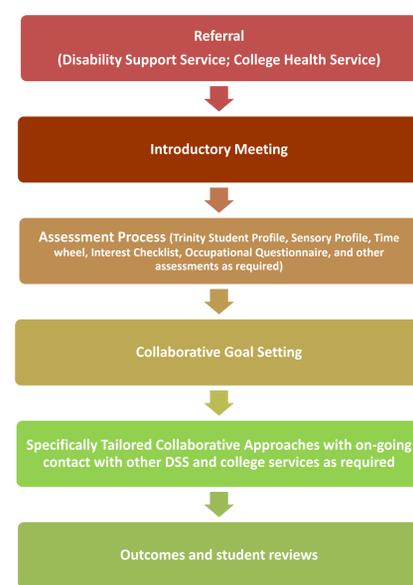


Figure 3: The Unilink Process for students availing of the Service



Discussion

Within the present economic climate of ever reducing funding, the provision of a shared service such as the one outlined here, can be seen purely as a cost saving exercise. However, the Unilink Shared Service Model has been built upon a foundation of collaboration between the Disability Service and the Discipline of Occupational Therapy in TCD, and has been developed with the aim of fostering collaboration and the sharing of good practice between student services in various HEIs. The rationale for developing the Unilink Shared Service Model is outlined below:

- To disseminate an effective Occupational Therapy approach to enabling students with disabilities to engage in their student role.
- To embed the service within each HEI's structures and ethos, to allow for an integrated approach to supporting students.
- To provide an alternative occupation focused student support service with practical outcomes for the student, which is complementary to existing disability, counselling and health services.
- To ensure quality and fidelity of this approach in various HEI settings.
- To foster collaboration between student services in various HEIs.
- To disseminate various approaches, policies and procedures, and administrative systems that can be developed and adapted to different HEI settings.
- The creation of a central hub of expertise, training, innovation, research, supervision, peer support and clinical governance in support of the model's development.

Future of Unilink as a Shared Service Model

The Unilink Service has successfully engaged in a rigorous e-tender process to provide an **on-campus** Occupational Therapy service within DCU, DIT, and UCD. Unilink is also provided to Marino Institute of Education, on an **off-campus** basis, where students come into TCD to meet with Occupational Therapists from the service. Unilink aims to develop further over the coming years, in providing both on-campus and off-campus services to students.

The Unilink service has developed a strategic plan in line with the TCD Disability Service's 3 phase student journey. As part of this plan, Unilink will be collaborating in a 'Transition to Employment' project (<http://www.tcd.ie/disability/career/Transition-to-Employment.php>), supported by funding from the Genio Trust. This project aims to develop an approach to supporting students into the workplace, and is a collaboration between all of the HEIs availing of the Unilink shared service.

Conclusion

Over the past 10 years, staff within Unilink have developed an effective, research based service, which has consistently been shown to enable students to engage in college and support retention. The development of the shared service model over the past three years has shown that this approach is transferable between HEIs.

Unilink Shared Service Outcomes

Figure 4: Student Numbers within shared service HEIs 2011-2012 and 2012-2013

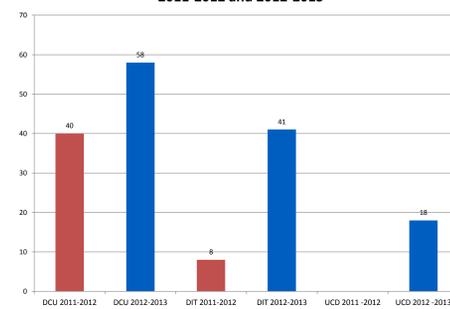


Figure 5: Diagnosis of Students 2012/13

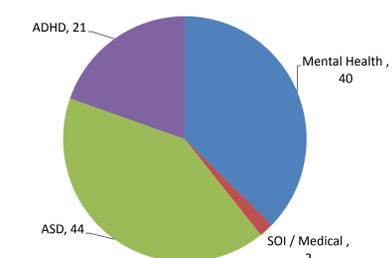


Figure 6: Outcomes of Service Evaluation 2011-12

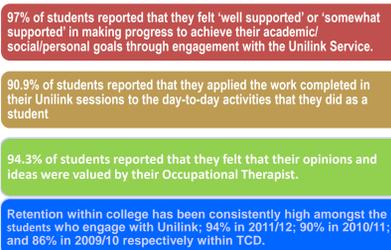


Figure 7: Feedback on the Unilink Shared Service Model from Disability Service in each HEI

UCD	DIT	DCU
"The process of introducing Unilink to UCD was led by the Unilink OT who had experience of introducing the service in other colleges. Unilink staff worked with the Disability Adviser to agree on a referral process for UCD students."	"We identified a support need for students who had presented with Mental Health Conditions and Autistic Spectrum Disorders. Some of these students did not specifically need academic support, but a more holistic and practical level of support to assist with (e.g.) life skills, coping mechanisms and time management (to name but a few)."	"We initially started off by sending 2 of our 'high-risk' students into TCD to meet with an OT once a week during our second semester. Due to the success of this support we decided to base an OT in the DCU campus once a week for the following academic year. Quickly this increased to 2 days a week until in 2013 we had 2 OT's sharing the 5 days."
"Unilink has met the need for regular, on-going, one-to-one support which the UCD Access Centre could not previously provide consistently to students who were struggling with the transition to college."	"We had heard strong feedback on the Unilink Service as used by other HEIs and initially started a pilot period of one semester. Feedback from students was very positive and thus we expanded the use of the service first to one, then two days per week. The process was a collaborative one with our colleagues in TCD and was both efficient and effective."	"Having Unilink has not only given us an additional support to help those students with high needs but it has also given us an additional professional perspective into the team. I think the variety of professionals within the DCU team now has meant a more diverse way of supporting students and has opened us up to alternative ways to encouraging independent learning."

Figure 8: Feedback from Students Availing of the Unilink Service

"OT has at times been the most important part of my recovery. Finished my degree and have a job, couldn't have done that without Unilink"	"The self-management programme is great because it can be used when you are doing well to maintain your mental health or when you might be going through a rough patch and because it is customised to suit your needs."	"This is a unique service. My OT has been the single greatest help to me in getting through college, and reaching my potential. My OT has also provided a forum for me to analyse how to address the difficulties I experience."
"The value of the service to me was immeasurable. I felt a perfect balance was struck between staying linked in and not being imposing. I have no doubt I would not have lasted the year if it wasn't for the service."	"I felt it was a brilliant service and correcting my own lapse in self management is the only improvement I'll be making going forward."	"I learned about college, I met new people and help was given to all my problems" - Student feedback on the Orientation Day for students with ASD.