

# Universal Design in the workplace

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# Plan today

- What is Universal Design (UD)?
- What is the history of UD?
- Introduce the European Accessibility Act & implications for service provision anywhere in the EU.
- Examples of good practice in areas of
  - Communication
  - Physical mobility accessibility
  - Physical environment to support psychosocial aspects
- UD as opposed to Reasonable Accommodation (RA).



# Universal Design

- Universal Design (UD) is the design and composition of an environment so that it can be accessed, understood and used to the greatest extent possible by all people regardless of their age, size, ability or disability. An environment (or any building, product, or service in that environment) should be designed to meet the needs of all people who wish to use it. This is not a special requirement, for the benefit of only a minority of the population. It is a fundamental condition of good design.
- CEUD established in 2007, following Disability 2005
- <https://universaldesign.ie/>

# What does it cover?

- All projects, services, policies, built environment, equipment, websites and communications.
- It involves asking end users about their work, what works for them and how they find solutions for current challenges.

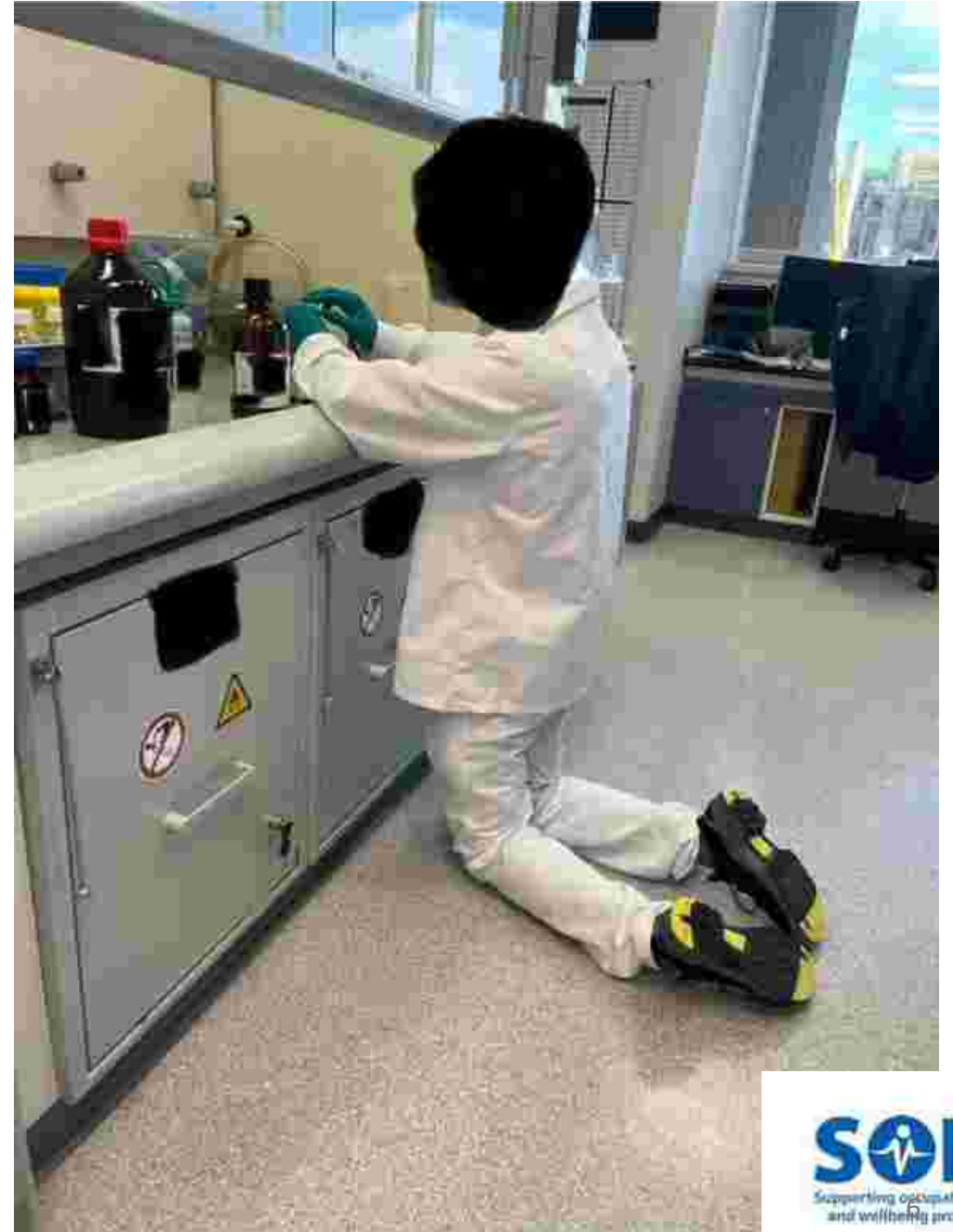
# Universal design



- Other names design-for-all, human centred design, design for diversity, inclusive design and user centred design.
- Not about disability, they are one group who benefit.
- Process driven.
- Our goal is progress not perfection.
- **Never perfect!**

# What it's not.....

- Universal design is not the same thing as access standards.
- It is not a special design for a few people.
- It is not “disabled design” or one-size fits all.
- It is not ugly design.



# Approaches to UD

## 7 principles of universal design: Ireland

1. Equitable use
2. Flexibility in use
3. Simple & intuitive use
4. Perceptible information
5. Tolerance for error
6. Low physical effort
7. Size & space for approach & use

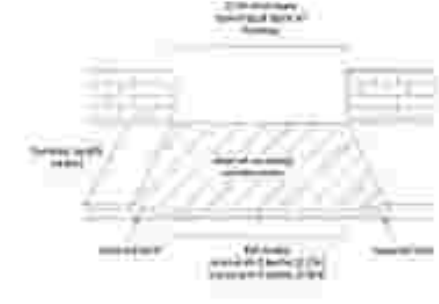
## 8 goals of universal design: Australia

1. Body fit
2. Comfort
3. Awareness
4. Understanding
5. Wellness
6. Social integration
7. Personalization
8. Cultural appropriateness

# History of universal design



## Barrier free design :USA



## Disability Specific Design (1970's, Selwyn Goldsmith UK)



- **Ron Mace, North Carolina University**



## Assistive Technology

- Human centred or human factors design. EG ergonomics
- Co-design/participatory design



# History of UD in Ireland & Europe

- The Institute for Design and Disability (IDD):1989
- European Institute for Design and Disability (EIDD): 1993
- The Centre for Excellence in Universal Design (CEUD) :2007



# European Accessibility Act

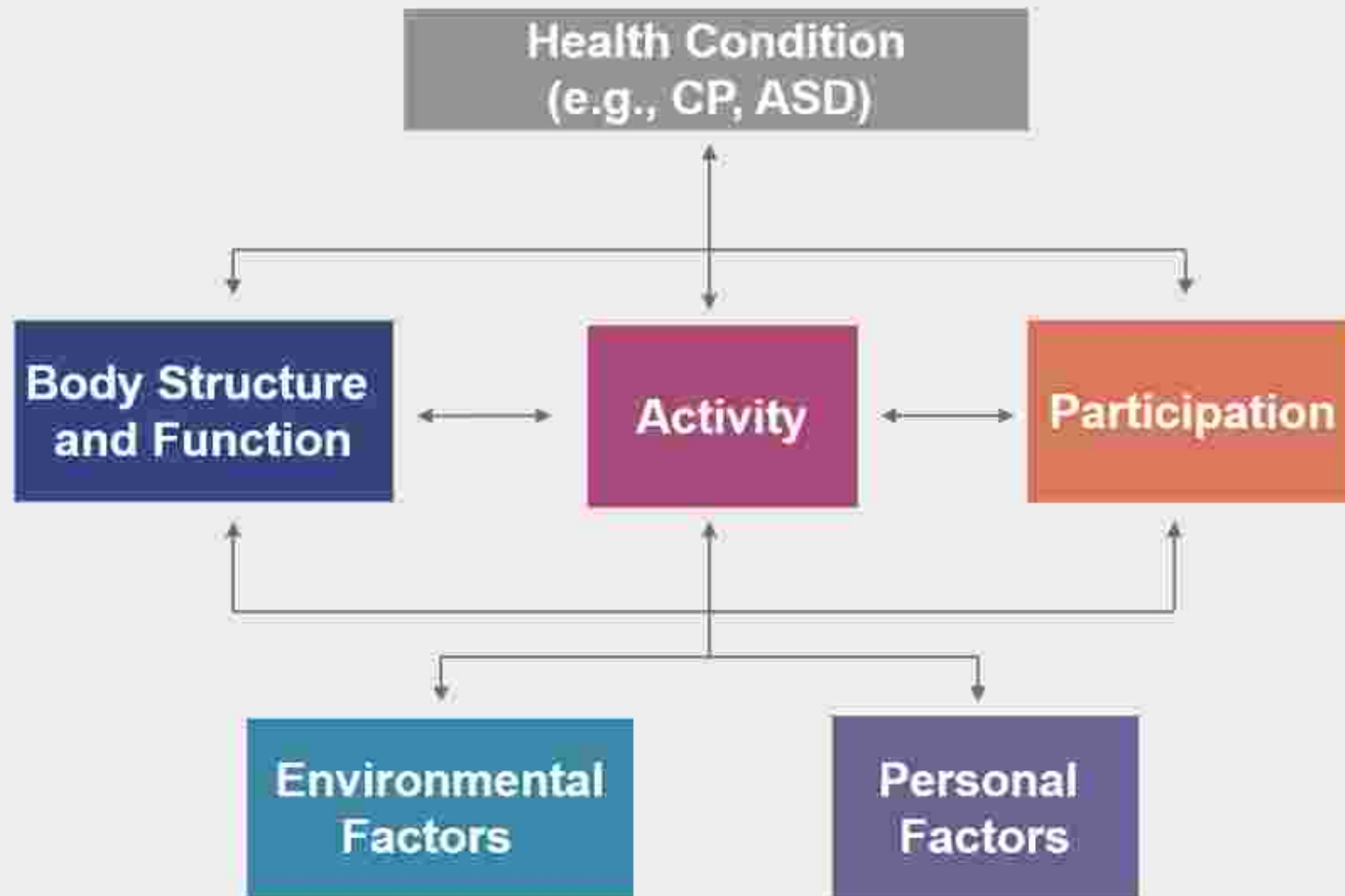
- The European Accessibility Act (EAA) is a European Directive that contains accessibility requirements for a range of products and services. The EAA commenced on **28 June 2025**.
- Applied to public procurement of products or services.



# Why UD & UK?

- UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).
- The UK ratified the Convention in 2009.
- eliminating disability discrimination
- enabling disabled people to live independently in the community
- ensuring an inclusive education system
- ensuring disabled people are protected from all forms of exploitation, violence and abuse
- The Equality Act 2010.....would it fall under this realm?

# ICF





## Good everyday examples of UD Equipment



# Disability design, universal design or modern life supports?



# UD & the built environment





# UD & the built environment





# Experiential examples of UD



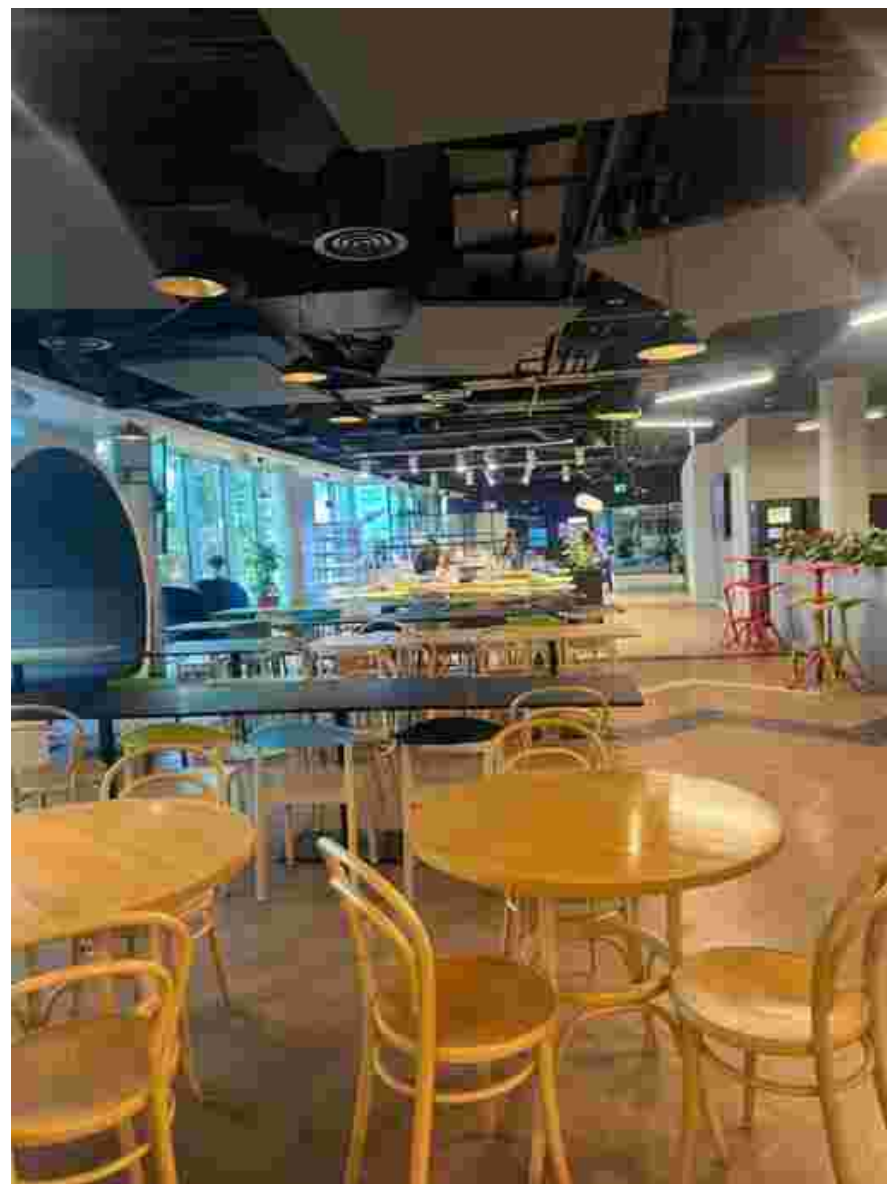
# Canteens & UD



  
CORK OT SERVICES

  
Supporting occupational health  
and wellbeing professionals

# Canteens & UD





# Communication

## Verbal

- Clear and simple
- Appropriate environment
- Use the same word for the same thing
- Pause after a question to allow for processing
- 3 phase communication

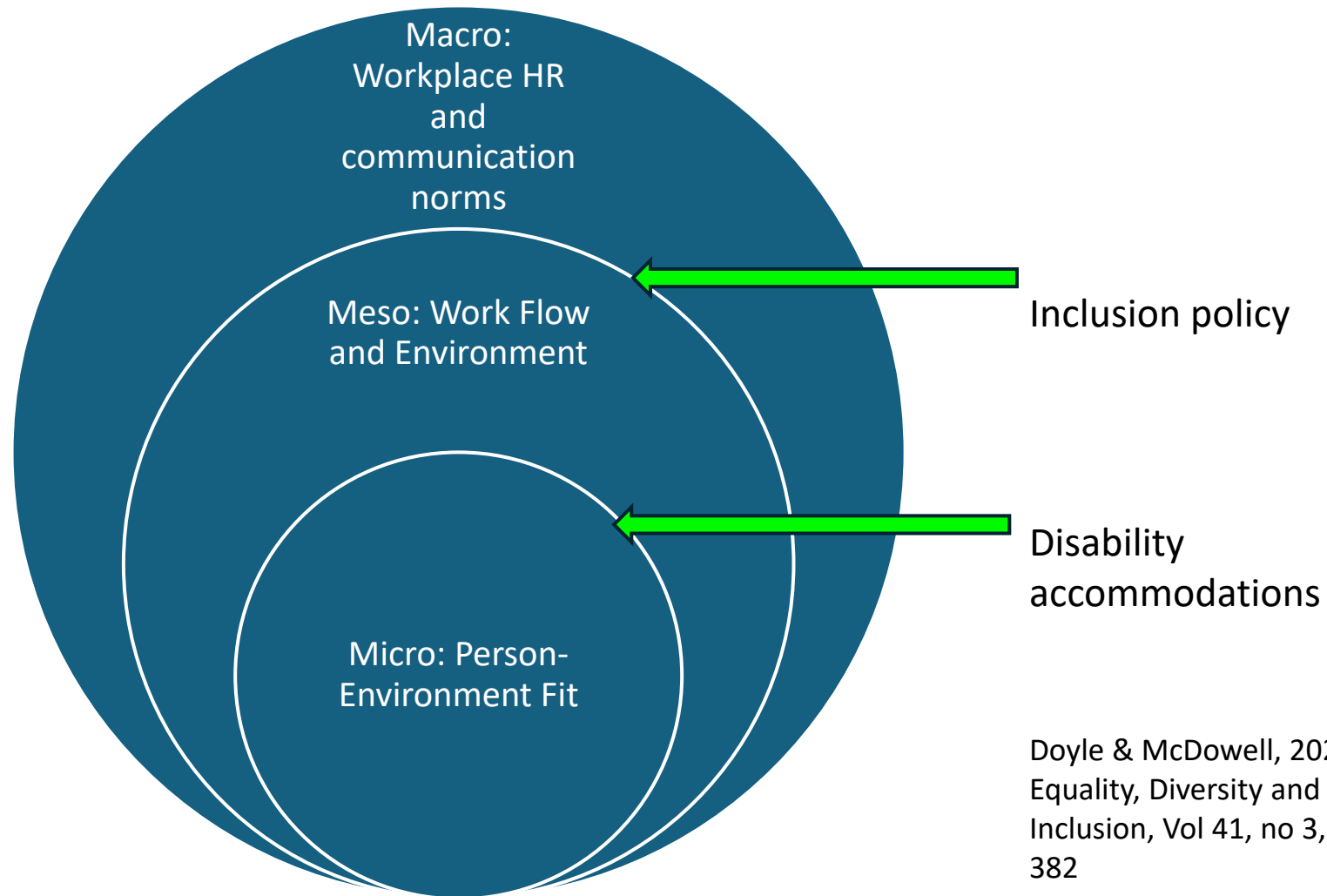
## Written

- 12 pt size
- San serif fonts
- Clear contrast between text and background
- Use numbered bullet points
- Short sentences
- Simple/ common words
- Clear agendas for meetings

## Visual

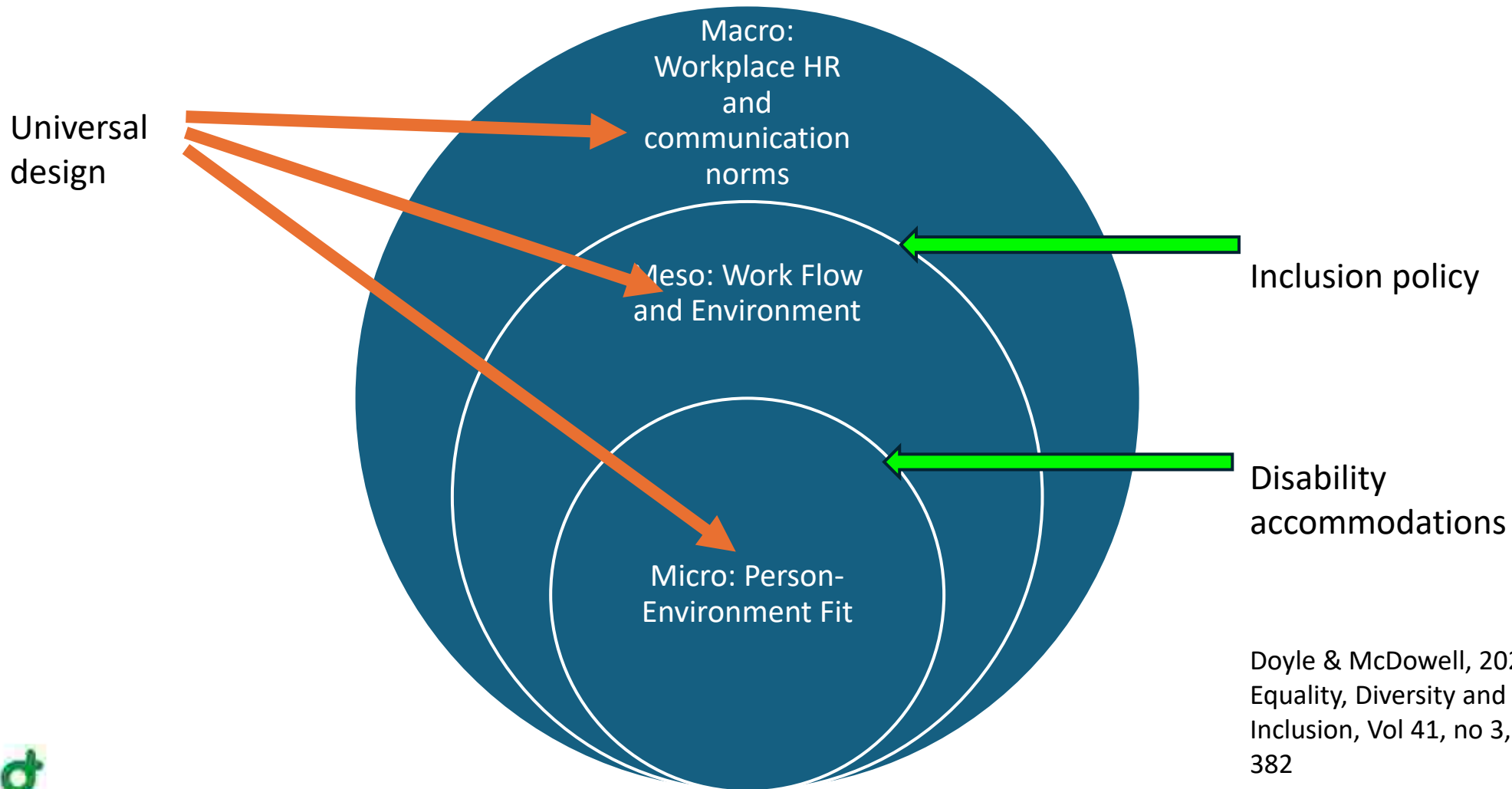
- Pictures to support the words
- Alternative text or alt text
- Data tables for charts
- Clearly different colours on graphs and charts
- Clear contrast between text, picture and background

# Why Universal design in the workplace?



Doyle & McDowell, 2022.  
Equality, Diversity and  
Inclusion, Vol 41, no 3, pp 352-  
382

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# Accessibility or universal design



# Reasonable accommodations (Ireland)

- Changes to the tasks and structure of a job or the workplace environment.
- Exist to level the playing field.
- These should enable the person to have equal opportunities when applying for work, to be treated the same as co-workers, have equal opportunities for promotion and to undertake training.

## UK:

- removal of physical barriers, extra support
- Proactive: remove/reduce obstacles.



# Reasonable accommodations

- Ramps to building
- Accessible toilet & parking spaces
- Clear pathways for mobility aids
- Suitable furniture RA
- Access to EAP
- Movement breaks
- Legal right



- Universal Design is inclusive
- Accessible design is customer driven
- Adaptation is person specific (RA)

# Common RAs listed in reports:

1. Clear instructions
2. Frequent breaks
3. Access to quiet spaces
4. Hybrid working
5. Ergonomic seating
6. Wobble chair or cushion
7. Flexible schedule
8. Standing desk
9. Noise cancelling headphones
10. Uninterrupted work time
11. Receiving written instructions and notes
12. Movement breaks
13. In-work support
14. Agenda in advance of meetings
15. Meetings recorded and recording available
16. Transcription software
17. Speech to text software
18. Writing Assistant software

# Common RAs listed in reports:

## Actually UD

1. Clear instructions
2. Access to quiet spaces
3. Ergonomic seating
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7. Receiving written instructions and notes
8. Movement breaks
9. Agenda in advance of meetings
10. Transcription software
11. Wobble chair or cushion
12. Speech to text software
13. Meetings recorded and recording available

## Reasonable Accommodations

1. More frequent breaks
2. Hybrid working
3. In-work support
4. Writing assistant software
5. Noise cancelling headphones – depends on the setting. UD in an office, RA in a shop.

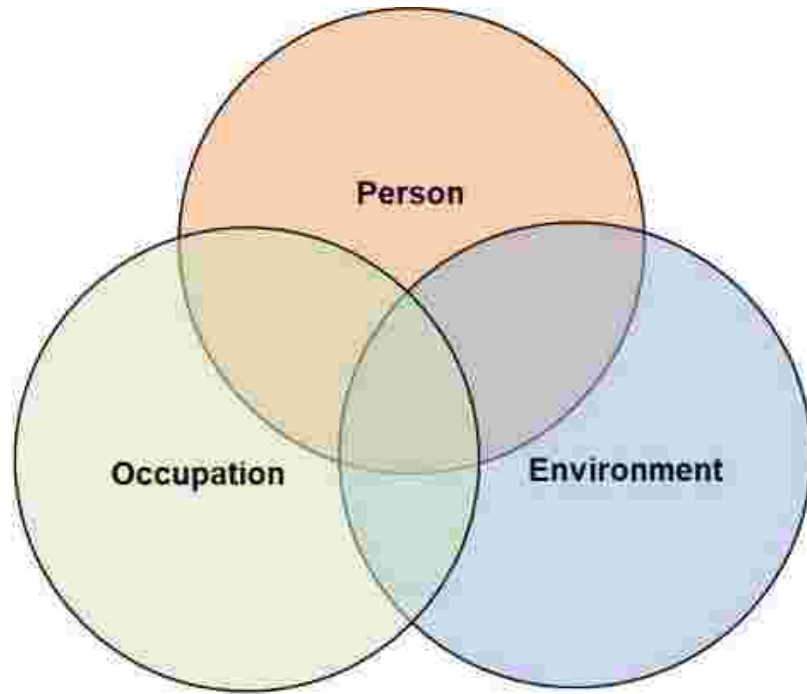
# Practical example.



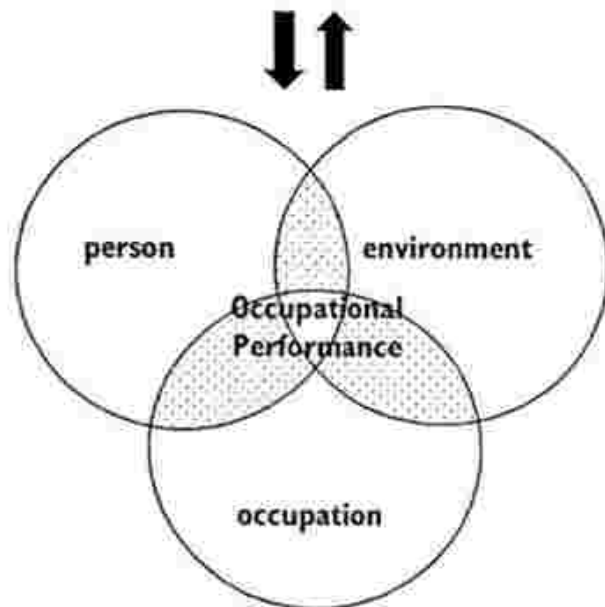
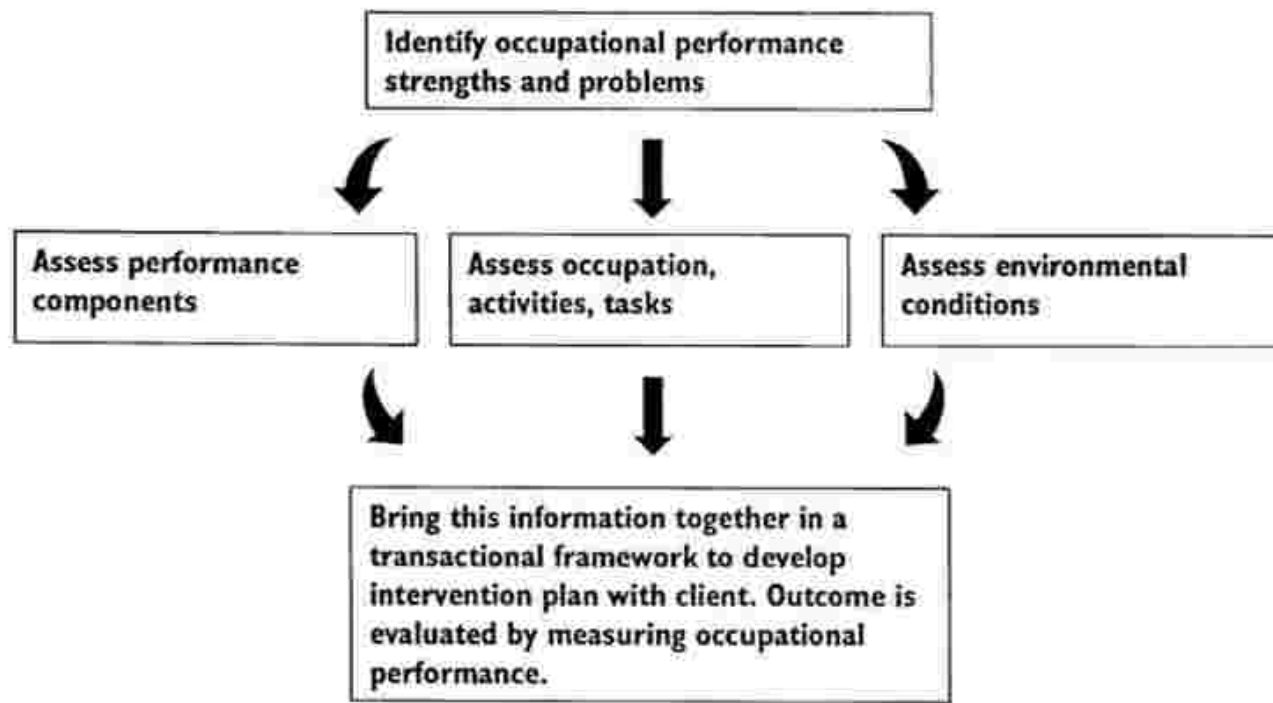


# Why & What is Occupational Therapy?

Occupational Therapy supports people to participate in everyday meaningful activities



- Person: The individual
- Environment: Where they are while they are performing their occupation/task
- Occupation: What they want to do, need to do, have to do

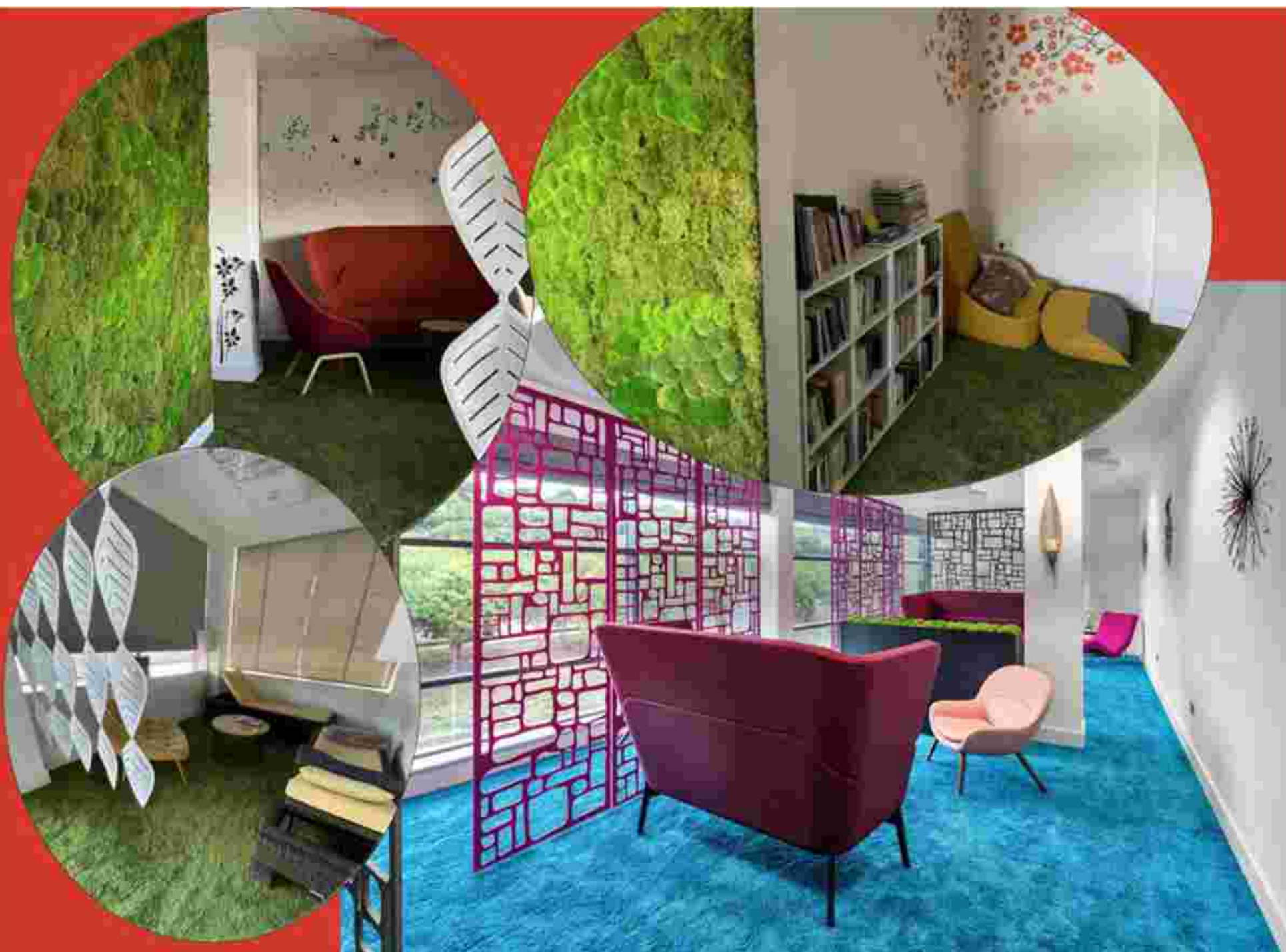


# Why occupational therapy?

- Analysis of the
  - Occupations
  - Environments
  - Individual/population
- Identifying and analysing occupational needs



# Wellness



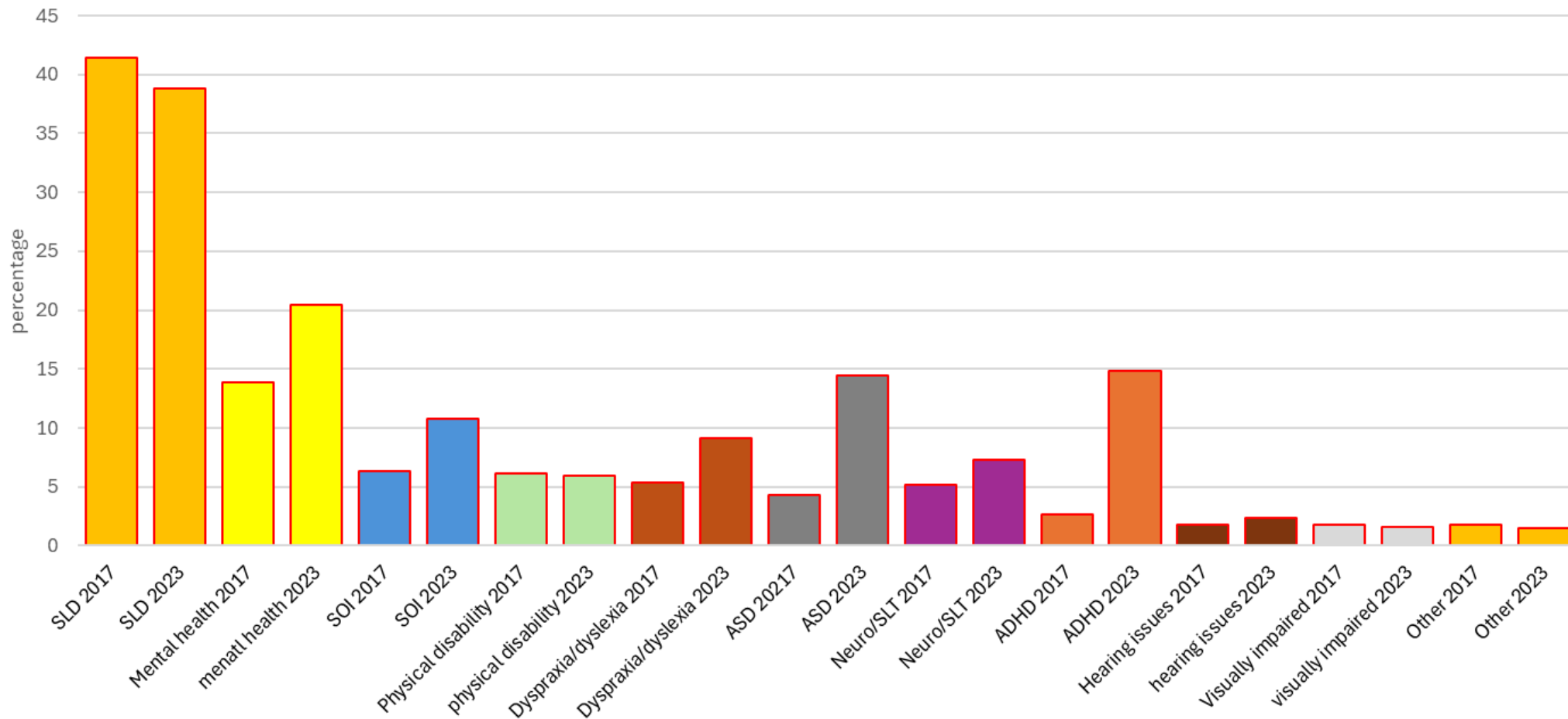


# Post OT



# Why do we need UD & OT: recent profile of graduates?

Changing profile of registered third level students who avail of reasonable accommodations.



# Take home message: UD

- Not special design, but good design
- Meets needs of profile of population
- UD is proactive rather than reactive such as RA
- Map first approach to greatest need
- Long term cost effective
- Multi-disciplinary approach

# Universal design vs Specific accommodations

- UD reduces the need for person specific accommodations
- Improves employees experience of being included and valued
- Improves productivity
- Decreases stigma



# Universal Design in the workplace

Thankyou

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# Legislation

- <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/accessibility-requirements-for-public-sector-websites-and-apps>
- <https://www.gov.uk/service-manual/helping-people-to-use-your-service/understanding-wcag>
- [https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sample-accessible-document-policy?utm\\_source=Insidegov&utm\\_medium=banner&utm\\_campaign=access\\_regs](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sample-accessible-document-policy?utm_source=Insidegov&utm_medium=banner&utm_campaign=access_regs)
- EU Accessibility Act information: [www.universaldesign.ie/AA](http://www.universaldesign.ie/AA)

# Links & resources

- <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/accessibility-requirements-for-public-sector-websites-and-apps>
- <https://www.gov.uk/service-manual/helping-people-to-use-your-service/understanding-wcag>
- chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.ahead.ie/userfiles/files/shop/free/AHEAD\_Report\_2024-final-digital.pdf
- [https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sample-accessible-document-policy?utm\\_source=Insidegov&utm\\_medium=banner&utm\\_campaign=access\\_regs](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sample-accessible-document-policy?utm_source=Insidegov&utm_medium=banner&utm_campaign=access_regs)
- <https://www.udinstitute.org/>
- [Center for Inclusive Design & Environmental Access, Buffalo University.](https://www.buffalo.edu/research/research-centers/center-for-inclusive-design-and-environmental-access.html)
- <https://archplan.buffalo.edu/research/research-centers/center-for-inclusive-design-and-environmental-access.html>
- <https://www.manualof.me/>
- <https://www.ucc.ie/en/autismfriendly/>