**The National Access Plan (2022-2028) & UDL**

The National Access Plan (2022-2028) strongly emphasises the principle of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) as a cornerstone for creating inclusive, universally designed environments that support the success and outcomes for all students. The plan specifically highlights the implementation of the Programme for Access to Higher Education (PATH) which, in its fourth strand, supports the further advancement of inclusive, universally designed environments. This initiative aims not only to foster accessibility for all students but also to develop provisions for students with intellectual disabilities, thereby ensuring that higher education institutions are equipped to offer quality inclusive learning experiences that accommodate the diverse needs of their student populations.

Additionally, the plan underscores the importance of higher education institutions adopting whole-of-education approaches to access, along with student success strategies and universal design principles. This comprehensive approach is intended to remove physical barriers and create a learning environment that is accessible and conducive to the success of all students, reflecting the plan's commitment to inclusivity and diversity in the student body.

By focusing on UDL principles, the National Access Plan aims to transform higher education institutions into spaces where every student, regardless of their background or needs, can fully participate, succeed, and benefit from their education. This approach is in line with the plan's overarching goals of inclusivity, flexibility, and sustainability, ensuring that the higher education system is responsive to the needs of students and the wider community, and supports the achievement of national objectives in education and social equity.

The National Access Plan (2022-2028) outlines several strategic actions and targets related to disability services within higher education institutions. While the plan covers a broad range of objectives for improving equity of access, participation, and success in higher education, key targets specifically related to disability services include:

1. **Universal Design Implementation**: Strengthening the implementation of Universal Design principles across all aspects of higher education, including teaching and learning, assessment methods, and the physical and digital environment, to ensure that all students, irrespective of their disability, can access and participate fully in their education.
2. **Support for Students with Disabilities**: Enhancing the supports available to students with disabilities, ensuring that these supports are effectively communicated, easily accessible, and tailored to meet the diverse needs of students. This includes academic supports, assistive technology, and accommodations for exams and assessments.
3. **Data Collection and Monitoring**: Improving the collection and analysis of data related to students with disabilities, including their participation rates, progression, completion rates, and post-graduation outcomes. This data will inform policy development, resource allocation, and the identification of areas requiring targeted intervention.
4. **Training and Awareness**: Providing training for staff across all levels of higher education institutions to raise awareness of disability issues, promote inclusive practices, and ensure that all staff are equipped to support students with disabilities effectively.
5. **Collaboration with External Partners**: Strengthening partnerships with external organisations, including disability advocacy groups, secondary education providers, and employers, to support transitions into higher education, enhance employability, and ensure that graduates with disabilities have equal opportunities in the labor market.
6. **Policy Development**: Reviewing and updating policies related to disability support within higher education institutions to ensure they reflect current best practices, legal requirements, and the diverse needs of students with disabilities.
7. **Financial Support**: Ensuring that adequate financial resources are available to support the implementation of disability services, including funding for assistive technologies, accommodations, and specialized support staff.
8. **Accessibility of Digital Resources**: Ensuring that all digital resources, including websites, learning management systems, and online course materials, comply with accessibility standards to support students with disabilities.

These targets align with the overarching goals of the National Access Plan to create an inclusive and equitable higher education system that supports the success of all students, including those with disabilities. Achieving these targets requires a coordinated effort across higher education institutions, government departments, and the broader education and disability communities.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a framework aimed at improving and optimizing teaching and learning for all people based on scientific insights into how humans learn. When universities apply UDL principles to assessments and examinations, they strive to provide equitable access to education and evaluate students in a manner that accommodates diverse learning styles and abilities. Here are some ways universities can implement UDL in assessments and examinations:

### 1. Multiple Means of Representation

This principle involves providing information in different formats to make it accessible for students with various learning styles and disabilities.

* **Use of different media**: Incorporate text, audio, and video to deliver exam content, allowing students to choose the format that best suits their learning preferences.
* **Clear and accessible instructions**: Offer instructions in multiple formats (e.g., written, spoken) and ensure that they are straightforward and easy to understand.
* **Alternative text and captioning**: Provide captions for videos and alternative text descriptions for images to support students who are deaf or have hearing impairments and those with visual impairments.

### 2. Multiple Means of Action and Expression

This principle focuses on providing students with various ways to demonstrate their knowledge and skills.

* **Varied response formats**: Allow students to express their understanding through different types of outputs such as written essays, oral presentations, multimedia projects, or practical demonstrations.
* **Adjustable time limits**: Offer flexibility in timing to accommodate students who may need more time due to processing speed, anxiety, or other disabilities.
* **Use of technology**: Enable the use of assistive technologies that can help students input their answers (e.g., speech-to-text software, alternative keyboards).

### 3. Multiple Means of Engagement

This principle aims to stimulate interest and motivation for all students.

* **Choice in assessment topics**: Give students some choice in the topics or questions they address in their assessments to increase engagement and allow them to work in areas of personal strength or interest.
* **Self-assessment and reflection**: Incorporate opportunities for students to assess their learning and reflect on their progress and strategies.
* **Stress-reduction practices**: Implement practices that help reduce anxiety around exams, such as mindfulness exercises or providing a 'practice run' of the examination process.

### Implementing UDL in Exams

* **Universal test design**: Design tests from the outset to be accessible to everyone, reducing the need for accommodations or modifications.
* **Continuous feedback**: Rather than having a single high-stakes exam, provide continuous assessment opportunities to help students gauge their understanding and progress throughout the course.
* **Collaborative exams**: Consider allowing collaborative examination options where students can work in groups to solve problems, reflecting real-world scenarios where collaboration is often key.

By adopting these UDL principles, universities can create more inclusive assessment methods that cater to the needs of all students, including those with disabilities. This approach not only promotes fairness and inclusivity but also enhances the overall educational experience by allowing all students to demonstrate their capabilities fully and fairly.