



Rialtas na hÉireann  
Government of Ireland

# Universal Design Self-Audit Tool for Early Learning and Care Settings





An Roinn Leanaí  
agus Gnóthaí Oige  
Department of Children  
and Youth Affairs



TrinityHaus  
[www.trinityhaus.tcd.ie](http://www.trinityhaus.tcd.ie)



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# Self-audit tool: Using the tool

Universal Design (UD) is good design. It is the design and composition of an environment so 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. If an environment is accessible, usable, convenient and a pleasure to use, everyone benefits. By considering diverse needs and abilities throughout the design process, universal design creates environments that meet peoples' needs.

The Self-Audit tool can be used by anyone concerned with how the Early Learning and Care (ELC) setting built environment (indoors and outdoors) meets the needs of all users. Owners, managers, practitioners or architects can use it to examine and reflect on the environment, indoors and outdoors.

Conducting the audit will help you see how the setting meets UD principles. It will also help you identify ways in which this can be developed further. It can be used to help you see possibilities for adding/ adapting features in an existing setting (retro-fitting) or to identify what to include if you are planning an extension or a new build.

**You do not have to complete the entire Self-Audit tool at one time. You can choose an aspect of the environment and work on that alone.**

When you read each statement decide the extent to which that criteria are present. Consider **all users** of the setting:

- **Parents**, especially those with buggies or car seats or who are dropping off or collecting more than one child.
- **Grandparents** dropping off and collecting children.
- **Children, parents or staff** using wheelchairs, crutches or mobility aids.
- **Delivery personnel** with grocery or other orders.
- **Visitors to the setting**, perhaps coming with equipment to carry out a specific activity with children.

Consider all the stages of the day and times of the year. Perhaps take a walk in the car parking area as children arrive/depart ECCE sessions. How adequate is the lighting or shelter for the person arriving early in the morning or locking up in the evening? If parents must wait to be buzzed in, can they do so without getting wet, especially if they are dropping off a baby and toddler for example?

Because it is so important to consider all users, in each section you are prompted to check in with children, staff, parents and other users to ensure that you have captured their experiences.

### Completing the self-audit tool:

The self-audit tool is divided into four areas:

- ELC setting Location, Approach, Site Entry and Site layout
- Entering and Moving about the ELC setting
- ELC setting Internal and External spaces
- ELC Elements and Systems

In each area, decide which response best reflects your built environment.

Design criteria	
<b>0</b> = Criteria not met	<b>NA</b> = Not Applicable
<b>1</b> = Criteria partially met	<b>(E) in red</b> = Essential criteria
<b>2</b> = Criteria fully met	<b>(R) in blue</b> = Recommended criteria

If a section (for example kitchen) is not applicable to you, you can ignore it. Some items (for example dining rooms) are neither (E) or (R). These items are points to consider.

If your answer is Not met or Partially met, then ask the question: if not why not? If there is something you can do to develop this, decide how you plan for it to happen. You can mark N/A if the criteria are not relevant to the type of service you provide.

There is space for you to record ideas for changes or things you need to find out more about. Refer to the corresponding section of the UD Guidelines for ELC settings to help with this. Maybe there are aspects that you have no control over, but you may find creative ways to make adaptations. Think about the time scale in which this can be achieved.

For ideas on creating and using the learning environment you can use the self-evaluation tools in the Environments pillar in the Aistear Síolta Practice Guide on [www.aistearsiolta.ie](http://www.aistearsiolta.ie)



# 1. Site Location, approach, entry and design

Consider and consult all users. Criteria **in red (E)** are classed as **Essential**. Criteria **in blue (R)** are classed as **Recommended**.

Site of the setting					
		0 criteria not met	1 criteria partially met	2 criteria fully met	NA
1	The site is easily accessed by all users. <b>(E)</b>				
2	Pathways are sufficiently wide, smooth and well maintained. <b>(E)</b>				
3	Planting is low level so it does not block light or pathways. <b>(R)</b>				
4	There is external lighting. <b>(E)</b>				
5	There are parking facilities for cars and bicycles. <b>(E)</b>				

**Reflections**

Have you observed all users (especially the children) in the environment?

Have you spoken to all users (especially the children) of the environment?

Record your ideas and plans:

Short term:

Longer term:



## 2. Entering and moving about the early learning and care setting

Consider and consult all users. Criteria **in red (E)** are classed as **Essential**. Criteria **in blue (R)** are classed as **Recommended**.

Main entrance		0 criteria not met	1 criteria partially met	2 criteria fully met	NA
1	The main entrance is easy to find when approaching the building. <b>(E)</b>				
2	It is sheltered from the rain. <b>(R)</b>				
3	The main entrance has level access. <b>(E)</b>				
4	Where there is a height difference either <b>internally or externally</b> , access is provided via a suitable ramp or lift. <b>(E)</b>				

**Reflections**

Have you observed all users (especially the children) in the environment?

Have you spoken to all users (especially the children) of the environment?

Record your ideas and plans:

Short term:

Longer term:



Entrance door and reception					
		0 criteria not met	1 criteria partially met	2 criteria fully met	NA
1	The main door is easy to operate and open. (E)				
2	There is an intercom, buzzer or key-pad system that is easily used. (R)				
3	The parents/guardians have the code. (R)				
4	The code is changed regularly. (E)				
5	The main door has an automatic closer. (R)				
6	There is a reception area close to the entrance. (R) If yes there are clear directions and signs for the various rooms. (E) This signage is in the languages of the users and there are pictorial representations. (R)				

**Reflections**

Have you observed all users (especially the children) in the environment?

Have you spoken to all users (especially the children) of the environment?

Record your ideas and plans:

Short term:

Longer term:

Entrance door and reception					
		0 criteria not met	1 criteria partially met	2 criteria fully met	NA
7	The entrance and reception area are welcoming for all users. <b>(E)</b>				
8	All doorways are sufficiently wide and easy to open. <b>(E)</b>				
9	All walking surfaces are firm and non-slip. <b>(E)</b>				
10	Access routes such as corridors and hallways are wide and kept free of obstruction. <b>(E)</b>				
11	Key spaces (playrooms, toilets, kitchens, office spaces) are easy to find. <b>(E)</b>				
12	Circulation spaces (lobbies and hallways) are easy to use. <b>(E)</b>				
13	The layout of the setting is easy to use. (For example, the manager's office is close to entrance/sleep rooms close to relevant rooms.) <b>(R)</b>				

**Reflections**

Have you observed all users (especially the children) in the environment?

Have you spoken to all users (especially the children) of the environment?

Record your ideas and plans:

Short term:

Longer term:



### 3. Key internal and external spaces

Consider and consult all users. Criteria **in red (E)** are classed as **Essential**. Criteria **in blue (R)** are classed as **Recommended**.

Shared Central Areas: Lobby, family rooms, eating and dining					
		0 criteria not met	1 criteria partially met	2 criteria fully met	NA
1	There is space where parents can wait (for example, when a child is settling in). <b>(R)</b> There is provision for refreshments in this area. <b>(E)</b>				
2	There is space where parents and staff can meet comfortably and in private. <b>(R)</b>				
3	There are spaces and features to support children of mixed ages to interact. For example, shared communal spaces, clear panels between rooms. <b>(R)</b>				
4	There is a dining room. If yes, it is large enough to accommodate all children at the same time so meal times can be relaxed social occasions.				

**Reflections**

Have you observed all users (especially the children) in the environment?

Have you spoken to all users (especially the children) of the environment?

Record your ideas and plans:

Short term:

Longer term:

Shared Central Areas: Lobby, family rooms, eating and dining					
		0 criteria not met	1 criteria partially met	2 criteria fully met	NA
5	There is a variety of furniture to support the development of self-help skills. For example, trollies/counters at suitable heights. <b>(E)</b>				
6	There is a variety of furniture so all ages, including staff, can sit comfortably. <b>(E)</b>				
7	There are suitable, safe facilities for children to be involved in cooking as an activity. <b>(R)</b>				

**Reflections**

Have you observed all users (especially the children) in the environment?

Have you spoken to all users (especially the children) of the environment?

Record your ideas and plans:

Short term:

Longer term:

Internal spaces for children: Children's rooms					
		0 criteria not met	1 criteria partially met	2 criteria fully met	NA
1	There is sufficient floor space in all rooms for play and activity. (E)				
2	There is sufficient space in all rooms for children to play alone or in small groups. (E)				
3	There are quiet, comfortable spaces in all rooms for children to relax. (E)				
4	There is comfortable seating in all rooms (for example sofas) where children and staff can sit and chat or have story time. (E)				
5	The materials in all rooms are accessible for all children enabling them to choose what they want to play with. If a child is using a wheelchair this needs to be at their eye level. (E)				
<b>Reflections</b> <p>Have you observed all users (especially the children) in the environment?</p> <p>Have you spoken to all users (especially the children) of the environment?</p> <p>Record your ideas and plans:</p> <p>Short term:</p> <p>Longer term:</p>					

Internal spaces for children: Sleeping					
		0 criteria not met	1 criteria partially met	2 criteria fully met	NA
1	Sleeping facilities are located in a quiet area, close to playrooms. <b>(E)</b>				
2	The sleeping areas can be darkened with blackout blinds. <b>(E)</b>				
3	There is sufficient space around cots. <b>(E)</b>				
4	There is adequate storage for bedding/ sleep mats/stacking beds without impinging on cot space. <b>(E)</b>				

**Reflections**

Have you observed all users (especially the children) in the environment?

Have you spoken to all users (especially the children) of the environment?

Record your ideas and plans:

Short term:

Longer term:

Internal spaces: Toilets					
		0 criteria not met	1 criteria partially met	2 criteria fully met	NA
1	Toileting areas are easy to access for children, staff and parents. (E)				
2	Children's toilets are adjacent to the playrooms. (R)				
3	Toilets are in a range of age appropriate sizes. (E)				
4	There is a toilet easily accessed in or near the outdoor area. (R)				
5	The layout of the toilet area respects children's right to privacy. (E)				
6	There are separate toilets for staff. (E)				
7	There is an accessible toilet for visitors. (E)				

**Reflections**

Have you observed all users (especially the children) in the environment?

Have you spoken to all users (especially the children) of the environment?

Record your ideas and plans:

Short term:

Longer term:

Internal spaces: Nappy changing facilities					
		0 criteria not met	1 criteria partially met	2 criteria fully met	NA
1	Nappy changing facilities are adjacent to baby and toddler spaces. <b>(R)</b>				
2	The nappy changing area is accessible to parents (for example to change a child who is not attending the setting). <b>(E)</b>				
3	There is a viewing panel between the nappy changing area and play rooms. <b>(R)</b>				
4	The nappy changing table is height adjustable. <b>(R)</b>				
5	The nappy changing table is wide enough to accommodate older children. <b>(E)</b>				
6	There are handwashing facilities near the nappy changing table. <b>(E)</b>				
7	There are steps to the nappy changing table for children to use. <b>(R)</b> If yes, are these steps firm? If yes, is there a handrail?				

**Reflections**

Have you observed all users (especially the children) in the environment?

Have you spoken to all users (especially the children) of the environment?

Record your ideas and plans:

Short term:

Longer term:



Internal spaces: Outdoor clothing and changing					
		0 criteria not met	1 criteria partially met	2 criteria fully met	NA
1	There is space where children can change into outdoor clothing to go outside. (E)				
2	There is space where children's outdoor wear (coats/ wetsuits/wellies) can be stored and aired. (E)				

**Reflections**

Have you observed all users (especially the children) in the environment?

Have you spoken to all users (especially the children) of the environment?

Record your ideas and plans:

Short term:

Longer term:

Ancillary spaces: Staff spaces					
		0 criteria not met	1 criteria partially met	2 criteria fully met	NA
1	There is a Manager's office. (R)				
2	There is a staff room. (R)				
3	There is provision for refreshments in this area. (R)				
4	This space is located away from children's areas. (R)				
5	There is space for staff non-contact time. (R)				

**Reflections**

Have you observed all users (especially the children) in the environment?

Have you spoken to all users (especially the children) of the environment?

Record your ideas and plans:

Short term:

Longer term:

Ancillary spaces: Food and kitchens					
		0 criteria not met	1 criteria partially met	2 criteria fully met	NA
1	The kitchen area is easy to access for the person delivering food supplies. <b>(E)</b>				
2	There is adequate food storage for the size of the setting. <b>(E)</b>				
3	This storage is easy to access. <b>(E)</b>				
4	Cooking facilities are easy to use. <b>(E)</b>				
5	There is a separate toilet for staff who are food handlers. <b>(E)</b>				
6	The kitchen counter is height adjustable. <b>(R)</b>				
7	There is a separate laundry room, away from food preparation areas, where bedding, bibs, soft furnishings can be washed and dried on site. <b>(R)</b>				

**Reflections**

Have you observed all users (especially the children) in the environment?

Have you spoken to all users (especially the children) of the environment?

Record your ideas and plans:

Short term:

Longer term:

Ancillary spaces: Internal storage					
		0 criteria not met	1 criteria partially met	2 criteria fully met	NA
1	There is adequate space to store buggies and car seats. (E)				
2	This space is at or near the entrance (important for buggies so floors in children areas are kept clean). (R)				
3	There is space to store children's bike and scooters they may use to arrive at the setting. (R)				
4	These storage spaces are easy to find and access. (E)				
5	There is adequate, secure storage space for staff personal items. (E)				
6	There is storage for materials within or near each playroom. (E)				

**Reflections**

Have you observed all users (especially the children) in the environment?

Have you spoken to all users (especially the children) of the environment?

Record your ideas and plans:

Short term:

Longer term:

Outdoor spaces					
		0 criteria not met	1 criteria partially met	2 criteria fully met	NA
1	The outdoor play space is easy for children to access, for example, opening directly off play rooms. <b>(E)</b>				
2	There is sufficient space in the outdoor for children to play alone or in small groups. <b>(E)</b>				
3	The outdoor space can be used by more than one group at a time, supporting mixed age interactions. <b>(R)</b>				
4	There is some quiet comfortable space outdoors so children can relax. <b>(E)</b>				
5	There is comfortable seating outside so children and staff can sit and chat or share stories together. <b>(E)</b>				

**Reflections**

Have you observed all users (especially the children) in the environment?

Have you spoken to all users (especially the children) of the environment?

Record your ideas and plans:

Short term:

Longer term:

Outdoor spaces					
		0 criteria not met	1 criteria partially met	2 criteria fully met	NA
6	There is a covered outdoor space that provides shelter and shade, as well as a transition space where wet wellies and clothes can be changed. (R)				
7	There is storage for materials within or near the outdoor area. (E)				
8	Children have opportunities to experience challenge appropriate to their age and stage of development. (E)				
9	There are accessible digging and planting areas, for example, raised beds. (E)				
10	There is a variety of surfaces so all children can walk, run, pedal and play (for example grass/hard surfaces/bark/rubber matting. (E)				

**Reflections**

Have you observed all users (especially the children) in the environment?

Have you spoken to all users (especially the children) of the environment?

Record your ideas and plans:

Short term:

Longer term:



## 4. Elements and systems

Consider and consult all users. Criteria **in red (E)** are classed as **Essential**.  
Criteria **in blue (R)** are classed as **Recommended**.

Construction, materials and finishes					
		0 criteria not met	1 criteria partially met	2 criteria fully met	NA
1	There is provision for rooms to be opened into one (with partitions/sliding doors) to facilitate parent/staff/community events. <b>(R)</b>				
2	Walls are painted in neutral colours to avoid excessive sensory stimulation. <b>(E)</b>				
3	Floor coverings are in neutral colours to avoid excessive sensory stimulation. <b>(E)</b>				
4	There is colour contrast between walls and floors and any handrails, sanitary ware, fixed furniture (to ensure users with visual impairments can distinguish these). <b>(E)</b>				

**Reflections**

Have you observed all users (especially the children) in the environment?

Have you spoken to all users (especially the children) of the environment?

Record your ideas and plans:

Short term:

Longer term:

Fit out elements					
		0 criteria not met	1 criteria partially met	2 criteria fully met	NA
1	Windows are at a low level so children can see outside. (R)				
2	Window restrictors are in place. (E)				
3	Large glass doors and windows have manifests in place. (E)				
4	Doors are sufficiently wide so people with double buggies or mobility aids can move comfortable in the setting. (E)				
5	Clear signage is in place so all users can navigate the space with ease. (E)				
6	Stair gates are fitted. (E)				

**Reflections**

Have you observed all users (especially the children) in the environment?

Have you spoken to all users (especially the children) of the environment?

Record your ideas and plans:

Short term:

Longer term:



Light, thermal air and sound					
		0 criteria not met	1 criteria partially met	2 criteria fully met	NA
1	All sanitary areas (toilets and nappy changing areas) are well ventilated. <b>(E)</b>				
2	All other rooms (playrooms/staff/kitchen and parent areas) are well ventilated. <b>(E)</b>				
3	There are soft furnishings, rugs and/or drapes to absorb sound. <b>(E)</b>				
4	Door closers are adjusted to ensure doors don't slam shut. <b>(R)</b>				
5	Natural light is the primary light source. <b>(E)</b>				
6	When artificial light is needed there is a variety of lighting: Fluorescent, Wall/table lights, Task lighting. <b>(E)</b>				
7	There are blinds to reduce unwanted glare or reflectance. <b>(E)</b>				

### Reflections

Have you observed all users (especially the children) in the environment?

Have you spoken to all users (especially the children) of the environment?

Record your ideas and plans:

Short term:

Longer term:

Assistive technology and specialised equipment					
		0 criteria not met	1 criteria partially met	2 criteria fully met	NA
1	Are there speakers or amplification/ induction loops for users with hearing difficulties?				
2	Are there door sensors to alert if someone has gained access to an area they should not be in? (R)				
3	Are there automatic door or window opening devices/systems? (R)				
4	Are there lighting, heating and ventilation controls or monitors? (R)				
5	Is there multi-sensory or therapeutic technology (for example multi-sensory garden/playground or equipment/sensory room)?				
6	Are there hoists or lifting equipment for children?				

**Reflections**

Have you observed all users (especially the children) in the environment?

Have you spoken to all users (especially the children) of the environment?

Record your ideas and plans:

Short term:

Longer term:

# What to do next?

## Reflecting on the completed audit

Having completed an audit of your setting, or part of your setting, you may now have a better understanding of how the setting meets Universal Design principles. The process should also have helped you to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the built environment. Your reflections after each sub-section and any notes you have made regarding your ideas and plans for short or long term improvements will guide you in making any decisions about adding/ adapting features in an existing setting (retro-fitting), or design ideas if you are planning an extension or a new build.

## Level of work or scale of project

When considering what aspects of the setting to improve or the design features to focus on, consider the Levels of Design described in the UD Guidelines for ELC settings. These levels of design include 5 levels of intervention, adaptation or design, ranging from minor low cost issues (Level 01) up to larger more costly retrofit or new-build projects (Level 05). Considering these five levels may help you to prioritise, plan and manage any proposed improvement works.

 For more information about the **Levels of Design** see **page 33** of the **Universal Design Guidelines for Early Learning and Care Settings**.

## Next steps

Depending on the level of work involved in making the changes you have identified, or the scale of the project you are planning, you may need to adopt different approaches to completing the work. It may be possible to carry out minor works without involving others, while some smaller projects may require a tradesperson that you organise yourself. Bigger projects will probably need a more extensive Design Team and require onsite construction coordination. For these projects you might need an architect or similar design professional to ensure all planning, building, and health and safety regulations are complied with.

Many projects will require a Design Brief that sets out your needs and informs the design team about the requirements for the project.

 For more information about **Design Teams** and **Design Briefs** see **page 29-30** of the **Universal Design Guidelines for Early Learning and Care Settings**.

Refer also to **Appendix 7** of these guidelines for more detailed advice on setting out a Design Brief.



The Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) in  
collaboration with the Centre for Excellence in Universal  
Design (CEUD) at the National Disability Authority (NDA)

[www.dcy.gov.ie](http://www.dcy.gov.ie)  
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