The Fourth Space: A Transformative Model for the Trinity disAbility Hub

Overview

The *Fourth Space* is a bold, values-driven model for embedding disabled students and staff as co-creators, leaders, and change agents within Trinity College Dublin. Building on the "third space" model—which blends academic and professional spheres—the *Fourth Space* extends further. It is a rights-based, co-produced environment where disability is not a barrier to be accommodated, but a driver of institutional innovation, excellence, and cultural transformation. This model contributes directly to Trinity's Strategic Plan *Thrive: Trinity Strategic Plan 2025–2030*, particularly the commitments to intensifying innovation, enhancing student belonging, creating a thriving workplace, and embedding sustainability and inclusion.

Definition

The *Fourth Space* is a collaborative, inclusive ecosystem where disabled people actively shape policy, pedagogy, research, space design, and service delivery. It dismantles traditional hierarchies and builds systems that reflect lived experience, user leadership, and participatory design. It fosters a culture where all members of the Trinity community belong, contribute, and thrive.

Strategic Integration with the disAbility Service Strategic Plan (2025–2030)

The *Fourth Space* serves as the operational and cultural framework for delivering Trinity's disAbility Service Strategic Plan, which is built on four pillars:

1. Partnerships & Leadership

- Formalise disabled student and staff leadership through advisory boards and working groups.

- Expand Trinity Ability Co_op, DuNES, and peer-led networks.

- Offer structured leadership academies and mentorship.

- Position the Fourth Space as a lived experience-led governance model.

2. Employability & Inclusive Practice

- Scale the Inclusive Internship Programme and summer placement models.

- Integrate employer pledges and reasonable accommodations toolkits.

- Use the Fourth Space to test, evaluate, and mainstream inclusive employment models.

3. Research, Innovation & Thought Leadership

- Establish the disAbility Hub as a national and international Centre for Thought Leadership.

- Drive interdisciplinary research on Universal Design for Learning (UDL), assistive technology, and disability rights.

- Publish white papers, host inclusive innovation fairs, and award Capstone and postgraduate scholarships.

- Use the Fourth Space as the incubator for practice-based and participatory research.

4. Access, Inclusion & Belonging

- Advance the Universal Access 5-Year Plan through co-audits and community design.

- Embed UDL principles in curriculum reform.

- Pilot the role of Access & Inclusion Coordinators in Schools and build a system of champions.

- Embed sensory and respite spaces designed with student-led input.

Core Pillars of the Fourth Space

Co-Creation

- Disabled students and staff co-design services, curricula, research initiatives, and policies.

- Utilise participatory design tools, lived experience panels, and accessibility audits.

Leadership & Representation

- Establish paid student internships, research fellowships, and mentoring pathways.

- Integrate disabled leadership across College governance structures.

Belonging

- Foster cultural change through inclusive events, communication campaigns, and visible representation.

- Develop sensory and peer-supported spaces that reflect diverse identities and access needs.

Strategic Alignment & Sustainability

- Align with the UNCRPD, European Accessibility Act, and the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty.

- Use digital platforms (e.g., Power BI, SITS, CRM) to scale supports, track engagement, and report progress.

- Secure multi-source funding (FSD, philanthropic, research grants).

Conclusion

The *Fourth Space* is a catalyst for embedding belonging, co-ownership, and inclusive excellence into the heart of Trinity College Dublin. As a delivery mechanism for the disAbility Service Strategic Plan and a living embodiment of *Thrive*, the *Fourth Space* ensures that disabled students and staff are not only supported but central to shaping the university's future.

United in Ability. Embedded in Strategy. Thriving Together.