

June 2002

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Making Reasonable Adjustments with Disabled Students in Higher Education

Staff Development Materials:
Case Studies and Exercises



University of Nottingham

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Foreword

Professor Stephen Bailey
Pro Vice Chancellor, University of Nottingham
Professor in Public Law

I am delighted to have been asked to write the foreword for a publication that recent legislation has made particularly timely. The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 (SENDA) requires Higher Education Institutions to make reasonable adjustments for disabled students. As a lawyer I know only too well that reasonableness is a concept that is easy to state and difficult to apply.

Throughout the HE sector, academic staff are being encouraged to improve the quality of teaching and learning for all students. At the same time, the Government has set a challenging target for widening participation in HE. The development of learning and teaching strategies, arrangements for staff development and the work of the Institute for Learning and Teaching all have their part to play. This document will contribute to these processes.

This collection of case studies also shows the value of HEFCE projects for encouraging communication about effective practice between universities. Staff in ten midlands universities have contributed to the project from which this publication has derived.

The main significance of the publication is that it focuses on what is being and can be done rather than simply on what staff ought to be doing. It shows the value of collaboration between groups of staff within universities and, in particular, of partnerships involving academics, disability specialists and staff developers. It is a document that I hope all those involved in dealing with these issues will find encouraging.

June 2002

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- 1.1** This short publication is intended for academic staff, disability specialists and staff development personnel in higher education institutions in the UK. Its primary objective is to contribute to the developing discourse in higher education about how best to respond to the new anti-discrimination legislation in relation to disability (SENDA 2001). In particular, it focuses on what can be expected from academic staff in making 'reasonable adjustments' to teaching, learning and assessment processes.
- 1.2** Its explicit purpose is to counter the notion that responding to the spirit of the legislation will require huge amounts of additional work by academics. Instead, it articulates an approach which focuses on existing and often creative work which academic staff are doing to support disabled students. For HE staff currently engaged in curriculum development with diverse student groups, the new legislation simply requires a continuing interest in developing as professional educators.
- 1.3** This collection of materials has been derived during the HEFCE Academic Staff Supporting Disabled Students Project (ADDS) 2000-2002 which has centred on staff developers within the M1/M69 network of universities (see annex 2). The main thrust of the work has been to identify ways of making courses for academic staff more 'disability aware'. The rationale for collecting this particular evidence is our view that
- there is a dearth of materials which staff developers can use directly to encourage academic staff
 - academic staff can identify more readily with the changes made by fellow academics
- It seemed clear that short descriptions of actual adjustments and changes could be helpful in both cases.
- 1.4** Individual staff in the network universities were asked to create their own 'narratives' about their work; and to reflect practice as it is lived. Rudimentary guidelines were provided to ensure that the accounts were brief and reasonably reflective.
- Here, the contributors provide accessible accounts for new and experienced academic staff, which powerfully illustrate the practicalities of making 'reasonable adjustments' within the university context and, in so doing, bring to life some of the most pressing questions in this field. They represent a wide range of disciplines but are not, in the main, professionally involved in 'equality studies' or in disciplines informed by such.
- 1.5** In editing the work we paid close attention to the ethical issue of representation. These accounts about practice are written from the academic and/or support staff perspective. In principle we would have liked to develop staff/student jointly authored pieces. However, this was not practicable and so either we anonymised the accounts or we had the permission of the students concerned for the case studies to be produced.

Organisation of the booklet

- 1.6** The booklet starts with a chapter which locates the examples, theoretically and temporally. It explains the staff development context in HE and in particular the work in relation to disability. It outlines some of the theory which lies at the heart of recent developments in this field and summarises all the key issues which these particular examples illustrate.
- 1.7** Examples of work are then classified in two sections: first, case studies 1-10 which show changes in teaching and learning methods; and second, case studies 11-14 which make reasonable adjustments to assessment. Each case study is accompanied by key questions and can be photocopied and used with academic staff as it stands. Further ideas about how they can be used, and themes for discussion, are available in annex 3.
- 1.8** Reference is made to most categories of disability. The requirements of dyslexic students, of those using wheelchairs, of those with mental health difficulties, of deaf students and of visually impaired students are all considered. Some examples show how multiple disabilities are experienced. The greater weighting given to dyslexia reflects its relative incidence among disabled students in the UK.
- The subject areas included are: Biosciences, Archaeology, Art History, Geography, Engineering, Politics, Art and Design, Town Planning, Tourism, Health and Community Studies and Education. Given the continuing difficulties with employment for disabled graduates, it is particularly pleasing to include the examples from vocational courses.
- 1.9** Further references are provided in chapter 5. They will be valuable for readers who would like more information about particular disabilities as well as about the new legislative obligations. Four annexes are also appended: accessibility checklists for course organisers; details of the M1/M69 network membership; notes on how to use the case studies; and a glossary of appropriate language.

- 2.0** These accounts of practice reflect a range of professional attitudes and stances. Their value can best be appreciated by identifying the temporal, institutional, and theoretical contexts in which they have been developed.
- 2.1** In terms of time, they have been written in England just prior to the introduction of the Special Educational Needs Discrimination Act (SENDA 2001, to become DDA Part IV in 2002), which for the first time makes it unlawful to discriminate against disabled students. The new legislative obligations have thus not been the main driving force here. Rather, the examples have emerged towards the end of a period of sustained development of support for disabled students in HE (Higher Education Funding Council Initiatives 1992-2002) and to some extent seem to have been inspired by the developing quality of practice among disability specialists and the broader quality enhancement within the sector as a whole
- 2.2** The decade of the 1990's has witnessed a period of rapid and dramatic change in British higher education, with macro policy initiatives on widening access, and on quality assurance in research, teaching and learning. In addition, there has been a sustained drive to
- develop teaching and learning via research and practice (ESRC Teaching and Learning Programme);
 - professionalise teaching in HE through PGCHE courses and the Institute of Learning and Teaching (ILT) accreditation;
 - organise teaching and learning generic and subject networks all of which have produced a favourable context for curriculum development in general.
- The writers here appear to have been motivated either by a general desire to develop good teaching and assessment methods for all, or by a concern to offer something fairer to individuals or groups of students.
- 2.3** Notwithstanding such general developments within the sector, considerable funding inequities remain between HE institutions. And, in relation to disability, the central funding arrangements also produce considerable variability in resource between and within institutions. This is certainly reflected within the M1/M69 network. Hence, the academic and support staff writing here are reporting from particular settings within very different university contexts, operating with very different levels of resources. This has important implications for the extent to which academic staff are able to work in partnership with specialist staff in their central services.
- 2.4** Despite these differences, the legislative requirements must be addressed during the coming years and it is timely to be considering how staff in any HE context will be able to make 'reasonable adjustments'. It is particularly important for staff developers, as a professional group, to consider how best to achieve these developments among the staff they train.
- 2.5** The history of staff development in relation to disability has been rather mixed in British universities. This has stemmed to some extent from the small numbers of disabled academic staff and/or the poor monitoring of numbers; and from the relatively small numbers of disabled students.

Traditionally, the main methods have included:

- awareness raising sessions and events for staff, on a voluntary basis
- embedding of information and processes about disability within staff development and training courses
- training sessions for staff in disability policy and procedures
- providing print and web based information
- staff consultation and training needs analysis at school/service/departmental level.

In delivering this work, disability officers and staff development officers can be seen to have been drawing on Boud and McDonald's (1981) classification of staff development models: professional service; counselling; collegial; or an eclectic mix of the three.

- 2.6** More recent developments include a 'staff centred' process model, the organic model of staff development (<http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/ssc/staff>). This can incorporate any or all of the above but essentially involves staff in determining their own priorities, negotiating their own processes with disability personnel; shaping options and timetables; implementing and reviewing; and determining the next steps.

The practical advantages of this approach have been that the choices made have been unexpected, creative and owned by the staff concerned. It has offered an escape from the 'session basis' of much staff development ('we had the session on disability and so we have done that'). It shares many characteristics with staff developers' ideas about consultation and 'needs analysis' work. It is distinctive in that it explicitly acknowledges from the outset that in relation to disability, the developments will be ongoing : the 'narratives' are planned to continue.

- 2.7** Although the early working up of the organic model has been with departments and services, it has become clear that the personal narratives (Clandinin and Connelly 2001) are key. If the objectives of staff development include the encouragement of staff as 'change agents', then personal/professional development narratives are of vital importance in shaping the changes with which people will feel most at ease (cf LTSN personal development programmes). These examples are mini narratives, linking past, present and future.
- 2.8** They are also part of an historical record of work in a notoriously under recorded area. They reflect a kind of action research by the staff concerned: raising questions, proposing answers and creating possible solutions via new practice. It is vital that such work finds a written record, if it is to achieve due recognition and have sustained impact.
- 2.9** Disability specialists and staff developers will find many ways of using the examples which follow in chapters three and four (see annex 3). Of particular value, in the short term, is the fact that they illustrate ten live and recurring issues for academic staff in 2002 and so they will be seen as having congruence with some of their central ideas and concerns.

The issues are:

Equity. The fundamental question of whether disabled students are expected to 'fit in' to the existing curriculum with minor adjustments or whether a fairer curriculum can be devised which takes full account of any impairments. If we are implementing a social model of disability (see annex 4), should changes be added on for disabled students and/or threaded through for all?

Transition. The impact of prior educational experience on student attitudes and expectations and the changes needed in HE to accommodate these.

Students as experts about disability. The obvious common sense of this with the accompanying question of how this can be operationalised in practice. The impact of students' ability to communicate about the experience of disability on the curriculum outcomes with staff; and the implications of this for student involvement.

Staff attitudes, knowledge, expectations and feelings about disability. There are many fears around disability and these examples show staff acknowledging these and moving on.

Staff attitudes to their own professional development as educators:

Some staff here clearly think that inclusiveness is part and parcel of their professional stance and that they do learn from reflecting on practice. Reflective practitioners? Staff realise that they may have more power in relation to the curriculum than they usually realise.

Sustaining expertise within schools and departments can be problematic if very few disabled students enter any particular school. More inclusive courses can change this scenario.

Curriculum enhancement for all: changes made in response to disability may lead to a better experience for all students. Some questions are raised about this.

Institutional coordination of responses (partnerships between staff in HE). These examples often show staff working in partnership with central services but the general mechanisms for co-ordination are often far from transparent, if they exist at all.

The impact of peer group attitudes to disability on the HE experience of disabled students. The examples show positive and negative effects.

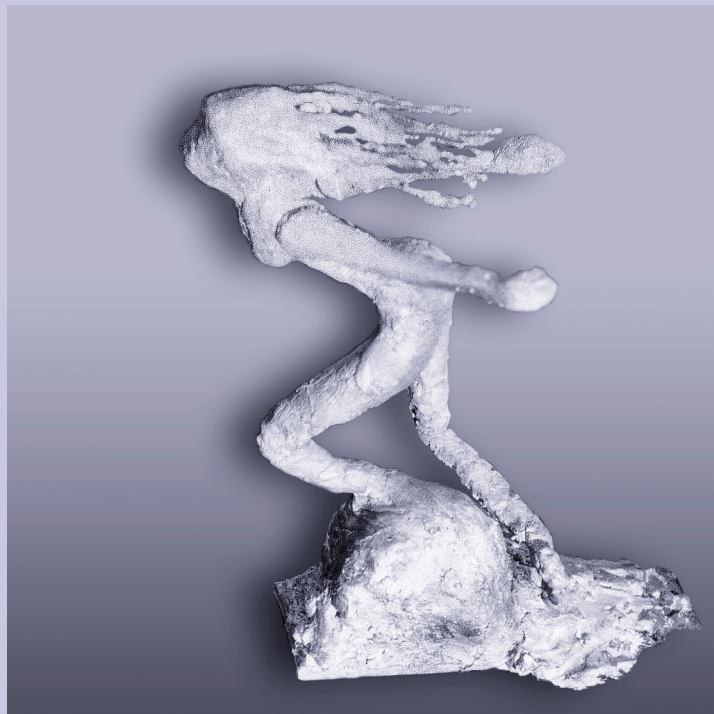
Academic/Vocational issues. Staff raise questions about the possible differences between the demands of an academic course for disabled students and the demands in professional life.

Taken as a group, the examples provide a valuable addition to the materials now emerging in HE about particular disabilities; and about the teaching, learning and assessment practices required in relation to them.

Chapter

3

Examples
within teaching
and learning



FREEDOM
Sophie White

Supporting dyslexic students on the web

Dr. Gabriele Neher, School of History and Art History
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Presenting situation

Art History and Visual Culture are both subjects that traditionally attract comparatively large numbers of students affected by specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia. Many of the students adapt well to the forms of assessment used on courses, which range from written coursework to oral presentations and slide examinations. All of these forms of assessment draw on skills of visual analysis, an area in which many dyslexic students excel. My main area of concern has thus been less with devising alternative forms of assessments, even though, where required, I will strive to do so. Most of my interest has focused on supporting the learning process of dyslexic students through an alternative presentation of support materials for courses taken.

Staff response

As many dyslexic students find reading of densely printed materials a slow, and time-consuming process, I decided that an alternative presentation of written course materials would benefit such students. One solution that offered itself was the presentation of materials on the web.

For the construction of websites to accompany my modules, I consulted materials on accessibility and student learning, tried to read some of the literature on dyslexia, and, most importantly, talked to my students. The students consulted were very much in favour of websites, for the following reasons:

As reading is a slow process, as well as an often inaccurate one, web sites are helpful in that the amount of information visible at any one time is restricted, and can be restricted even further by increasing the font size for pages displayed

Web sites offer the choice of reading on-line or printing materials

Materials posted can be copied, and then manipulated in a way that suits the student concerned

Web sites offer access to visual resources, thus involving the student concerned in a more active learning process

For the development of the web sites, I have used my printed module handbooks. The simple transfer of these materials onto the web, gives students choices in navigation. In addition to this first step, support materials for individual lectures are posted following each lecture. Most importantly, this includes a list of visual aids used in the class. The list will also be distributed in class. As most of my teaching covers Italian Renaissance Art, this means that students in classes do not need to worry about the spelling of unfamiliar names. The advantage of posting the material on the web is again one of navigation, and also serves as an aide-memoire of images seen when students have to tackle tasks based on images.

Feelings and observation

One of the attractions of offering support materials on the web for me was that the use of this technology offered a means of presenting text-based course materials in a different way. The textual information is not different in any way from the materials presented in 'traditional' course handbooks, yet the environment of the web permits alternative ways of navigating through the material, allowing the students concerned more control over their learning processes.

This continues to be one of the main driving factors for my ongoing interest in supporting the learning of dyslexic students. With the embedding of 'key skills', which include visual skills, into benchmarking statements and programme specifications, there is an added incentive for exploring further how best to support students with learning difficulties. While changing assessments might benefit these students in the short term, the challenge for me lies in rethinking teaching in such a way as to support the learning processes of the students- and in return, to learn infinitely more from them than was initially invested.



Discussion Points

1. First reactions?

2. Questions

- Would these adjustments have been possible/desirable in your own situation?
- Have you learned anything new about dyslexia from the exemplar?
- This is an example of changes made for disabled students benefiting all students. Can you think of any other similar examples?

Supporting a dyslexic student

Rakesh Bhanot and Margaret Sephton, the Centre for Higher Education Development,
 Dennis Clarke, Academic Tutor, School of Art and Design
 Sarah Williams and Sally Evans, Learning and Study Support,
 Student Services
 Coventry University

Presenting situation

The student had studied for one year on a Business Degree course and did not feel happy with the content, except for some of the free choice options within the School of Art and Design. He had introduced himself at the Dyslexia Support Group as "[This is my name] and I'm going to fail".

Following negotiations between the Senior Lecturer in Learning and Study Support, the student and colleagues from the School of Art and Design, it was agreed that he should transfer to a BA General degree. This would allow him to build on his strengths by following a series of modules in which he could succeed.

Processes and feelings experienced by the member of academic staff

The academic tutor in the new School was very impressed by the student's enthusiasm, knowledge and desire to debate ideas regarding design issues. He decided to "concentrate on his abilities, not on his disabilities". It is possible that in spite of his articulate nature, the student was not aware of his own internalised oppression. (He has 'very bright' older siblings).

It soon became apparent that the student had repeatedly been discouraged and demotivated, prior to joining the University, and had not been allowed to do certain things because of his dyslexia. This had resulted in his lack of exposure to the same pedagogical environment as other pupils and students.

The tutor made time to listen and felt it important not to judge the student's overall abilities against his 'disability'. He was willing to wait and let the student disclose when there was a problem and then discuss ways of resolving it. The student was very aware of the support available and knowledgeable about his condition and was also willing to discuss this further with the staff members.

In relation to his own development, the tutor had attended a one-day in-house disabilities awareness course and found it to be very valuable in this situation. The course allowed him to rethink how to explain things in order to take account of gaps in the student's knowledge. For example, the student was aware of the need to develop skills in accurate sentence structure, but did not recognise that he was able to do it because he had always been told that it was something he would never manage. The tutor was able to work with him to build awareness of appropriate linguistic skills and thus develop a practical capability in this area.

Staff responses

It was acknowledged that the student was very good at explaining the issues associated with his disability to relevant people and, consequently, the tutor found him very easy to get on with. He was a confident person, with an open personality, who had no problems interacting with other staff and fellow students.

The tutor identified the areas of particular interest to the student and together they extrapolated a programme of study that developed these interests and abilities, with a greater emphasis on computer skills and design issues than on writing; thus building and emphasising the student's 'strengths'.

The tutor offered note writing support to the student, but it was rejected on the grounds that the student was happier with his own notes. Other practical IT resources were offered and found useful by the student.

Outcomes for the student

The student was encouraged to practice and develop what he could do whilst making time to concentrate on things that he had found difficult. Writing was acknowledged to be the greatest difficulty to overcome. The tutor began by asking the student to "empty his thoughts onto a page" and then they talked together about how to make sense of the words and build up effective sentence structures.

The student found the final year dissertation to be a particularly daunting task. The tutor arranged to spend an afternoon exploring everything the student knew about his topic, which helped him to structure it effectively. Arbitrary concepts were written up on a whiteboard and associated subject matter written alongside. These became chapter headings and subsequently sub-headings and even suggested a possible paragraph order. The student then photographed the whiteboard to enable visual recall at a later date. The student then arranged additional support focussing on the language skills required in order to complete the project.

It was noted that academic conventions actually helped the student to structure his work: formulating a bibliography, using and ordering quotations and filling in the text around them.

At the end of the course the student was able to reflect on the quality of his written work and identify where he could write more effectively. He was successful in gaining a good 2:1 degree with Honours. Though he could 'hardly read a paragraph' on his first meeting with the Senior Lecturer in Learning and Study Support, he had acquired over 300 poetry books by the completion of the course.

What the tutor learned from the student

The tutor gained a deeper insight into what dyslexia is and how spatial awareness and mental geography may be affected by the condition. He also increased his awareness of different types of dyslexia during discussions with the student and other colleagues whilst realising that each person's experience of dyslexia is unique.

Thoughts about future practice

The tutor and other colleagues are increasingly aware of how important it is to take time to establish just what the problems are that a dyslexic student is experiencing, realising also that individual cases may be very different from all the others. They feel that they need further information about dyslexia and the support available.

The tutor also feels that the student's background and 'cultural capital' are likely to have an influence on his ability to articulate his needs. Since not all students will be able to express their needs due to a variety of factors (gender, ethnicity, internalised oppression etc.), the relationship with and/or attitude of the tutor will influence the openness of the student.

It was recognised that, even though someone may be 'written-off' during the schooling process, individuals should not be expected merely to 'plod through higher education and get poor grades'. If one concentrates on the student's abilities, and builds an appropriate programme of study to develop and to build on their strengths, then there is every reason to expect success.

This case study was written by Rakesh Bhanot (Programme Manager for Postgraduate Courses for Learning and Teaching in HE) and Margaret Sephton (Administrative Officer, the Centre for Higher Education Development) following a dialogue with Dennis Clarke (Academic Tutor). Background information was provided by Sarah Williams, Senior Lecturer in Learning and Study Support, and Sally Evans, Learning Support Tutor.

Discussion Points

1. First reactions?

2. Questions

- How significant was the student's ability to communicate about his dyslexia for the outcomes achieved?
- What can be done if students are not confident about explaining their situation? What would you do personally?
- Are there any opportunities within your school for sharing the knowledge gained through supporting a disabled student ?



Comparing Your Responses

On an individual basis write down your reactions to the tutor's work with the student on **structuring the dissertation**.

Compare your responses in pairs.

Have you used this approach? Have you achieved the outcomes using a different method? Would you feel confident using visual methods for teaching students to structure their writing? Who else in the university could you refer students to, for work on academic literacy?

Embedding learning about dyslexia within a typography module

Tracy Allanson-Smith, School of Art & Design,
University of Derby

Background

Students were asked to design a 'dyslexia friendly' questionnaire as part of their level 2 typography module. The brief utilised live copy from a census form. Students were asked to research dyslexia, edit text, work to a deadline, provide work for two external (dyslexic) clients, and amend designs for final presentation. Previously work had been completed by students in around six weeks but in this case and, as a result of student feedback, the final deadline was reduced to 3 weeks and included client feedback at the mid point.

During the project the learners were encouraged to develop important skills: handling the reality of deadlines; handling the production processes; and responding to the influences and needs of a specific audience.

What happened?

The module briefing session deliberately encompassed a variety of teaching and learning methods in order to ensure that the students understood the brief and also to cater for equal opportunities within the student cohort.

During the session, the students were given experiential exercises designed to provide some idea about how dyslexia can be experienced. They were asked, for example, to use their non-writing hand and to take a passage of dictation, using capital letters with words containing a vowel. This gave some insight into the frustration encountered by many dyslexic people when trying to complete several literacy based tasks at the same time. I had experienced this exercise myself during a dyslexia staff development event at Derby University and had found it memorable.

By reading material supplied by the British Dyslexia Association, I learned different methods of teaching and learning to help students with dyslexia. I tried to ensure that I incorporated 'multi-sensory teaching' in my practice and so included the following strategies to vary the delivery of teaching and learning: formal briefing, aural test, written knowledge test, dyslexia fact sheet hand outs, discussions, written query sheet, slide presentations, group criticisms, external client feedback, and also formative and summative assessment. Other strategies included; peer interaction from level 3 students, computer skills workshops, and the use of a video which highlighted positive aspects of dyslexia from a student's perspective .

Observations and feelings

- After the 3rd week of teaching, the analysis of student feedback provided evidence of enhanced confidence with typographic issues for the overwhelming majority of the group and over half also indicated that they had increased their knowledge of dyslexia.
- The use of external feedback from the two dyslexic clients was invaluable for the students, for the following reasons:
 - it allowed anonymity within the cohort: dyslexic students were not made to feel that they needed to volunteer their services
 - it allowed rapid feedback became possible (tracks progress, aids motivation)
 - it provided an authentic dyslexic audience; tutors (in this case) could not contribute appropriate feedback in full
 - it accelerated the production process and kept students motivated.
- Students have suggested that as part of the initial briefing a dyslexic speaker should be introduced. More external clients could form a group for feedback to allow a more wide ranging response. Both are viable observations and will be actioned in future.

The topic of dyslexia has been an invaluable issue around which details of typography such as choice of font, arrangement of layout weight and size of fonts and the use of upper and lower case have been amplified.

"I now know how to incorporate a dyslexic angle into my future work." Level 2 student

Introducing this topic has also encouraged greater student knowledge of this learning difference, which is of critical importance for future practitioners of visual communication/graphic design. It has highlighted an area of equal opportunities which needs greater awareness, particularly on this programme, and not only for learners but also for academic staff.

Discussion Points

1. First reactions?

2. Questions

- 'Simulating' disability is problematic. What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of trying to do this?
- Is there any potential for incorporating learning about dyslexia/disability within your subject area?

Improving access for deaf and disabled students - a strategic approach

George Taylor, Faculty of Health & Community Studies
De Montfort University (Leicester)

Presenting situation

Deaf people, particularly those who use sign as a first language, are a very small group within the general population and are geographically widespread. Interpreting services are not widely available, and this further restricts deaf students' access to training opportunities. Furthermore, deaf people are often at a disadvantage in vocational training and educational settings because they lack the study skills and background knowledge that are more readily available to some of their non-deaf peers. This is often because they have not had the same wide access to school curricula and to information about different subjects. They share this disadvantage with other groups of people who are similarly excluded, such as black and Asian people.

Processes and feelings of staff

The experience of staff in the Faculty of Health and Community Studies at De Montfort University is probably typical, in that the few deaf people who become part of the student group are usually isolated. Whilst individual responses to the needs of such students can be arranged, the presence of deaf students is discontinuous in faculties and therefore the lessons learned by staff tend to be only for that student at that time, and do not impact upon the overall delivery of programmes. On courses, such as social work, which are underpinned by an anti-discriminatory practice value base, this culminates in feelings of dissatisfaction on the part of both students and staff.

Designing a way forward

Research at De Montfort University (Taylor 1996) highlighted the structural nature of the barriers facing deaf students in further and higher education. It is logical therefore, that any solution must also be structural. One way of addressing this is a Preparing for Study programme, an initiative being developed, within the Faculty of Health & Community Studies, as part of the MÁs project funded by Leonardo da Vinci II . In the first instance this will be preparation for entry to the BA Hon's Applied Social Studies (including the Diploma in Social Work) programme, but could be adapted for entry to a range of university programmes. It is essentially an on-line model for the identification and acquisition of study skills, and the teaching of foundation skills in subject areas (social work).

The Preparing for Study programme is being developed so that it is fully accessible to deaf and disabled students. Instead of adapting a currently available programme to make it accessible, or developing one specifically for deaf and/or disabled students, this will be designed to meet the needs of deaf and disabled students but will be open to all students. This link with a mainstream university programme is essential. One of the clear conclusions of the work undertaken for the Leonardo I phase of this project, 1998-99, is that "special" programmes are vulnerable to financial cuts and marginalisation unless they are firmly embedded into the structure of the institution.

Furthermore, evidence from research into Access Courses (Taylor & Palfreman-Kay 2000) and the conclusions from the Leonardo I project indicate the need for a preparation programme "for deaf and disabled students pitched at a different level to either Access or University Foundation Programmes". The failure of the former to meet the needs of deaf and disabled students indicates the need for preparation work to be located within a university rather than a college of further education.

Transition to HE

We will pay particular attention to the "transition" period from further to higher education. One initiative already taken has been to establish a working relationship with the Derby College for Deaf People, which has the experience of providing training programmes for deaf students drawn from many parts of the UK, and the facilities to be able to act as an access point for the Preparing for Study programme. Another early development is to employ a deaf person as a part-time community development worker. This enables us to work directly with community groups and colleagues in this field, promoting the Preparing for Study programme, and developing an effective approach to marketing and recruitment.

Practical issues

The Preparing for Study programme will be delivered on-line, and this is both an advantage in terms of accessibility and a disadvantage in terms of the challenges it presents.

A review of on-line study skills programmes highlights both generic and specifically targeted approaches. The majority of the more generic sites are versions of the National Key Skills Framework offered through different universities. These sites, such as that at De Montfort University, are adapted to suit local need and fit within the university menu of programmes.

There are some study skills programmes that are designed specifically for deaf students, but they are mostly for classroom based teaching rather than on-line. A significant local initiative is the work being undertaken on study skills by Derby College for Deaf People (DCDP) which has a long-standing experience of providing further education programmes to deaf students and a developing expertise in study skills strategies.

Following this review of on-line study skills it was decided to focus attention upon the National Key Skills Framework as being most likely to provide a progressive and adaptable model for this project. The Key Skills approach is one that is embedded not only in the mainstream structure of De Montfort University, but also in the mainstream structure of the entire Further and Higher Education sector in the UK, and it is therefore consistent with the methodological approach of the project.

A search for on-line social work and social care programmes reveals that, at the time of writing, there are no accredited social work or social care programmes available in the UK using a solely on-line delivery method. There are a few on-line programmes within the social work/social care field which relate to specific courses at individual universities. These often make extensive use of the Internet as a source of teaching material, but are usually designed for use in the classroom, with Internet support. Furthermore, they are mostly for first year undergraduates rather than for the pre-undergraduate level which is the focus of the M&S project.

Following this review the UK partners group decided to focus attention on the development of a new Introduction to Social Work module. There are some clear benefits to such an approach:

- content can be specifically designed as inclusive from the outset rather than adapt already existing material;
- the forthcoming major changes in the field of social work education will be reflected in the material developed for the module;
- in-house development is more likely to instill a sense of ownership in the staff responsible for delivering the module, giving a greater sense of "embeddedness";
- links with mainstream university programmes will be much more straightforward and have a greater structural impact.

The question of mode of delivery is another challenge that we face. Virtual Learning Environments, such as WebCT, are market leaders in this field. Another approach would be to build a dedicated website for the teaching materials and resources and use First Class (or similar) to manage the communications and tutorial support. Any decision will need to wait until we are clearer about content, and have been able to subject the various approaches to testing by deaf and disabled people.

Outcomes and future developments

The project is currently in development and the outcomes to date can already be seen in the closer working relationships between the university and local user-based organisations and colleges of further education, as well as the direct and significant input of deaf and disabled people in the development of a university programme. This is a steep learning curve for all concerned, and as the Disability Discrimination Act 2002 impacts directly upon further and higher education, this inclusive approach could provide a model for future inclusive working practices.

Discussion Points

1. First reactions?

2. Questions

- Is your school/department engaged in any transition work in relation to disability? Are there 'reasonable adjustments' which could be made at this stage to encourage entry?
- If you wanted to know more about deafness and the implications for study, could you access such information within your university?

Developing access to teaching, learning and assessment for a student with cerebral palsy

Jo Schofield, School of Tourism and Hospitality Management, University of Derby

Presenting situation

M. has cerebral palsy; he is a wheelchair user and his speech can be difficult to understand. He had started at the University the previous year on a computer course, but there were obvious problems as he is unable to use a keyboard. To cut a long story short, through the efforts of a colleague, he transferred onto 2nd year degree course in Tourism. I first came across M in the Tourism Marketing Management tutorials and was rather apprehensive because I had never taught anyone with such obvious disabilities. Neither had my colleagues and so there was little advice immediately available to me.

The first group presentation

One of the assessment methods for this module was a group presentation involving the collection of primary research via questionnaires. I had spoken to M individually to ascertain how he felt about this form of assessment and he was very keen to take part in the group work and to be included in the actual presentation. The students were allowed to choose their own groups and M was not chosen, so I had to nominate a group to take him. I spoke to M and the three other students together and we came up with a strategy of how to cope and what to do.

Some of the suggestions were that they would meet M in a pre-arranged spot in town to conduct the research and that M's part of the presentation would also include a more comprehensive overhead or a handout of what he was actually saying. The presentation was not particularly good and there were still issues about the students' acceptance of M as a team member.

The second group presentation

By the next semester, M had really started to settle in well and this was mainly to do with having one reliable person to help him with pushing, scribing, computer inputting etc. Previously, he had been relying on several people for different jobs. This stability with basic help really made a difference and allowed him to concentrate more on his studies. For the Research Methods presentation, I decided on a different tack and this was to put him in a group with two very enthusiastic mature students. They approached it as a role play exercise and this very format allowed M to be involved, whilst allowing the other two students to reiterate the points he had made. It was a very good presentation.

The destination studies trip

This success was followed by a field trip to Magaluf. M had never been abroad before and so had approached fellow colleagues as to whether it would be possible for him to go, considering the fact that he may need 24-hour assistance. There was a potential option of an alternative piece of coursework but the Department view was that if M wanted to go we would get funding, and we did – one helper was paid from Central University funding, whilst the other was funded directly from the Department. This trip was life-changing for M in several ways:

- His fellow students became his friends . His enthusiasm and determination had won them over. They had been unsure how to treat him because of his disabilities, yet he is the same as any lad of his age and partakes in the drinking and general socialising as much as the next person. The only difference was that he had never had the chance before now.
- Since the trip he has been abroad several times with his parents. They had always perceived this to be beyond their reach due to M's disabilities, but now a whole new world has been opened up to them due to the confidence of their son.

Current developments

The new academic year has again brought problems for M. He has lost his helper, as she has started a Master's course. M needs a reliable PA who knows and understands his needs. Working with too many people does not help him, but as a temporary measure I went into his lectures and asked his fellow students for help. The response was good and it helped him through the first few weeks. We put up a poster asking for help with my name as the contact. We had a very good response and M now has a new helper, so we will just have to see how this works out in his final year.

Discussion Points

1. First Reactions?

2. Questions

- Could M's first year experience have occurred in your university?
- What are the implications of M's need for a single PA who covers all support tasks?
- How does this example demonstrate the importance of the social model of disability?
- Was the staff response fair to the non-disabled students?

Towards an inclusive field course: a case study of the Derby University field course in the Gambia

Dr Francis Jegede, Division of Geography,
University of Derby

Introduction

Significant efforts have been made to widen disabled students' physical access to educational sites and other public buildings. However, attempts at integrating disabled students fully into the mainstream educational provision through appropriate curriculum design and course delivery are still largely fragmented.

The aim of this exemplar is to share experience with colleagues who may be involved in running similar residential field courses involving disabled students either here in the United Kingdom or abroad.

Some preliminary issues

The challenge of providing an integrative education for students with or without disability is particularly great in a field course based subject such as Geography, where a lot of teaching and learning experience takes place outside the four walls of a lecture theatre. Outdoor activities involving residential or day excursions have been an essential aspect of geographic education over the years.

The Division of Geography, University of Derby currently runs a residential field course to the West African State of the Gambia. The last field exercise was particularly significant in that for the first time, a student wheelchair user was involved in the field trip to a developing country, where facilities for disabled people are generally inadequate or non-existent.

The field course was organised as part of the specialist programme - BSc. (Hons.) in Third World Development and was made up of a team of two academic staff members, a carer/personal assistant to the disabled student and six students.

Field activities, disability and perceptions

The main obstacles to effective participation by disabled people in field activities is not the nature or severity of their disability but the way disabled people are perceived by others, concerning what they can and cannot do (or should or should not be allowed to do). While many of these perceptions, stereotypes, assumptions may be well intentioned, the experience described here completely challenged them and changed the author's understanding of disabled people's involvement in field courses.

Field course planning and processes

The planning stage initially involved a great degree of apprehension. Previous experience in the Gambia with students, had not prepared me for engaging with a disabled student on a distant field course where basic facilities such as transport, telephone, medical services etc., often taken for granted here in the UK, are not readily available.

In line with the University regulations, the planning process involves administering confidential medical questionnaires which are designed to collect essential information such as contact telephone numbers and address of next of kin, name and address of doctor, medical records and history of any allergies, heart conditions, etc. These questionnaires also contained information on students' current vaccination status against diseases such Tetanus. These confidential medical records were to be used only if required by appropriate medical personnel in any emergency. All staff on the field course were also required to have current First Aid Certificate before departure.

In addition to all necessary preparations required for organising a foreign field course, special considerations were given to how to empower the disabled student in the team to ensure the learning outcomes of this exercise were realised. Among the questions in mind during the planning process were:

1. How will the disabled student cope with the perceptions of disability in a completely different cultural environment and what effect would this have on the student's learning experience?
2. Has the student any prior experience travelling abroad and what can one learn from previous experiences that can be used to develop support frameworks for participation in the field exercise?
3. What are the medical, physical and emotional needs of the disabled student and what are the specific support systems that could be called upon to meet these needs?
4. What specific arrangements need to be made to facilitate students' full participation in the field exercise, before departure, during the field course and after the field exercise?
5. How can the field exercises be modified to take account of the student's disability, while at the same time meeting the learning outcomes of the field exercise?
6. How would the disabled student's involvement in field course impact on the rest of the students?
7. What are the health and safety issues involved in taking students with disability abroad?
8. What are the potential problems and difficulties that may arise on the field as a result of having a wheel chair user on a field course abroad?
9. What are the University of Derby's procedures and regulations for dealing with any eventualities while on foreign field course?

Some of the initial worries and issues were resolved through series of discussions and dialogue with the appropriate units in the university, the disabled student concerned, the Head of Geography and the rest of the students on the team. A co-ordinated support system was put in place before and during the field course.

Programme modifications to take account of disability

Very few modifications were made to the usual programme. The main areas where special arrangements were made include:

- the use of a personal assistant/carer;
- request for a wheel chair accessible room in the hotel;
- use of other means of transport to field activity locations.

An essential aspect of the support system involved the inclusion of the disabled student's personal carer who takes responsibility for meeting specific personal needs of the students. This gives the staff the opportunity to concentrate more on other generic aspects of the student's needs and the student's teaching and learning experience.

Facilities provided in the hotel accommodation were reasonably good, and local taxis were used more than in the previous field excursions, as the coaches provided were not particularly suitable. The disabled student participated fully in all activities during the field course.

Observations and reflections

The field course provided an invaluable opportunity for both staff and students to interact with the locals and a number of government and non-governmental organisations involved in the development process of the country. Rather than being a problem, the fact that we had a disabled student on the team actually enriched the experience.

As for the lessons learnt through this experience, one can say that:

1. The disabled student involved in this field course proved to be more 'able' than many students in the team in coping with the rigour of the field exercise.
2. The gregarious nature of the disabled student and the generally positive attitude displayed during the field course both helped make the experience a success and most rewarding, not only for the student but also for every one involved in the exercise.
3. People with disability should be treated as individuals and over generalisation of their conditions as to what they can and cannot do should be avoided as much as possible. There can be no general rule for managing field courses involving people with disability.
4. Physical disability does not necessarily mean inability to participate in strenuous physical activities involved on a field course. All that is required is a little bit of understanding and support to help disabled students realise their potential.
5. Disabled students should be allowed to take personal decisions as to what they can or cannot physically do on the field and for that decision to be underpinned by necessary modifications or changes to field course programme or activities.
6. A properly designed and organised field course should be able to accommodate varying degrees of disability without compromising the integrity and academic rigour of the field exercise.

Discussion Points

1. First Reactions?

2. Questions

- Do you have field work elements within your courses?
If so, what would be your first steps in organising the necessary arrangements for a visually impaired student on your field trip?
Have protocols been established for this within your school/department?
- Do you have protocols in place in relation to disabled students and international placements? If not, what would these protocols need to include?
- Do you have expectations about disabled students' personal characteristics. Is there more pressure on disabled students to be highly communicative and committed as students?
- What kind of benefits accrue to non-disabled learners from inclusive practice?

Support for a student with cerebral palsy

Rakesh Bhanot and Margaret Sephton, the Centre for Higher Education Development,
Mathew Kinross, Learning Support Coordinator,
the Business School
Academic Tutor
Sarah Williams and Sally Evans, Learning Support within Student Services
University of Coventry

Brief details of the situation

The student had cerebral palsy and was a wheelchair user. He applied to study a course in Town Planning. His parents were very supportive and worked proactively with the University to identify the needs related to his studies. The student had a volunteer/assistant with him at all times to help with everyday life necessities and the demands of the course (e.g. note taking).

Processes and feelings experienced by the staff

The tutor was able to prepare well in advance of the arrival of the student. This enabled assessment of the accessibility of the teaching accommodation. The tutor was aware that some of the activities of the course would not be appropriate for a wheelchair user (e.g. some field trips and site visits) and negotiated ways of achieving the required learning outcomes by using a variety of methods. Whilst the programme could not be radically changed, there was sufficient flexibility in terms of using more accessible locations. He was keen to endeavour to provide the same experience for this student as for all of the others.

He recognised the challenges presented by the student's difficulty in holding a pen and it was agreed that his volunteer/assistant could do any drawing required, e.g. on a site visit, with instructions from the student. Although the tutor felt that this was a compromise, he had at the time been unable to find any other way of dealing with the situation, despite contacting SCOPE for information on specific computer packages that might assist. His feeling was that supporting a student with these severe disabilities was going to be a challenge but he was happy to be involved in making necessary adjustments to the course content and delivery.

However, he did feel that the vocational nature of the course meant that the student might not fully benefit from all aspects of the course. The limited scope for practical work in some of the professional areas involved was a cause for concern and the tutor recognised that the student would need a great deal of support from an employer who was willing to invest in the appropriate infrastructure to enable him to work effectively.

The tutor was very impressed by the student's inner drive and readiness to work extremely hard. He also acknowledged the invaluable assistance and guidance received from the University's Disabilities Office, without which it would not have been possible to support this student.

He also felt that the 'cultural capital' and the socio-economic background of the student had assisted with his ability to articulate his requirements and had developed his determination to succeed.

The staff responses, including practical problems solved

None of the staff involved in teaching this student had ever taught someone with similar disabilities before. They did have some reservations, but these were in relation to his future career prospects and not about how able he was to participate fully in the course.

It was fortunate that most of the teaching was scheduled to take place in a building well equipped to allow access for a wheelchair. However, the computer-based statistical analysis sessions had to be relocated from an older, less accessible building, to enable the student to fully benefit from them.

Group work did not present any problems for either the staff or the student as all the other students were very supportive and involved the student fully in all activities.

Outcomes for the student

The student passed his course and is currently pursuing a Master's course in Town Planning, for which he was well prepared, at the University of Oxford.

During his time at Coventry University, he gained greater independence by doing work experience away from his home district and participating in the final year trip to Europe. He did not become dependent on the people he got to know and with whom he was familiar.

What the member of staff learned from the student

The tutor stated emphatically that he had learned 'humility' from working with this student. His awareness of the potential for disabled students to succeed academically had been raised. He had had many of his assumptions about disability challenged and had introduced positive changes in his teaching style in relation to all students. For example, he had learned to provide printed copies of presentation notes and to present information in differing ways so that they would be understood by all students (e.g. enlarged handouts for partially sighted students).

The tutor became aware that the social science background of the Coventry University course had enabled this student to fully participate in the degree programme. In other institutions, where there is a greater emphasis on architecture and design, it might have been more difficult to meet all the course requirements.

As a result of his experiences of working with this student, the tutor became the Learning Support Co-ordinator for his School. Strategies have now been developed to encourage the dissemination of information regarding disabilities and to raise awareness of associated issues throughout the subject area.

Thoughts about future practice

The tutor did acknowledge that some students did not want their disabilities made public and that everyone needed to be sensitive to this issue.

Future course development would take account of the needs of disabled students to ensure that they were not run in such a way as to be excluding.

Staff development sessions would continue to be provided to raise awareness of disability issues, including what might be referred to as potential 'plagiarism' - e.g. when a volunteer/assistant undertakes written or drawing tasks for a disabled student, whose work is it? At Coventry University, training is provided to both disabled students and their volunteer/assistant in relation to this.

Finally, the tutor felt that the University had positively gained from having this student at Coventry in that he had acted as a catalyst for change. The success of this would continue to influence future course development and student support.

Discussion Points

- How do you react to the tutor's claim to have "learned humility" from this work?
- How might a student feel about this?
- Why would this idea be uncomfortable for some disability specialists?
- Why would it make sense to some staff?

Experiences of two vision-impaired lecturers on a PGCE programme

John Irvine and Nigel Taylor
University of Central England

Presenting situation

This article considers our experiences as 'participants' during a PGCE programme. One of us has no sight, whilst the other has some useful vision but has considerable difficulty in reading printed matter. These experiences occurred six and three years ago respectively. Accordingly, we acknowledge that services to PGCE students with a vision-impairment may have improved during the past two years or so.

In essence, the main difficulty we experienced related to the inaccessibility of course materials. For all participants, course materials were usually provided on the day of the relevant taught classes. In most cases, this approach did not prove to be problematic. For us, however, this was to create a range of considerable difficulties, despite our attempts to inform and negotiate with the programme presenters before the start of the programme.

Course response

Initially, as agreed, some materials were provided on floppy-disc at our request. As the course progressed, the amount of materials supplied diminished until no accessible materials were supplied by the later stages of the programme. Furthermore, the period of time between the provision of materials and the class date also decreased from perhaps one working week at the beginning of the course, to the actual day of teaching mid-way through the programme.

In addition, more difficulties were encountered due to the excessive use of OHP materials in class. Whilst the use of such materials is not problematic in itself, the inability of presenters to describe and explain their content was problematic.

As a consequence, we were obliged to access most of the course materials through a personal reader service. Generally, due to the 'late' delivery of course materials the process of reading was not completed until after the teaching of the relevant subject matter in a classroom setting. As a result, our ability to engage and participate in small and large group activities was frequently impeded. Moreover, the excessive use of OHP materials consolidated this 'disabling' experience. By the end of the programme both of us were frustrated at the whole learning process and disillusioned about the 'equal opportunities' commitment of the course presenters. Furthermore, whilst we did not feel we were a burden on the programme presenters, there were times when we believed we were regarded as being burdensome. Our collective experience has also caused us to consider seriously the accessibility and suitability of other learning opportunities.

In order to gain something constructive from this process we believe that several issues need to be addressed on all teaching programmes. These include:

- essential course materials should be provided in the preferred format of students with disabilities;
- the use of OHP materials should be kept to a minimum, and should be duplicated in a format accessible to students with disabilities;
- essential materials should be provided in advance of taught sessions, permitting sufficient time for students to assimilate the information before taught sessions;
- non-essential materials should be dispensed with.

Finally, as a result of recent legislation we believe that educational establishments will be placed in a situation of having to provide 'in-house' materials in an accessible format to staff and students with disabilities. Consequently, good practice regarding the provision of course materials should include:

1. reviewing all course materials to identify and establish their importance and relevance for teaching;
2. enhancing the quality and presentation of written and diagrammatic materials for students with vision-impairments and other difficulties relating to accessibility of text;
3. consulting with course participants before the programme begins in order to identify and meet individual needs;
4. supplying accessible materials at least one week in advance of taught sessions;
5. supplying a prioritised list of essential textbooks well in advance of the course to permit students the opportunity to arrange for transcription or recording;
6. reviewing the situation with participants regularly throughout the programme, and amending provision as agreed.

Discussion Points

- How many disabled staff do you know in your university? What have you learned from them?
- The early and timely preparation of course materials seems simple enough. Why is it not for many? Would it involve major changes for you in your approach to course preparation?
- Do you find the checklists provided here a useful tool for enabling you to develop inclusive practice? Would you need anything else?

Collaborating in the support of a final year student with severe depression and alcohol problems

Joy Mather, Mental Health Development Officer
Bob Wood, School of Manufacturing Engineering
Loughborough University

Presenting situation

R had been suffering from depression from very early on in his degree, after having to cope with some painful and unfortunate family circumstances. He had difficulties in completing the progression requirements each year, and during his industrial placement he experienced a breakdown. He was subsequently coping with acute symptoms of depression, alcohol problems, as well as anxiety and damaged confidence. He had been receiving support from the University Counselling Service for some time and also had regular contact with psychiatric services.

At the beginning of his final year R's Counsellor referred him to the University's mental health development officer (based in the Disabilities and Additional Needs Service). She talked with him about the practical help which she could offer and one of the things which R identified was that it would be helpful to explain about his difficulties to his Programme Director and thus engender greater understanding about them. A three-way meeting was arranged.

Bob's perspective

Prior to the arranged meeting, it was apparent throughout R's studies that his problems were having a clear effect on his academic performance. However, his positive attitude towards his studies gave me little cause to single him out. During the initial meeting with R and Joy it became apparent that this positive attitude was really a dogged determination to complete his degree, and that this determination was a second major source of anxiety.

In developing a useful dialogue with R, it seemed important to convince him that his situation was manageable and that he was an important member of the 'management team'. In practical terms, this required the three of us to negotiate and progress a study plan that was sympathetic to his needs but adequately challenging to satisfy his determination. It seemed wrong to view R as a 'client' or 'patient' and more positive to see him as a student struggling to cope with strong negative influences in his life. Over several meetings, this prompted R and I to discuss various ways in which he might better manage his time and thoughts, and to perhaps recognise and accept those periods when his depression was too strong for productive study.

Although the three of us had only one face-to-face meeting, subsequent telephone and email discussions between Joy and myself were very important in steering my dialogue with R, particularly in developing my non-academic perspective and grounding my expectations of him.

Joy's perspective

R. had an insightful approach to the difficulties he was having. He seemed fairly clear about what he thought might help, perhaps because by the time I met him he had been struggling with depression and its consequences for some time. He was apprehensive about the meeting with Bob, but also definite about the fact that he was the person he needed to see. I assumed from this that he had already trusted him with some information about his situation, but this was not in fact the case. The thought of explaining and describing his feelings and his situation made him very nervous on the day of our three-way meeting, and I know now that in fact the two had barely spoken to each other before this point.

Bob handled a delicate situation quietly, sometimes humorously, and focused on the practical issues in a way which gave a positive and encouraging message; he didn't make a big deal of the experiences R was going through. Liaison meetings can be difficult, and there may be apprehensiveness from all parties. I think we used this opportunity to share information and to establish the fact that we were all, particularly R himself, part of the process of keeping him on track.

After this meeting I saw R very regularly and came to know him well. We were able to try various strategies to get him through the very difficult final months; he was literally sick and tired of pushing himself day after day when the rewards were not apparent. But mostly I saw him on his own, and only heard his point of view. It was sometimes difficult to tread the line between support which was challenging and confidence building, and 'help' which merely reinforced R's sense of deficit and disability.

The value of the collaboration with Bob was that he kept R's experience as an achieving student with a future at the forefront. At one stage in the final semester R had to give a presentation. Because of his experience on placement (in which presentations and the accompanying stress had been a stark feature of his breakdown) he was extremely anxious and really doubted his ability to go through this part of the course. Although well aware of the dangers of avoidance, and the need to 'face the fear' I was worried about the effects of the stress on someone whose mental health was already fragile. I argued the case for being sympathetic – maybe giving the presentation to a very small number of students instead of all of them. Bob, however, felt that R was someone who could rise to a challenge, given the right encouragement. His instincts were right; the presentation (to the whole group) and the experience became a real confidence booster for R, as well as laying the ghosts of the disastrous placement. Bob and I have since been involved in similar judgment calls, and we have found our differing perspectives a useful framework for looking at a situation from all kinds of angles, and making a more informed risk assessment as a result.

The challenges and benefits of working together

In the first place we knew nothing about each other's backgrounds, specialisms, ways of working or attitudes – a first meeting in the company of a student who is nervous or vulnerable doesn't necessarily leave a lot of space for checking out these things. Liaison meetings should inspire calmness and confidence! When support is coming from a variety of disciplines and perspectives, there are dangers of confusion, inconsistencies, partial or distorted views and unhelpful dynamics (e.g. 'splitting' as it is known by counsellors). There's a definite need to be clear about boundaries and remits, and to keep in touch.

But the positive side of 'joined up' collaborative support is that the student can have help in dealing with his/her difficulties in a non-stigmatising way. Mental health support and counselling cannot have the detailed and grounded understanding of the demands of an academic course or an industrial placement. In the same vein, academic support must take account of the student's wider needs, limitations and capabilities.

However, within support frameworks, there is a danger that the student becomes a 'client' or identified with illness or deficits, and there sometimes seems a fine line between challenge and damage. In this respect, clear and trusting dialogue is required to identify how much control the student can beneficially have in managing his/her problems and to build a support framework around this. If support also comes from within the department, the student has much more chance of remaining first and foremost 'a student', admittedly with some problems, but also with an informed and realistic departmental advocate as well as objective focused support from elsewhere. We needed all these forms of support, and we needed to be able to communicate throughout and complement each other's ways of working.

Discussion Points

- Consider the ways in which the role of mental health development officer seems to differ from that of a counsellor or doctor.
- Who would be called upon to do this kind of collaborative work in your university?

Supporting a student with Asperger's Syndrome

Dr Lucy Sargisson, School of Politics
University of Nottingham

As former Director of Studies and Chair of Student Affairs Committee and Student/Staff Consultative Committee (SSCC), I had the responsibility of monitoring the pastoral care and well-being of all of our students and it is in this capacity that I can offer knowledge and information about supporting a particular student with Asperger's Syndrome. I can also explain the steps taken by the school to ensure that G had the best possible academic experience. I should like to stress that this is my own personal (rather than an official School) account.

Making adjustments

G came to us with A's at A level and the particular challenges that faced us concerned structural delivery of teaching and social interaction. In the early days, G found two-way social interaction very difficult and stressful and was inclined to dramatic outbreaks of frustration. We arranged one-to-one tuition and this worked well. Tutors soon realised that the usual signals of non-verbal communication were not appropriate and developed direct ways of verbally communicating with G. He is a voracious reader and his capacity to retain and understand complex texts has impressed everyone who has contact with him. He has strong political views, particularly on exclusion in education, and his early undergraduate work, though brilliant, tended to be somewhat dogmatic. His written work was always long: I believe his undergraduate dissertation was a quarter of a million words.

With regards to social integration, G attended lectures with his peers, was allocated a special (non-medical) student helper, and was on the School's SSCC. He was also a member of the Politics Society. As an Undergraduate student he represented his year on the Student/Staff Consultative Committee and chairing these early sessions was a real challenge as he could not pick up the cues that it was time to stop talking and allow someone else space to speak.

I am aware that certain direct and indirect costs were involved in teaching G but am not in a position to fully recount these. Direct financial costs involved daily taxi fares to and from home, paying the non-medical helpers, and special photocopying arrangements so that he could access the core reading for his courses. Indirect costs would be such things as staff time (the decision not to enforce a strict word limit had implications in this respect).

G graduated with an excellent degree and is currently doing research.

Staff feelings and observations

As a postgraduate student, G is a valued member of our School. He fully participates in putting questions to visiting speakers in Research Seminars. These sessions require sensitive chairing as he has in the past stepped over the line of acceptable criticism and been quite rude to speakers.

It is my observation that he has matured in his time here. He is quite relaxed in conversation. He recently gave a paper at our School's Graduate Colloquium and I was impressed not only by the standard of his work but also by the gentle and generous way in which he handled questions from other students and staff. I do not mean to imply that his behaviour no longer reflects Asperger's syndrome. His behaviour is, and always has been, unusual: in Research Seminars, for instance, he usually sits by the door, rarely removes his coat and has a small toy that he manipulates in his hands as he listens. He is phobic about flying things and if there is a fly or wasp in the room he will rush out, terrified. By saying that he has matured, I intend to convey that a softer edge has developed as he has gained social confidence. He will interact now, he is friendly and will take verbal cues. We have learned to work with him and he is truly liked and respected by my colleagues and myself.

Discussion Points

- Did you expect to read about **changes in social confidence and behaviour** within the parameters of Asperger's syndrome? (Asperger's syndrome can be defined as a pervasive developmental disorder which is characterised by severe and sustained impairment in social interaction, development of restricted and repetitive patterns of behaviour, interests and activities.)
- What are the possible dangers of making assumptions about students with Asperger's syndrome on the basis of one example?

Chapter

4

Examples
of adjusting
assessment



LOOM
Fiona Kitch

Identifying and supervising a dissertation topic for a dyslexic student with medical difficulties

Dr. Hamish Forbes, Department of Archaeology,
University of Nottingham

Presenting situation

K was a mature student with dyslexia and a medical history of depression. During her final year, the depression became so acute because of the pressure of her studies that she could not complete the year. In particular, she was unable to complete more than a small amount of research on her dissertation. She was allowed to suspend studies on medical grounds. Six months later she indicated that she wished to return to complete the degree.

Staff response

As her personal tutor, and at the instigation of the Study Support Centre tutor, I attended a 'review' meeting with the student shortly before she was due to resume her studies. Although she was completing her final year part-time on medical grounds, she was still suffering significantly from depression, and so the issue we faced was how to organise the student's studies so as to minimise the pressure placed upon her.

The dissertation, in particular, presented problems. It represents a major piece of sustained, autonomous work for final year students spread over two semesters (40 credits; 12,000-14,000 words). The dissertation topic initially chosen by the student was in many ways fairly "typical" of a humanities dissertation. It involved a large amount of reading, the understanding of complex and technical knowledge and data, and the employment of abstract concepts. The student felt that to undertake large amounts of reading and assimilate a mass of technical information would be too stressful for her given the combination of her dyslexia and her depression.

During the meeting we explored some of the non-academic activities which the student enjoyed and used as relaxation. Textiles emerged as a major element. I, therefore, suggested that the student consider undertaking the reconstruction of an actual version of a primitive vertical loom, of a type discussed in the archaeological literature. The project would include an element of library research into the different ways in which the archaeological evidence had been interpreted, but much of the work would involve practical skills, such as the drawing of plans for the loom derived from her understanding of the discussions in the literature.

Construction of the wooden parts ("hardware") of the loom would be undertaken by a professional woodworker, but the supervision of the construction, the complex work of setting up the threads on the loom and the actual weaving would be the student's responsibility. The idea was that the student would describe the processes involved in each stage of the project and keep a photo journal of the progress. The dissertation's conclusions would relate back to issues relevant to the archaeology of textiles.

Practical problems:

- This 'non-standard' approach to a research project in archaeology needed validation. The case for it had to be made to the external examiner before the student could attempt it. In this case he considered it acceptable.
- The cost implications were significant. The timber for the "hardware" of the loom had to be purchased, and payment for the joinery work involved in construction was another major cost. So, too, was the purchase of quantities of woollen yarn for the weaving. In this case the student's partner was very supportive and quite content for family finances to be employed on the project.
- Domestic problems, such as having a large loom taking up a considerable amount of space in a room in the student's house were overcome by the forbearance and support of the family.
- Supervision of a non-standard dissertation. As supervisor I was able to provide moral support and also archaeological knowledge. However, throughout the project, the support of the Study Support Centre tutor was crucial, providing a detached viewpoint to the project which I did not always have. Together we explored and resolved any emerging difficulties.

Outcome for the student

The student developed increasing confidence in her abilities as the project progressed. She completed the dissertation, and also the rest of her modules. The dissertation was awarded a clear II:i mark, and in no small part as a result of this the student gained an overall II:i degree. At the start of the year I had considered that the achievement of even a II:ii degree would have been a success.

Thoughts on future practice

The employment of non-standard approaches to dissertations is very dependent on agencies over whom the student and supporting staff have very little control. In particular, departmental policies and external examiners need to be aware of the kinds of problems which dyslexic students can have if such an approach is to be successful. In addition, it is evident from this example that a great deal more can be achieved if students and teaching staff work in partnership with Study Support staff. The support and encouragement of such staff can be a crucial factor in encouraging academic staff who wish to explore further the approaches which enable dyslexic students to maximise their potential.



Discussion Points

1. First reactions?

2. Questions

- Would this approach be 'non-standard' in your institution?
- Is this fair to non-dyslexic students? Are there equity considerations with this kind of adjustment?

Amending Assessment for a Dyslexic Student

Professor C R Black, School of Biosciences
University of Nottingham

Presenting situation

Last year it was brought to my attention that a second year student taking a five credit (37.5 hours of study time) Semester 4 dissertation was so severely dyslexic that she needed to have a note-taker in lectures and would also need to have examination papers prepared as tape-recordings. The usual form of assessment for the dissertation module is an extended essay. I was asked if I would be prepared to set an alternative assessment.

Staff response

I consulted various people to establish whether this was possible and what form the assessment should take. These included:

- the vice-dean responsible for teaching to check that an alternative assessment was permissible; it was, as the Module Catalogue stated that the exact form of assessment was at the module convener's discretion.
- the chair of the Student Disabilities Committee to seek his opinion; he was totally supportive.
- my wife, who is also an experienced university teacher, to see whether we could devise an alternative assessment that was equally challenging but did not involve an extended essay; she suggested the student be asked to prepare a 10 minute radio broadcast with an associated support pack for listeners to the "BBC University Radio World About Us" programme. The student would be asked to choose an area of environmental plant biology relevant to the parent taught module she was taking and prepare an interesting and newsy report.
- Margaret Herrington in the University's Study Support Centre, who has responsibility for ongoing support for students with disabilities, to confirm that this proposal was acceptable and fair to the student; she was enthusiastic and offered studio support to help prepare the recording.
- the student to ensure she was happy with the proposed alternative assessment; she was, although slightly apprehensive about whether she could rise to the challenge. She was given approximately 8 weeks to complete the assignment.

Outcomes

The student submitted the completed radio broadcast and listeners' support package on time and said she enjoyed the assignment. Her work was assessed independently by two academic staff and awarded a high 2/1 mark. The tape, though clearly made in several instalments, showed evidence not only of wide reading and good understanding, but also the ability to present the material effectively to meet the needs of the target audience.

Feelings and observations

My feelings are that both the student and I enjoyed the assignment as something different from more conventional assessments, even though I was initially reticent about setting this student a different type of assessment from others, in case I discriminated against them, either positively or negatively. Once it was decided that I could set this type of assessment, no additional workload was involved in supervising or marking the work. I personally find it interesting and stimulating to set students a range of coursework that helps to develop additional skills, and believe they enjoy and benefit from the challenges provided.

An important point for me was that the exercise reinforced the view that, although some students may have difficulty in expressing themselves in extended prose or under examination conditions, they may nevertheless be able to show their full potential when set alternative challenges in areas requiring different communication skills. I am happy to continue to offer students advanced level coursework assignments that are tailored to meet their needs and requirements as I feel they and their teaching staff both gain additional benefit and satisfaction from assignments that are of mutual interest.

Postscript

After the success of the 'reasonable adjustment' described above, the idea was extended and offered to more students the following academic year.

"we have set a similar exercise for a second year group of about 80 students for the first time this year. We have divided them up into groups of 5 and asked them to prepare a 5 minute "TV" clip on any topics related to the impact of environmental stresses on plants. Each group elects a team leader and decide how to structure their presentation - e.g. have an anchorman back in the studio, roving reporters and interviewees. They can use visual aids if they wish. One or two groups are even planning to video themselves. It should be interesting to see how things turn out!"

The assessment criteria include: Originality (10); Knowledge of topic (10); Clarity of presentation (10); Communication skills (10); and ability to enthuse/inform audience (10)"

Discussion Points

This work can lead to the conclusion that if the curriculum processes take account of a variety of learning style/preferences, then there will be less need for separate arrangements for individual students.

- Can you think of an example in your own courses in which this would be the case?
- The academic in the example reveals a 'can and will do' attitude to making necessary adjustments so that students can realise their academic potential. From your experience what prevents academic staff from developing this attitude?
How would you personally persuade a colleague to develop this kind of flexibility?

A two-way reflection on supporting a dyslexic student with a dissertation

Nottingham Trent University

Presenting situation

Module Leader:

A student on an Art and Design sandwich course, who made notably constructive spoken contributions to Critical Studies seminars in her first and second years, began to show signs of dyslexia in her second year essay. Identification of her dyslexia by a specialist helped her to understand the cause of her earlier slow reading speed. Unfortunately, recognition of her dyslexia did not help her to feel any more secure.

In discussing the preparation for her third year dissertation, she showed a profound lack of confidence and less discernment than before. She also found more difficulty in absorbing and understanding tutorial advice and required lengthy repetitions of the key points. Her final year supervisor found similar 'symptoms' for the whole of the preparation period. It was unfortunate that, due to bereavement, her dyslexia support was disrupted, just as she faced the prospect of cutting her dissertation text to size. Not surprisingly, her anxiety and distress increased.

Dyslexia Specialist:

The student was experiencing the kind of cognitive difficulty that is common to many dyslexic students on Art and Design courses, when working on their written dissertations. The enhanced ability to make free associations between words and ideas, which is central to creative thinking, can result in a confusion of ideas, divided and sub-divided into many inter-related, overlapping points. This way of thinking does not fit easily with linear forms of writing.

The additional dyslexic weakness in short-term working memory, where difficulty is experienced 'holding in mind' a number of issues for the purpose of judging meaning and level of importance, made it difficult for this student to extract broad categories and bring order to a 'barrage' of output. Any individual faced with what amounts to mental overload could easily be reduced to tears of frustration. The over-riding fear would be that the task would never be completed at all, let alone for a given deadline. This student was particularly conscientious and so had even more reason to feel overwhelmed.

In addition to the problems with organising information described above, the student found it difficult to read familiar words with fluency. Her spelling was weaker than expected and handwriting slower than the majority of students in higher education. This made the task of ordering and editing doubly difficult, in spite of an above-average score on standardised tests for aspects of general intellectual ability.

The fact that the student was so much affected by an unavoidable change in her dyslexia support specialist, highlights the role played by the latter in providing emotional as well as learning support and the importance of continuity.

Staff Response

Module Leader:

Typically, as a dyslexic student, she was granted an extra two weeks before submission. We were determined to do our best by her, but we were perplexed. Necessarily, we were dependent on the views and contribution of the Dyslexia Support Unit.

In the event, she managed to hand in the dissertation on time and when her work was assessed and its high quality revealed, we were pleased that she had realised her perceived potential. The dissertation was very lucid, critical and able in a traditional academic sense. It was carefully measured in its comments, analytical, very readable and well designed. It achieved only 2% short of the 'excellent' category.

However we were incredulous, in retrospect, at the stressful course of events leading to the submission.

Dyslexia Specialist:

In spite of an ongoing high level of anxiety on the part of the student, the dyslexia specialist was able to provide sufficient emotional and technical support during the weekly sessions, to enable her to produce a lengthy dissertation of a good standard.

Module Leader:

Dedicated to the best interests of this student, both members of staff wanted her to realise her full potential and kept her to the extended deadlines before final submission. Staff gently coaxed and showed readiness to discuss and reflect as necessary. Evidence of her thorough preparation, her conscientiousness and good past record led us to a very pragmatic attitude in the final stages; to avoid worrying her about the limit and to encourage her to complete and submit her work as it stood.

Dyslexia Specialist:

Ongoing email liaison and co-operation between the specialist and the module leader made a flexible approach possible. Full assessment for dyslexia supported by documentation, carried out by the Dyslexia Support Unit, meant that assessment allowances could be provided without compromising the department's assessment standards.

It was fortunate that the student had received a grant for a computer and one-to-one specialist support by means of the Disabled Students Allowance, awarded by her Local Education Authority. This meant that she did not experience the additional frustration of competing for the use of a university computer and was not dependent on the kindness of computer-owning friends. It is clear that a personal computer provided a lifeline for this student.

Feelings and observations

Module Leader:

In the case of dyslexia, we have an excellent working relationship with the Dyslexia Support Unit and already have structures in place to help students. As dyslexia can take several forms and affect attitudes and achievement, we are also aware of the need to stay open-minded and consult the Unit over signs that might appear unfamiliar.

The message for members of staff is 'never give up'. This student's case confirms the need to recognise the possible differences between appearances and reality and to avoid making unqualified diagnoses of students, seeking instead specialist advice from colleagues – in this case, from the Dyslexia Support Unit.

Dyslexia Specialist:

A balanced, pragmatic and flexible approach, based on established, recorded procedures and good communication between specialist and department, enabled the student to produce work that was consistent with her evident ability.

Discussion Points

1. First reactions?

2. Questions

- Have you learnt anything about dyslexia from this example that you didn't already know?
- Do you have access to a dyslexia specialist within your institution?
- Why are the academic staff so puzzled by the student's difficulties?
- Is support for dyslexic students essentially about enabling them to fit in with existing academic conventions?

Practice Placements For Disabled Students

John Irvine and Nigel Taylor
University of Central England

Designing for diversity

Each year six to ten disabled students undertake the Diploma In Rehabilitation Studies (Vision Impairment) programme at UCE. Most, but not all of these students have a vision impairment. The remainder experience some other form of disability such as physical, hearing or neurological impairments. Provided that applicants with a disability are able to demonstrate their ability to manage their disability effectively on a day-to-day basis, and can meet the academic and professional requirements of the course, they receive equal access to the course. Indeed, individuals with a disability can often enhance the experience of all students undertaking the programme.

Planning and organising placements

In common with many courses which lead to a 'professional' qualification a significant proportion of students' learning during the Diploma programme occurs in a work-based practice placement. These placements usually occur in social services departments, voluntary organizations or educational establishments which provide services to adults and/or children who are blind or partially sighted. Given the importance of practice placements to the programme as a whole, considerable amounts of time are devoted to locating, planning, supporting and monitoring this aspect of the programme.

All students are involved in the process of identifying and preparing for placements from the outset, regardless of ability and disability. Several reasons exist for this. Firstly, students are expected to take control of their own learning at all stages of the programme, including the identification of appropriate placement agencies. Secondly, as students are recruited from all parts of the United Kingdom they are given the opportunity to complete their practice placement in a setting of their choice, including their home area.

Although the process of finding and setting up placements begins shortly after the commencement of the Diploma programme, the course team (including our Secretary) are already quite well-informed about the abilities and needs of each student in relation to information requirements, independent mobility and personal management skills. This is achieved by a continual process of individual student consultation meetings with all students undertaking the programme. When a student with a disability is being placed, additional planning and preparation is routinely performed. For example, disabled students are required to attend a pre-placement meeting with the programme's Placement Co-ordinator and their prospective Practice Teacher in order to engage in the process of preparation and negotiation to identify and eliminate actual or potential disabling barriers. This process requires a degree of forethought and knowledge, but does not require excessive amounts of additional time relative to that given to non-disabled students.

Underpinning philosophy

The philosophy which underpins the Diploma programme is strongly influenced by the 'Social Model Of Disability'. A key principal of the programme asserts that professionals who work with vision impaired people should enable and empower individuals and groups to challenge and overcome barriers caused by social and institutional structures which fail to take account of the need of disabled people. For example, all learning materials and documentation provided by the programme's teaching and administration staff is provided in an accessible format to disabled students. Most frequently, this is on computer disc, but it may also be in large print or Braille.

The 'Social Model' approach is applied to all aspects of the programme, including placements. It is not viewed as being confrontational; rather it is achieved through informed debate, negotiation and persuasion. For example, when arranging placements administrative and record-keeping systems within the placement agency need to be made accessible and/or manageable. This may, for example, involve awareness training for students of data recording systems relevant to the placement agency before the placement begins, or perhaps during the induction period. This enables students to have adequate time to prepare their equipment and materials, and to arrange personal assistance if necessary. Furthermore, Practice Teachers and their colleagues are also given time to prepare appropriate cases and types of work to be completed by students during placement, taking into account information, mobility and transport requirements.

Reflections

The contribution any disabled student makes to a given placement should be measured on the basis of the levels of competency and professionalism by which any student is assessed. Accordingly, assessments of students' competence should not be undermined by disabling barriers and environments. The involvement of disabled students, therefore, in the identification of, and planning and preparation for appropriate placements is viewed by all parties as essential. In this way impediments to learning and service delivery are usually minimized or eliminated completely. Additional benefits often come by way of enhanced student enjoyment of practice learning, increased learning for Practice Teachers and their colleagues, and perhaps most importantly, the development of good 'disabled' role models within the profession for service users.

Discussion Points

1. First reactions?

2. Questions

- What are your own concerns about disability in the workplace? Are you operating with a deficit model of disability?
- What are the advantages of being visually impaired in these practice settings?
- Would there be any advantages in your vocational setting?

The following references provide detailed information for use with the case studies. They cover the new legislative requirements, current development work in the field and further material about specific disabilities. References from the main text are included in section iv below.

I. Key references on concepts and terminology

- Barnes, C, & Mercer, G (1996) Exploring the Divide: Illness and Disability. Leeds: The Disability Press
- Bynoe, I, Barnes, C, & Oliver, M (1991) Human Rights for Disabled People, N.C.C.L.
- Oliver, M. (1990) The Individual and Social Models of Disability. Available from <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/disability-studies/archiveuk/Oliver/in%20soc%20dis.pdf>

II. National websites

- For up to date information on the legislation (SENDA 2001 amendments of the DDA), the Code of Practice and for valuable discussions on various aspects of disability <http://www.drc-gb.org>
- For information about all the HEFCE projects within the development initiatives and about disability funding in general <http://www.hefce.ac.uk>
- For information and advice about current HEFCE projects on disability and new developments, contact the National Disability Team. <http://www.natdisteam.ac.uk>
- For information about disability in relation to teaching and learning contact the Institute of Learning and Teaching, and the Learning and Teaching Support networks generic centre websites. <http://www.ilt.ac.uk>
<http://www.ltsn.ac.uk/genericcentre>
A recent series on Assessment in HE includes:
McCarthy, D and Hurst, A. A Briefing on Assessing Disabled Students. See website for address.
- For information about IT and Accessibility, consult TechDis (Technology for Disability Information Service). This is a new JISC (Joint Information Systems Committee) service which provides information and advice to the Further and Higher Education Sectors on the use of Communication and Information Technologies (CIT). It focuses on enhancing access to learning and teaching, research and administration activities for students and staff with disabilities. <http://www.techdis.ac.uk>

- **Bobby**
This site is a web-based tool which will analyse web pages for their accessibility to people with disabilities. The website address is: <http://www.cast.org/bobby>
- For information about SKILL: National Bureau for Students with Disabilities, and their advice and support service
<http://www.skill.org.uk>
- For information about new practice in developing teaching and learning in HE, consult *Exchange*, a new collaborative publication which brings together:
 - The National Coordination Team (NCT) www.ncteam.ac.uk
 - The Learning and Teaching Support Network (LTSN)
 - The Institute for Teaching and Learning (ILT)
 - The Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC)
- **with**
 - The National Disability Team (NDT)
 - Action on Access (A on A, www.brad.ac.uk/admin/conted/action at <http://www.exchange.ac.uk>)

III Institution-based sites

- For information about the Nottingham University ADDS project, 2000-2002, on Academic Staff Development contact Ms Margaret Herrington, Margaret.Herrington@nottingham.ac.uk
Project reports will be made available during Summer 2002 at: <http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/ssc/staff> where information about dyslexia can also be found.
- For a register of resources about staff development and accessible curricula, consult Cowork at: <http://www.cowork.ac.uk>
This site has been developed within a 3-year collaborative HEFCE project between Coventry University, the University of Warwick and the University College, Worcester. There are very useful links with other sources on information about disability and HE.
- For information about disability and work placements contact: EQUIPE (Educational Quality in placements in Engineering) based at Loughborough www.lboro.ac.uk/departments/cg/equipe and the SIP (Sociologists in Placements) sub-project. This is a collaborative venture between two HEFCE and FDTL projects from different disciplines. www.unn.ac.uk/academic/ss/sip/
- For information about fieldwork activities, the Geography Subject Network has produced a guide 'Learning Support for Disabled Students Undertaking Fieldwork and Related Activities' it is available at www.chelt.ac.uk/el/philg/gdn/disabil
- For information packs on specific disabilities, contact Disability and Additional Needs Service, DANS, Loughborough University.
<http://www.lboro.ac.uk/disabilities>
Email: DANS@lboro.ac.uk

IV Other references

Clandinin, D.J. & Connelly, F.M. (2000) *Narrative Enquiry Experience and Story in Qualitative Research*. San Francisco, Jossey Bass

DFES 2002 Finding out about people's disabilities. A good practice guide for further and higher education institutions. Available from DFES Publications, PO Box 5050, Annesley, Nottingham, NG15 0DJ

Hurst, A. (1998) "Students with Disabilities and Opportunities to Study Abroad.", *Journal of Studies in International Education* 2 (2) 117-129

Konur, O. (2002) *Scholarship of Teaching and Learning and Assessment of Disabled Students in Higher Education*, paper presented at the Second UK & US Conference on the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL), 23rd-24th May 2002, London, UK <http://www.city.ac.uk/~cx639/sotl2.htm>

Simpson, A.E. (2000) *Teachability Project: Creating an Accessible Curriculum for Students with Disabilities*. Available from University of Strathclyde, Floor 4, Graham Hills Building, 50 George Street, Glasgow G1 1QE

Taylor, G & Palfreman-Kay, J. (2000) "Helping Each Other: Relations between disabled and non-disabled students on Access programmes". *The Journal of Further and Higher Education*, Vol. 24:1.

Taylor, G. (1996) "A Sense of Real Achievement? The Experience of Deaf Students in Social Work and Youth and Community Work Training" *Social Work Education*, VOL.15, NO.1. Pp46-74

Zuber-Skerritt, Ortrun (1992) *Professional Development in Higher Education. A Theoretical Framework for Action Research* London: Kogan Page

V Specific references on dyslexia

The general paradigm used in the HE sector continues to be one of the difficulties and deficits which dyslexic students face as they attempt to negotiate literacy based curricula. These references include a broader view:

Hammond, J. & Hercules, F. (2001) *Understanding Dyslexia. An Introduction for Dyslexic Students in Higher Education* (Scottish Higher Education Funding Council Project), The Glasgow School of Art. Available in printed form from The SHEFC National Coordinator and in digital form from <http://www.gsa.ac.uk>

Hunter Carsch, M. & Herrington, M. (2001) *Dyslexia and Effective Learning*, London: Whurr

Herrington, M. (2001) *Dyslexia: The Continuing Exploration. Insights for Literacy Educators*, Rapal Bulletin No. 46 pp 10-25, London: Avanti

Brigden, A. & McFall, C. (2000) *Dyslexia in Higher Education Art and Design : A Creative Opportunity*. The Surrey Institute of Art & Design, University College, Farnham, Surrey, GU9 7DS (available from the Academic Registrar)

West, T. (1991) *In the Mind's Eye. Visual Thinkers, Gifted People with Learning Difficulties, Computer Images and the Ironies of Creativity*. New York: Prometheus

Accessibility checklists for short course organisers and tutors

This material has been developed during the HEFCE ADDS Project based at Nottingham, 2000-2002.

I

Organisers' Checklist

1. Check participants' access requirements beforehand

Check that the course information is sent in good time before the course.

Request information from the participants about their access requirements on the pre-course admission form.

2. Check on the accessibility of locations used

Check access to parking; proximity to building/wheelchair ramps. Brief gatekeepers and parking attendants.

Check access to and within building: ramps/stairs/lifts/toilets/loop systems.

Brief reception staff that the course is taking place.

Ensure clear course direction signs to and within the building.

Check that the lift is accessible to a wheelchair user. Would the participant need anything in order to access the lift (for instance, a key or personal assistance)?

3. Audit the internal accessibility of the training rooms

Is the training room sufficiently spacious for wheelchair users?

Is there any background noise? (road traffic etc.)

Is there a loop system available, and would you, the participants or the presenter know how to use it?

4. Brief the trainer/presenter of the short course

Alert your presenter to the possibility that printed material may be required well in advance of the course. Conversion to alternative formats takes time: interpreters will require access to the documents several weeks in advance to develop signing; and brailled text may require days and sometimes weeks to prepare.

Notify presenters of the participants' requirements.

Give the presenter a copy of the course access checklist.

Inform the trainers about the key messages you want them to embed within the subject area, viz. addressing student diversity, signposting to additional information about disability.

5. Training day management

Remind receptionists and building manager that the course is taking place and that staff from other institutions may be attending.

Inform staff if there are participants with additional requirements.

Check that the presenter has the alternative formats required.

II

Suggested format for Pre-Course Administration Form

Name of participant:
 Position held:
 Department:
 Institute:

Where would you like the pre-course information to be sent? Please complete the category of your choice.

Home address

Home telephone
 Departmental address.....

Work telephone.....

Email as attached file.....

Other (please state)

Do you need the pre course information to be provided in any alternats?

Enhanced font size.....
 Braille.....
 Tape.....
 Other.....

Do you have any additional requirements?

We want to make our courses accessible to all members of staff but recognise that we have inherited facilities which may present some difficulties. We are working towards full participation. Please inform us if you have any specific access requirements and we will do our best to meet them.

Physical access requirements (for instance: lift access, additional parking arrangements, diet etc)

.....

Breaks Do you have any additional needs that we should consider regarding the duration of breaks?

.....



Do you require an alternative format for course material?

Enhanced font size.....
Braille.....
Tape.....
Other.....

If the session utilises I.T. do you have any particular requirements to enhance your participation (example: screen readers)? Please give details.

.....
.....
.....

Do you have a hearing impairment? If so, what can we do to assist you? Please tick and complete where relevant.

Provide a loop system.....
Provide a signer.....
Provide a note taker.....
Other.....


III

Presenters' Checklist

1. Access to the training room

- Are there clear directions to the training room and is it clearly signposted so that participants can locate it?

2. Access within the training room

Check the room layout. Is it accessible? The following are useful indicators:

- Is the furniture arranged so that most people can see each other's faces?
- Ensure that there is no congestion by the entrance/exit.
- Is the OHP/projection screen positioned so that all can see? If the screen is placed in front of a window, it may cast the presenter's face into shadow and this will be detrimental to lip-readers.
- Are any refreshments accessible?

3. Managing teaching resources

- Review the evidence from the pre-course admission form regarding participants' needs.
- Ensure that the course notes/resources are in the required formats
- Be sensitive to the noise generated by distributing handouts. Try not to talk over this process

4. Group management

To maximise participation, your introduction should include the following:

- Identifying the location of toilets and the fire exit procedures
- Provide the opportunity for the participants to introduce themselves
- Check for your audibility with the group
- Check for visibility of the OHP etc.
- Establish ground-rules: for example, speaking in turn where possible

5. Curriculum enhancement

- Embed 'worked through' references to disability/diversity within the course topic
- Signpost further contacts for information on enhancing access.

6. Evaluation

- Ensure that your evaluation process is accessible to all participants
- Evaluation sheets for the session should check that the course was accessible.

Note: it would be helpful to reproduce this checklist on coloured paper (cream, yellow or pale blue) to improve readability for participants with dyslexia.

M1/M69 Network

The M1/M69 Link is a regional staff development network in Higher Education. The Link has existed since the late 1980's and from its inception involved 'new' and 'old' universities. As well as being one of the oldest regional networks in Higher Education, it is also one of the most active.

Members include:

Aston	Ms Jan Tennant
Coventry	Mr Rakesh Bhanot
De Montfort	Mr Gerard Stevens
Derby	Ms Chris Newman
Leicester	Mr John Doidge
Loughborough	Dr Andrew Wilson
Nottingham	Dr Michael Davidson
Nottingham Trent	Dr Caroline Stainton
University of Central England	Mr Alan Mortiboys
Warwick	Dr Paul Blackmore [chair]

For more information visit their website

Website: <http://www.lboro.ac.uk/service/sd/m1m69/termsof.htm>

Notes on how to use the case studies

These notes are intended for staff developers and disability specialists.

The case studies have been tried out within national and local courses and workshops to good effect. The methods used have been fairly straightforward: as a minimum, they have been used following an introductory explanation of the key elements of the new legislation and of the underpinning social model of disability. Staff have then been invited to join in the creative search for reasonable adjustments in relation to disability. They were asked to read one or two case studies and discuss their own reactions as well as the questions posed. In some cases they were asked to consider the case study material in relation to their own departments, services and institutions; and to consider possible implications for them.

This annex identifies some additional contexts and purposes for using the examples and then outlines further key messages to be drawn from each case study.

Purposes and Contexts

Staff development personnel and disability personnel are usually active in a range of settings within universities. The case studies can be used, whole or in part, within many of these:

1. Within workshops, short courses and accredited programmes.
 - Use within general disability awareness raising sessions: drawing out attitudes to models of disability, to the key issues, to the generation of new practices and to the barriers preventing new work.
 - Use on general courses about teaching, learning and assessment to ensure that the activity is inclusive.
 - Use on discipline specific courses on teaching, learning and assessment to show how particular curriculum challenges can be approached.
 - Use in sessions on academic writing to show how support can be delivered.
 - Use on courses involving different groups of HE staff to draw out different perspectives and attitudes in different roles.
2. Within negotiated staff development programmes. There is more emphasis now on HE staff negotiating and coordinating their own staff development programmes
 - Use the case studies to encourage academics to develop 'critical awareness' regarding disability and to produce their own pieces of reflective practice, to share with their school /departmental colleagues.
 - Use them to demonstrate how case studies could be developed for accreditation purposes.
3. Within system development work
 - To stimulate 'training needs analysis' work with departments
 - To develop critical understanding about collaboration between academics and disability specialists
 - To inform the Schools' work on enhancing QAA programme specifications with regard to disability



Further key messages to be drawn out from each case study

Case Study 1. Art History: Supporting dyslexic students on the web

- **Disabled students are a direct source of evidence about what they require and why.** It is important for staff to develop confidence in discussing with students directly what their requirements may be. Encourage sensitivity to the reasons why students may choose not to provide this evidence. Discuss the limits of any legal obligation for staff to pursue this.
- **The type of challenge dyslexia presents to text-based dominance in HE is not always understood.** Encourage staff to consider how they make judgements about literacy and intelligence. Dyslexia in HE involves intellectual ability accompanying some difficulties with aspects of literacy. The task of making judgements about intellectual merit through the medium of literacy can be a challenging one.

Case Study 2. Art & Design: Supporting a dyslexic student

- **The significance of tutor attitudes for learner success.** Note the particular attitudes to differences between learners and to how the curriculum needs to work to learner strengths. Staff can be encouraged to develop their interest in discovering effective methods.
- **The effectiveness of staff training in terms of developing confidence to support students appropriately**
Encourage staff to link their training to their actual work with students, creating a 'reflective practice' cycle.

Case Study 3. Art & Design : Embedding learning about dyslexia within a typography module

- **Disclosure issues when disability is addressed openly within a group session.** When disability is raised in this way there is a tendency to ignore the fact that there may be a dyslexic student in the group who does not want to acknowledge it openly. Ensure that staff consider the implications of drawing the attention of everyone to someone's disability. In general, disabled students do not like this.
- **The importance of developing knowledge about disability among non disabled students.** To be ignorant of disability issues would be a major disadvantage in almost any vocational setting now. Students need to be made aware of this.
- **The significance of including training about disability within professional courses.** This is a very good example of showing that knowledge about disability is vital in the commercial world.



Case Study 4. Health and Community Studies:– Improving access for deaf and disabled students – A strategic approach

- **The effect of prior educational experience on access to HE.** Staff are not always aware of the effects on learner confidence, motivation and ambition of negative schooling. Particular effects can be discussed in relation to 'hidden disabilities ' such as deafness and dyslexia.
- **The sustaining of expertise among academic staff when disabled students are only infrequently admitted to HE departments.** Encourage staff to see how protocols for course design can change the culture in this respect and fulfil the 'anticipatory' duties required by law.
- **The expectations and the realities of online learning programmes for disabled students.** Encourage staff to see this as integral to their general development of such programmes for all students. Discuss sources of information about disability and IT (see chapter 5).

Case Study 5. Tourism and Hospitality:– Developing access to teaching, learning and assessment for a student with cerebral palsy

- **Students experience internal oppression, learned from the limiting attitudes of others?** Explore with staff the effects of peer group attitudes and support on learner outcomes for disabled students: and consider how negative attitudes may be tackled.
- **The location of responsibility for organising this response; the inconsistencies when this is not identified clearly.** Ensure that staff have thought this through in relation to their own university.
- **The significance of social inclusion for students' lives outside the university.** Encourage staff to see the students in a holistic way and not just in their role as student.

Case Study 6. Geography: Towards and inclusive field course: a case study of the Derby University field course in the Gambia

- **The location of the responsibility for co-ordinating these arrangements within universities.** Ask staff who would initiate these arrangements in their university.
- **Protecting the managerial power of the student when institutional co-ordination is required.** Ensuring that students retain their power in this can be problematic in some circumstances but does lead to better long term outcomes.



Case Study 7. Town Planning: Support for a student with cerebral palsy

- **The significance of advanced notice when students require a considerable package of support.** Encourage staff to develop procedures within their departments which encourage this.
- **Academic support fine but what about career prospects?** Encourage staff to consider how best to prepare students for negotiating (and perhaps challenging) working environments. Focus on the analysis of what can be done and on good communication and self advocacy skills.

Case Study 8. Education: Experiences of two vision impaired lecturers on a PGCE programme

- **The role of disabled staff in enhancing inclusiveness.** Draw on the knowledge and expertise of staff with disabilities. Be sensitive to the fact that some disabled staff who have succeeded without any support may not always be most aware of the need for such support. Develop a culture in which staff with hidden disabilities do not feel the need to stay quiet.
- **The issue of some changes not being advantageous for all.** Though most changes sought by disabled students will be helpful to all, this will not always be so. Consider and address the practical implications.
- **The significance of advanced notice when students require a considerable package of support.** Encourage staff to develop procedures within their departments which encourage this.
- **Academic support fine but what about career prospects?** Encourage staff to consider how best to prepare students for negotiating (and perhaps challenging) working environments. Focus on the analysis of what can be done and on good communication and self advocacy skills.

Case Study 9. Manufacturing Engineering and Management: Collaborating in the support of a final year student with severe depression and alcohol problems

- **The experience and value of partnerships between academic staff and central services; working through the questions together.**
- **The challenge of working through a social model of disability/illness in relation to mental health conditions.** Encourage staff to question their own stances on mental health difficulties and the extent to which academic practices may generate these.



Case Study 10. Politics: Supporting a student with Asperger's syndrome

- **The importance of accessing the financial resources available from the Disabled Students' Allowances.** Make sure that the staff have an information sheet about these: they need to understand that the students actually bring access to resources with them.
- **The value of exploring the particular experience of a syndrome with the student.** General information can reduce some of the frustrations but productive ways forward have to be found with individuals.

Case Study 11. Archaeology: Identifying and supervising a dissertation topic for a dyslexic student with medical difficulties

- **The imaginative role of the tutor in relation to student learning preferences and strengths.** This student had kinaesthetic learning strengths and the tutor's recognition of how this could be employed in a piece of experimental archaeology was key. Encourage staff to analyse their teaching and assessment practice in terms of learner differences.
- **The development of appropriate partnerships between academic staff, central service staff and students.** Staff need a chance to explore the nature of the challenge involved and the viability in their universities.
- **Combinations of disabilities and/or illnesses are also common.** Encourage staff not to think in terms of single conditions. Students may present with mental health difficulties and have some rather subtle, and undetected, specific learning difficulty.

Case Study 12. Biosciences: Amending assessment for a dyslexic student

- **The practicalities of obtaining agreement about alternative forms of assessment.** Encourage staff to clarify how they might do this in their own situations.
- **The alterations for a dyslexic student enriching the assessment options for all.** Staff can be encouraged to see these adjustments as a means of enhancing the general assessment toolkit.



Case Study 13. Art & Design: A two-way reflection on supporting a dyslexic student with a dissertation

- **Implications of late identification of dyslexia in higher education**

Academic staff are often surprised that students may only discover dyslexia once they have reached university. It is important to explain that students may have succeeded in school subjects which require less reading and writing; they may have developed adequate compensating strategies for the school context; or they may have not have been particularly successful at school and have come to HE via non traditional routes. Remind staff that late identification can require a considerable period of recognition, 'acceptance' and challenge.

- **The importance of challenging the deficit paradigm for dyslexia in HE.** There is a great danger in seeing dyslexic students as people who cannot do the central academic literacy work in HE and not seeing the value of the broader cognitive profiles which may be associated with dyslexia. Staff can be encouraged to recognise the value of what may be different and often highly creative ways of thinking.

Case Study 14. Rehabilitation Studies: Practice placements for disabled students

- **Challenging preconceptions about the work which students with some disabilities are able to do.** This is one of the main areas for investigation and new knowledge following DDA Part IV (2002). Encourage staff to think laterally about this within the broader frameworks of 'safety to practice'. Encourage staff to research this rather than make the traditional assertions about what disabled students cannot do in the workplace.

Language and Disability: A Recurring Theme in Staff Development

The issue

The HEFCE ADDS Project has found that academics and staff development officers wish to adopt positive and acceptable terminology in relation to disability but are uncertain about acceptable usage and do not always feel confident about asking disabled people for advice.

This annex clarifies why language and terminology matter and provides detailed examples of the more and less acceptable descriptors at the time of writing.

Arguing against 'political correctness' is a red herring


Language is a useful tool with which to begin exploring the experience of disability. However, among some staff there is residual irritation about the linguistic constraints of what they see as a further example of 'political correctness'.

This should be countered with two main arguments: first, the power to determine which words are most appropriate must be with those about whom the terminology is used (SKILL Disability Etiquette and Language Guidelines). Disabled people have challenged terms which they feel convey negative messages about them. Instead, they have suggested terminology which reflects positive images, new thinking about their position within society, more accurate descriptions of their experience of mental and physical disability and new ways of interpreting disablement. Using perjorative terms like 'political correctness' to undermine this rightful taking of power reflects an unwillingness to acknowledge this.

The second argument is about the nature of language itself. It is always evolving: preferences about usage are questioned and change; and 'negotiations' about language in use continue. Indeed, in relation to disability, disagreements often occur among disabled people themselves. The issue is not about 'correctness' but about acknowledging a dynamic situation in which it is important to check with individuals about the terms they prefer when discussing their experience of disability.

Exploring Language within a Staff Development session

It is important to recognise that many people initially feel uncomfortable when they start to explore this issue in staff development sessions. They may have heard and absorbed negative terms about disability throughout their lives. Critical reflection about this and the assumptions they may be making, can invoke confusion, stress and feelings of guilt.



Furthermore, if any of the staff have had experience of anti-discrimination training in the 1980's and 1990's, they may have resented styles which were often confrontational, aggressive and in themselves oppressive. They may still feel confused and ill prepared to engage in positive adjustments to their own work practice.

The potential for discomfort will need to be taken into account within the design and management of the session. The particular priorities must be:

- to encourage staff to feel comfortable with discussing change in language in general;
- to familiarise them with more/less acceptable terms;
- to encourage them to talk directly to disabled people about their preferences if they are unsure.

Useful Terms for Discussion

Able - Bodiedism

Characterised by a failure to listen to disabled people and/or to incorporate disabled people's views into mainstream thinking (Chinnery.B. 1991).

Medical Model of Disability

The primary focus of this model is on the individual and their impairment. The disability is defined in terms of the impairment and it belongs to the individual concerned.

Social Model of Disability

Recognises that the disadvantage experienced by disabled people - the 'disability' - is 'constructed' by social attitudes, practices and systems, which take little account of the requirements of people who have impairments.

Direct Discrimination

Treating people less favourably because of their disability (Bynoe, et al 1991/92:22)

Indirect Discrimination

Imposing a requirement or condition on a job, facility, or service, making it harder for disabled people to access (Bynoe,et al. 1991/92:22).

Unequal Burdens

Failing to make reasonable steps to remove barriers in the social environment thus preventing equal participation by disabled people (Bynoe, et al. 1991/92:22).

References

CHINNERY, B (1991) 'Equal Opportunities for Disabled People in the Caring Professions: Window Dressing or Commitment?' in Disability, Handicap and Society, Vol. 6, No 3. Abingdon: Carfax Publishing Ltd.

COLLINS, H (1995) Equality in the Workplace. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers



The Acceptable and Unacceptable Language of Disability (adapted from SKILL guidelines)

▼ Use

People with Disabilities

This is preferred by some people because it emphasises that first and foremost we are human beings and should be treated as such; our disability comes second.

Disabled People

'some disabled people argue that they are more disabled by environmental and economic barriers than by our physical and sensory impairments – and that the term disabled people allows full exploration of what we are disabled by'. Anne Rae, Disability Now, January 1989

Never say 'the disabled' or "the handicapped". *Handicapped, is a term associated with the stigma of social dependence, people who live off charity (with cap in hand, begging).*

Nor 'a/the dyslexic', 'a/the diabetic' etc. This makes disabled people sound like objects. It can undermine a person's identity and perpetuate stereotypical perceptions and images; disabled people are individuals with unique personal experiences and identities.

Never say "people suffering from, afflicted, challenged, inconvenienced" (it has connotations of being a victim).

Wheel Chair User

This emphasises the power of the user and not the chair, subtle but powerful difference.

Never use the term: 'wheel chair bound'.

Deaf or Hard of Hearing Person

Those who have a high degree of hearing loss may prefer to be called Deaf, as they are proud to be who they are within Deaf Culture and have no personal stigma about being deaf. Some people prefer the phrase: "Hearing Impaired", particularly those who are not completely deaf. However, there isn't total agreement.

Never use the terms: "deaf and dumb" and "deaf mute"

Person with a visual impairment, a blind person, a partially sighted person

Never use the term: "visually handicapped person"



▼ Use

People with learning difficulties or disabilities

Never use the terms: "mentally handicapped" and "educationally subnormal". *Mentally Handicapped* has become attached to the stigma of the institutionalisation and ensuing degradation.

People with a mental health difficulty/problem

Never use the terms: "crazy, mad, loony, nuts, insane, schizo." Or a "psychiatrically-disturbed person."

Down's Syndrome

Never use the term "Mongol."

Mobility impairment/difficulty

Speech impairment

Never use the term dumb, historically used to describe people without speech, now often used negatively to describe stupidity, ignorance.

Becoming Unacceptable:

Brainstorm, Although commonly used within training sessions to generate a speedy collection of thoughts within a group, it is derived from a medical term and is offensive to some disabled people. Alternatives may include 'Thought storm', 'Quick Feedback', 'quick think' etc.

Disabled Toilet, would you like to sit on a disabled toilet? If the toilet is fully functional call it an 'accessible toilet'. You may find that many accessible toilets have been disabled by being utilised to store coats or items of equipment by those who do not frequent them.

Special Needs, though this term is still frequently used, it perpetuates the concept that different needs are 'special'. Needs are needs and society has historically prioritised and addressed some people's needs above others.

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