

Embedding success

Enhancing the learning experience
for disabled students



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Introduction

Our students have the right to expect an outstanding learning experience. The Higher Education Academy supports universities and colleges in their desire to provide such an experience for a diverse student body.

We appreciate the challenge higher education institutions face in ensuring equal opportunities for disabled students; and this publication, I hope, will supply them with examples of how it can be done. It celebrates the success of the HEFCE/Department for Employment and Learning (Northern Ireland) initiative to improve provision for disabled students and describes the value that has been added by the projects.

We are pleased to be involved in a partnership with the Equality Challenge Unit and Action on Access which will help enhance the learning experience for disabled students.

Paul Ramsden

Chief Executive

The Higher Education Academy

A welcome from the Editor

Welcome to *Embedding success: enhancing the learning experience for disabled students*. This publication provides you with an account of innovative practice to improve the experience of disabled students. We demonstrate how targeted project activity can provide wider benefits to mainstream learning and teaching, subject communities and practitioners across the higher education sector.

Embedding success is introduced with a brief history of the past decade of funding from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) to improve provision for disabled students. We then offer a series of illustrative vignettes from 19 of the 24 disability projects funded under Strand two of the HEFCE/Department for Employment and Learning (Northern Ireland) 2003-05 programme (HEFCE 02/21).

The contributors are staff based in HEIs who have designed, delivered and disseminated a range of projects relating to the experience of disabled students. Managers and staff provide a series of illuminative accounts of the learning gained from their projects. They also discuss their effect across the HE sector relating to mainstreaming and embedding disability issues and offer examples of 'added value' and 'lessons learned' through their experiences of delivering their projects.

We have also included additional comment from the Academy's Subject Centres to provide a discipline-based context to the publication. This will also enable you in your subject communities to consider the links within your discipline areas and identify good practice.

Some of our Senior Advisers have also provided comment on many of the generic projects. This comment provides you with an overview of the resources and outputs which are transferable across subject disciplines and more widely applicable.

Embedding success also has a 'sources of support' section along with final concluding comment from myself.

We hope that you find *Embedding success* enjoyable and useful.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the following: project staff based in higher education institutions; Subject Centre staff; staff of the Higher Education Academy; and in particular Alison Robinson for her original idea for this publication; and HEFCE for providing a policy view.

Yvonne Dickinson

Adviser: Disability

The Higher Education Academy

A policy context and brief history from HEFCE

The Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCE) is committed to ensuring that all those with the potential to benefit from higher education have the opportunity to do so, whatever their background. We recognise the hard work of the higher education sector in responding to the challenges of the Disability Discrimination Act (1995) and the amendment to Part 4 (education) by the Special Education Needs and Disabilities Act (2001). The fundamental aims of our policy are to build on the successes of higher and further education institutions, maintain the overall stability of funding and enhance links with broader equality and widening participation agendas.

HEFCE policy objectives are to:

- a. embed disability work across our strategic aims
- b. work with sector partners to build capacity in institutions at all levels
- c. contribute to culture change in higher education, encouraging higher education institutions to make their provision accessible to disabled students as part of their normal practice
- d. support institutions in implementing the requirements of current and future legislation
- e. reduce the accountability burden on institutions.

As part of this commitment, we have been funding initiatives aimed at improving opportunities for disabled students since 1993.

In 1993-94 and again in 1994-95 we supported special disability funding programmes that had the broad aim of widening the

participation of disabled students in HE. These programmes were followed by a three year programme from 1996-97 to 1998-99. Over 100 projects worth £12 million were funded through these programmes and significant gains were made by the sector for disabled students.

To make best use of the resources and expertise already available in HE, we supported a further £6 million special funding programme from 1999-2000 to 2001-02. The programme had three strands:

- Strand one projects aimed to strengthen provision for students in institutions that had little provision for, or experience in supporting, disabled students. 29 projects received funds under this strand, and benefited from expertise developed in more experienced institutions, as well as from the National Disability Team, the HEFCE funded national co-ordination team for disability in HE. The aim was to help those 'beginner' institutions achieve the base-level of provision for disabled students identified in a recent HEFCE study (HEFCE 99/04).
- Strand two projects aimed to promote and transfer more widely existing expertise and good practice, much of which was developed through earlier HEFCE funded disability programmes. Eight projects were funded under this strand. Projects used funds to transfer and promote good practices in supporting disabled students to a wide range of staff across the sector including academic, estates, IT, library and careers staff.
- Strand three projects aimed to encourage collaboration between institutions. Thirteen collaborative projects were funded to enable institutions to share resources and expertise. In most projects, institutions worked jointly in a metropolitan area, or across a rural region, often with partners in further education.

In 2002 we invited bids for a further special funding initiative to run over 2 years from 2003-05. This initiative had two strands:

- Strand one – to improve provision in small and/or specialist institutions that currently had little provision for, or experience in supporting, disabled students.
- Strand two – to develop and disseminate resources relating to the learning and teaching of disabled students, in priority areas.

Throughout this time the National Disability Team provided hands-on support and advice both to funded projects and to institutions more generally.

Special funding programmes are extremely useful to pump-prime and develop expertise and services: many institutions are however, concerned about how to maintain these services once funding has finished. To help with this concern, we introduced, from 2000-01, a disability premium into our mainstream teaching funding method. This premium provides institutions with additional funds, on a recurrent basis, to recognise that additional costs are incurred in recruiting and supporting disabled students.

In moving forward with our disability policy we intend to build on the achievements of past and present HEFCE special funding programmes and seek to disseminate and enhance the tool kits, resources and guidance produced.

We are committed to ensuring the provision of high quality specialist resources to the sector to make advice and guidance available to institutions. We are progressing the excellent work of the National Disability Team by working together with sector-owned bodies and by providing resources to existing bodies. These resources are based in three organisations: the widening participation co-ordination team, Action on Access, in order to embed disability work into the widening participation agenda, including outreach; the Higher Education Academy in order to support learning and teaching; and the Equality Challenge Unit in order to ensure the embedding of disability provision in the context of broader equalities developments.

We continue to gather evidence to help us understand the barriers faced by disabled students and encourage improvements in institutional policy and practice to break down these barriers.

We also recognise the challenges to the sector in responding to the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 and we are committed to working with institutions, representative bodies and other stakeholders to ensure that the sector and the funding council are able effectively to meet their responsibilities under the duty imposed by the Act.

In summary, we believe that there has been a substantial 'step change' in policy, strategy and operational developments in HE to improve provision for disabled students. Perhaps most importantly the sector can demonstrate a positive culture and ethos in its approach to disability issues and the broader diversity agenda at all levels.

We look forward to working with the Higher Education Academy and the sector to ensure that all students benefit from a wholly positive and inclusive HE experience.

Dr John Selby

Acting Director

Widening Participation

Higher Education Funding Council

Projects

Staff-Student Partnership for Assessment Change and Evaluation (SPACE)

January 2003 to December 2005

Theme

Inclusive learning and assessment

Host institution

University of Plymouth

Partner institutions

University of Bath, Bath Spa University, Dartington College of Arts, University College Falmouth, University of Gloucestershire, College of St Mark and St John and the University of the West of England

Contributors

Judith Waterfield, SPACE Project Manager and Head of Disability ASSIST Services, University of Plymouth

Bob West, SPACE Project Management Team, Disability ASSIST Services, University of Plymouth

Project overview

The Staff-Student Partnership for Assessment Change and Evaluation Project (SPACE) set out to contribute to educational change for disabled students in the field of course assessment. The project was undertaken through action research and shared dialogue between students, academic staff and disability officers. It piloted a range of alternative and inclusive assessments, identifying possibilities and issues for mainstreaming inclusive options.

Disseminating the work nationally and internationally, we debated three key questions and addressed the challenges defined by the responses:

- Can we change assessment policies and current academic practice to remove discrimination and exclusion?
- Can we assess ability and not the effects of disability?
- Can we accommodate the learning styles of a range of learners at assessment?

“Variety of assessment would also make learning more enjoyable.”

Student with dyslexia studying Earth Sciences

Project implementation and progress

At the outset we were concerned with the volume and effectiveness of ‘special arrangements’ for assessments being offered to

disabled students in an attempt to ‘level the educational playing field.’ One important finding of our research was that disabled students, while valuing ‘special arrangements’ as recognition of them as disabled students, also feel very ambivalent about them. The most important development in this project was the introduction in the second year of a non-disabled student control group. This expanded our horizons and added to our work-load, but the overall value to our understanding of the issues cannot be overstated. It

gave us the opportunity to explore how inclusivity in assessment practice could be approached to meet the diverse learning styles of both disabled and non-disabled students through a consensual range of assessment modes. Seeking inclusive ways of assessing students and establishing these within courses

“The assessment choice enabled the students to consolidate their knowledge and the students have been far less anxious than previous years and there were no request for ‘special arrangements’.

Lecturer in Faculty of Technology piloting assessment choice

was also a core element of the project, as was the trialling of innovative and sometimes non-cognate subject assessment modes with individuals and groups of students.

One ambitious case study of this kind was undertaken with 146 disabled and non-disabled students studying BSc Building Surveying and the Environment, BSc Construction Management and BA Architecture undertaking a joint module on behaviour of structures. The students were offered an inclusive assessment choice of three modes instead of the formal end of module test. The choice received positive student and staff feedback.

The project had representatives from the Higher Education Academy and the Art and Design Subject Centre on its advisory group who disseminated its work. In addition we secured additional funds for Learning and Teaching Development from the Engineering Subject Centre to undertake the assessment choice pilot in more depth to include student evaluation questionnaires. This pilot has generated the most interest among academic staff and is a pilot we want to repeat with other disciplines and other institutions.

Key successes

The project has produced a tool kit to facilitate the consideration of inclusive assessment for the benefit of all students, providing student voices and case studies. Hard copies have been distributed and the resource is downloadable at www.plymouth.ac.uk/disability

Lessons learned

Qualitative student feedback is the gold dust of projects such as this.

"If the assessment system is changed I believe all students should partake."

Student with dyslexia studying Human Science

"If I could have had a viva or hand in a portfolio I wouldn't have needed a helper."

Student with visual impairment

It is crucial to establish firm procedures of enquiry, especially where questionnaires with open-ended questions are used. To maximise the value of the student comments, the questionnaire is best placed in the context of one-to-one semi-structured interviews where necessary. Such approaches are resource-hungry and need careful consideration when project planning.

Added value

The tool kit is timely in its attempt to promote and examine a social model of disability inclusion at the point when institutions have

specific duties to promote equality of opportunities between disabled persons and other persons under the new Disability Discrimination Act 2005.

“Exams are dependent upon how well I am on that particular day, not whether I have extra time.”

Student Focus Group

Commentary from the Engineering Subject Centre

Carol Arlett, Centre Manager

The SPACE project adopted a positive approach to the challenges facing inclusive assessment set in the context of changes to legislation and drivers in higher education. The tool kit will provide a practical resource for others wishing to adopt innovative approaches.

The work of the project is very timely for engineering academics as there is increased interest in the assessment of learning outcomes following the launch of UK-SPEC (the standard for recognition of professional engineers and professional engineering technicians in the UK). SPACE approaches assessment innovatively and demonstrates a proactive response to disability legislation.

The Engineering Subject Centre awarded additional mini-project funding for a pilot study in the School of Engineering on assessment choice. This has produced a case study (available from www.engsc.ac.uk) that examines the challenges involved in offering choice to students, including resource issues for both the Disability Office and the School of Engineering. The diverse group of students used for the pilot gave very positive feedback to having choices for assessment.

The SPACE project hosted an Engineering Subject Centre workshop on 'Improving Departmental Support for Disabled Students' in November 2005. The Engineering Subject Centre will continue to disseminate the project outcomes through its website.

Commentary on behalf of the Art Design and Media Subject Centre

Barbara Thomas, Academic Leader - Quality and Development, University of Bolton

Staff from the Art Design and Media Subject Centre were members of the advisory group for SPACE. The project was seen as one aspect of help for HEIs, where the principles of the SPACE tool kit could be embedded. Responding to the new disability equality duty requires institutions to:

- consider the impact of major policies on disabled staff and students through learning, teaching and assessment strategies
- embed and improve practices rather than bolt on approaches
- engage in dialogue which enables a scheme to be developed and managed.

Ongoing formative dissemination about SPACE was achieved through distribution of leaflets to the mailing list of the Subject Centre, at workshops and events as well as through web information and links from **www.brighton.ac.uk/adm-hea** (assessment pages) to the project.

Additional benefits were the findings of the qualitative, underpinning research. The project team are writing this up as support for individual research into assessment and to link teaching to research. The SPACE Tool kit is now available to the sector and to Subject Centres involved in the project at **www.space.ac.uk**

Models, Methods and Materials: Departmental Strategies for Supporting Disabled Students

May 2003 to May 2006

Theme

Inclusive learning and assessment

Host institution

University of Nottingham

Contributors

Roger Willison, Project Leader

David Burns, Project Manager

Lara Morgan, Project Officer

Project overview

The aim was to support school-led changes to improve access to the curriculum for disabled students. Previous research confirmed the project team's view that for change to be effective it needed to come from the academic experts within each discipline rather than coming from 'niche' disability experts. Eight Schools within the host institution (the University of Nottingham) originally signed up to work with the project. The project was also able to connect with several Subject Centres:

- Physical Sciences
- Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies
- Engineering
- Computing
- Biosciences.

Project implementation and progress

Work began in the School of Physics with a small working group of administrative, technical and academic staff. They identified an

“The fact that we had people coming in and asking questions was helpful in making us think.”

area of concern for the School, the accessibility of a laboratory module for blind students, and acted as ‘champions’ for the work. The project team facilitated

meetings and identified sources of information and expertise. The lab staff demonstrated ingenuity and a willingness to learn, enabling them to make minimal adaptations so the students could successfully complete the module.

This successful model developed into the ‘Academic Peer-to-Peer Model’ which formed the basis of project work in the Schools of Modern Languages, Built Environment, Nursing, Civil Engineering and History. Achievements in these areas have resulted in work on accessible materials and handbooks, new approaches to work placements, field trips and the year abroad, and different ways of assessing students.

Key successes

Two Blind students from the School of Physics presented their experiences of studying Physics to the Institute of Physics (IOP). This has resulted in the IOP receiving numerous enquiries about supporting Blind or Visually Impaired students. Philip Diamond from the IOP said:

“The seminar and the input from the Blind students was enormously helpful to participants from other universities attending the meeting. We found the project team’s support for these students exemplary and were impressed by how well the students were progressing on their degree programmes. The seminar participants learned a great deal from Nottingham’s input about the kinds of support they would need to give Blind or Visually Impaired students.”

“The disk has been really helpful in pulling all the information together.”

The project team have also presented to the Engineering, Computing and Physical Sciences Subject Centres. A case study is available on the Physical Sciences Subject Centre website.

“Well done for getting subject-specific examples in the training.”

The project has gained agreement to publish a Modern Languages Case Study.

With slight modifications we found it was possible to transfer this model across disciplines. It was successful within a de-centralised research-led university, but may need adaptation for other types of institution.

All project information will be available on **www.nottingham.ac.uk/sedu/disability** (password protected whilst under development).

Materials created by the project team are embedded within the Promoting Enhanced Student Learning (PESL) website: **www.nottingham.ac.uk/teaching/resources/issues/disability/**

Lessons learned

The desire to let Schools lead and the desire to ensure the task was sufficiently focused had to be finely balanced. In some cases Schools had extensive plans which floundered and were replaced by something more manageable.

Time pressure sometimes made it difficult to secure support from senior academics. The model was more effective with senior academics involved as ‘champions’ of change as they had more influence within the School and could ensure disability issues were promoted.

Clear communications are critical in providing effective support in the area of disability. Staff who did not regularly deal with disability issues could be confused by the diversity of support.

Added value

Collateral benefits of our work included the closure of loopholes that existed in communication processes and policies. One such discovery was that part-time staff, guest lecturers, external trainers and facilitators seldom receive the same opportunities to engage in disability training. We now have new guidelines to advise all staff of their responsibilities.

We also created a stand-alone, self-contained website on a CD-ROM containing key documents and links to reputable websites. 1,000 disks are being distributed internally and externally and are eliciting very positive feedback.

The team observed numerous additional benefits and improvements such as:

- better communication between central services
- a recognised need for an early induction programme for students with disabilities
- opportunity for staff developers to embed disability issues in all training and easily check with colleagues that disability-specific content is correct and that their materials are fully accessible.

Commentary from Brenda Smith

Assistant Director, The Higher Education Academy

This project has contributed materials to the Promoting Enhanced Student Learning (PESL) website that offers both subject specific and generic resources to support staff in a

variety of situations. These include teaching a Physics module to blind students and a talking point on whether to make lecture notes available or not. Other disability-related materials from other projects include a short video clip demonstrating the value of visual aids in a lecture and a discussion about making handouts available in advance. Valuable case studies highlight the support we can give to students, including supporting a student with Asperger's syndrome.

The PESL website is widely acclaimed within the University, and this has helped it to reach a wider audience of academics and postgraduates who teach. The resources contributed by the project are available to anyone interested in teaching and learning in higher education.

One case study contributed to PESL by the project illustrates how two Blind students were able to undertake laboratory experiments as a compulsory element of their Physics course. This case study demonstrates that with a little ingenuity and a willingness to learn on behalf of staff, disabled students can be included in a wide variety of learning situations.

Staff can often feel unsure about how best to accommodate the needs of disabled students. By making small adjustments and speaking to students about the implications of their disability in the learning and teaching environment, many difficulties faced by students can be greatly alleviated and the effectiveness of teaching for all students can be enhanced (www.nottingham.ac.uk/teaching).

The Models, Methods and Materials project has demonstrated how making adjustments need not be onerous or imposed on disabled students. Their involvement in the process is extremely important to ensure options are considered from all angles regarding reasonable adjustments and enhancing the learning experience.

Developing an inclusive curriculum for disabled students: the case of Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences

Theme

Inclusive learning and assessment

Host institution

University of Gloucestershire

Contributors

Mick Healey, Project Director and Michele Hills, Project Officer

Project overview

The Geography Discipline Network (GDN) is a consortium of old and new universities based at the University of Gloucestershire, whose aim is to research, design, develop and disseminate good learning and teaching practices in Geography and related disciplines. Within this forum, the GDN Inclusive Curriculum Project (ICP) was developed in response to a recognised need, as expressed by staff from the Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences (GEES) Subject Centre at disability workshops held in 2000 and 2001, to address national legislative and governmental agendas aimed at achieving parity of educational opportunity and experience for disabled students.

Project implementation and progress

The aim was to give practical, evidence-based advice, support and guidance for staff via four main outputs:

- a student survey and case study database
- departmental workshops
- a national conference
- a series of ten guides. Five titles address specific disability areas: hearing; mobility; vision; mental health and Asperger's Syndrome;

dyslexia and hidden disabilities. Three further titles are targeted at staff groups: lecturers; Heads of Department; support staff. The final two titles include an overview of the issues and a guide specifically written for students.

The guides have been distributed in hard copy to all HEIs with GEES departments and to all HEI disability advisory centres in England and Northern Ireland. They are also downloadable via www2.glos.ac.uk/gdn/icp

To capture the student voice and inform the project of disabled students' needs in 2003 the team undertook the first ever survey of barriers faced by GEES students. A report followed in April 2004 which can be accessed at www2.glos.ac.uk/gdn/icp/survey.htm. Twenty-Seven case studies were also published on the web www2.glos.ac.uk/gdn/icp/caseintro.htm and used in Inclusive Curriculum Project workshops (15 of which took place in institutions across the UK 2003–2005) and incorporated into the ICP Guides.

The GEES Subject Centre is continuing to carry the ICP torch by providing an advisory service to GEES staff and integrating inclusivity into their programme of departmental workshops.

Key successes

The workshops were very well received, with 97% of respondents rating their event as 'useful' or better, and of these, 66% rating it as 'highly useful'. Typical comments included: "a refreshing and topical

"We knew the disability agenda was rapidly moving away from targeted adjustments for specific disabilities and broadening out into how inclusive strategies could benefit all students. We wanted to promote this inclusive approach whilst also addressing the tough, practical issues which staff face in ensuring that disabled students receive the support they individually need to perform to the best of their ability."

Mick Healey, Project Director

look at how to make a difference”; “detailed exploration of issues”; “real in terms of use in the classroom and as a personal tutor”.

The national conference in April 2005 attracted some 65 delegates from 34 institutions across the UK, with many delegates taking away specific action points for their own institutions: “develop more workshops for the New Teachers’ Programme”; “ask questions about who supports the support staff”; “review/debate assessment in teaching”; “start a discussion with our students about how we can involve them in our curriculum development”.

Lessons learned

- It is important to ensure that academic staff work closely with disability advisers
- It is important to recognise the importance of capturing the student voice.
- We also found that our perspective on the nature of specific disabilities, especially Asperger’s Syndrome, changed significantly during the project as a result of our increasing understanding.

Added value

- The project was able to forge links with other disability-related projects, including the Economics Social Research Council (ESRC) Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP) project *Enhancing the quality and outcomes of disabled students’ learning*;
- A further added output was the production of an interactive web version of the student guide.

Commentary from Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences Subject Centre (GEES)

Dr Helen King, Assistant Director.

As with previous work produced by the Geography Discipline Network (GDN), the Inclusive Curriculum Project guides are informed by generic principles and hence are relevant to most academics and disability advisers independent of their disciplinary background. In addition, the wide variety of learning environments experienced within Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences (GEES) – from classroom-based to laboratory and field work – provide a rich diversity of scenarios which will be of relevance to other subject areas. For colleagues in the GEES disciplines, the strength of the guides is that they are illustrated throughout with specific, practical, discipline-based examples and case studies.

The majority of the guides are directed at an academic audience who need to consider the needs of others. In contrast, the student guide provides an excellent resource directly to support those who have learning difficulties or disabilities. I would recommend that it is circulated to all students both as an aid to understanding their peers' perspectives and to support those with 'undeclared' disabilities.

Improving provision for disabled Psychology students (IPDPS)

Theme

Inclusive learning and assessment

Host institution

University of York

Contributor

Nick Hammond, Project Director

Project overview

In 2000, there were about 38,000 students studying for a Psychology degree. By 2004, this number had risen to over 68,000. Psychology is now one of the largest undergraduate discipline areas, and around 7% of students declared a disability. At the start of the 'Improving provision for disabled Psychology students' (IPDPS) project the information available for disabled students or for those considering doing a Psychology degree was extremely limited and hard to find. Likewise, information for staff and departments on both their legal requirements in relation to disabled students and policies, and practices for effective support which could be helpful for disabled students, was patchy, to say the least.

Project implementation and progress

The aim of the IPDPS project was to improve the experiences of disabled students studying Psychology at university by providing evidence-based information and guidance to staff and to potential and current students. The first step of the project was therefore to collect information on the size and nature of the problem: what are the difficulties encountered by disabled Psychology students? what are the potential areas of concern in relation to the Psychology curriculum, and what support do departments provide? The second

stage was then to work with the community, either directly or through the Psychology Network, to provide guidance for staff and departments highlighting key issues in adjustments to departmental practice and routes for future development.

Key successes

The key success of the project was the development of the IPDPS website (accessible through the Psychology Network web at www.psychology.heacademy.ac.uk). The site provides a good deal of information on the nature of problems experienced by Psychology students in the form of case studies, and these also illustrate some aspects which are particular to Psychology, such as the requirements for statistical analysis and the coverage in the curriculum of topics that may relate to particular disabilities.

The project team also ran a number of focus groups with students. These sessions provided a rich source of insights into the perceptions and experiences of disabled students which have fed into the project's numerous dissemination activities.

Lessons learned

Our aim of providing evidence-based advice required the collection of evidence of on current policies, practices and experiences: gleaning such evidence from institutions and departments in particular proved to be both hard and time-consuming. Nevertheless the project team assembled a large amount of information, but a well-known risk with a relatively small project is that not all the useful knowledge can be adequately articulated and captured before funding comes to an end and key staff leave. Working with the Psychology Network to provide a more permanent home and activities in the future has allowed us to alleviate these problems to some degree.

Added value

We have found that engaging in a wide variety of dissemination activities has publicised the project and the website to our own subject communities but also to the wider HE sector. We have run a range of events and workshops for postgraduate students, teaching staff (particularly new staff) and others working in the field of disability support. We have worked closely with the Psychology Network through their conferences and their annual events for newly-appointed lecturers in Psychology. Again, the website provides copies of key presentations and support documents. We have also worked closely with our professional body, the British Psychological Society, on issues concerning both potential students and professional training and practice. Finally a major guide for departments is in the final stages of preparation and will be shortly available on our website.

Commentary from Psychology Subject Network

Annie Trapp, Acting Director

This project can be viewed as ground-breaking in terms of scoping the experiences of disabled students studying Psychology as well as those of Psychology graduates in the workplace. The website is a rich source of encouragement and practical advice for disabled students who are considering applying for, or who are currently enrolled on Psychology programmes. The project also identified examples of how Psychology staff and departments have supported disabled students. Examples of Psychology departments' disability statements and module specifications are available on the website.

The Resources section of the website includes a number of excellent Psychology-specific tools including *The National Centre for Tactile Diagrams Core Graphics Pack: Psychology* and the Psychological Literature for the Blind email list. Many of the other listed resources, however, will be useful to disabled students and support staff in general.

The IPDPS project uncovered a rich source of evidence to enable a deeper understanding of the disabled student's experience within Psychology. However, there is more work to be done. The accessibility of software packages used in Psychology would be one example, ethical issues another. The forthcoming report will highlight some of these gaps and it is to be hoped that the community will wish to build on and develop the work undertaken in this project.

Meanwhile, the Psychology Network will continue to disseminate the project outcomes through the IPDPS website which is linked into the Subject Centre's website.

SignsOnline: Two British Sign Language (BSL)/ English glossaries for Science and Engineering Education

January 2003 to January 2005

Theme

Inclusive learning and assessment

Host institution

University of Wolverhampton

Contributor

Judith Mole: Project Manager

Project overview

This project arose from the knowledge that there is a national shortage of sign language interpreters in higher education. This was evident particularly in Science and Engineering subjects owing to the specialist terminology encountered in these subjects. Deaf students were, therefore, finding it difficult to study Science or Engineering at HE level with full communication support, which in turn impacted on Deaf people's employability in these fields.

This project aimed to build on the success of the University's acclaimed online glossary for Art and Design education (see **www.artsigns.ac.uk**). The expertise, methodology and technology used for the development of the Art and Design glossary were used as an exemplar and framework for the development of further online British Sign Language (BSL) glossaries for Science, Engineering and the Built Environment.

Project implementation and progress

Building on the feedback received and the contacts made during the development of the artsigns glossary, we found that we had

many Deaf professionals and qualified interpreters who wanted to be involved in the project and contribute their knowledge and signs. None of the signs were previously documented, so Deaf practitioners and professionals were interviewed about the signs they use to describe their work and subject. Subsequently over 100 hours of video footage were analysed and commonly used signs were identified. To support the work of lecturers in Science and Engineering, we published a booklet, entitled *Learning, teaching and assessment: a good practice guide for lecturers teaching science or engineering to d/Deaf students*. This booklet is freely available from www.wlv.ac.uk/teachingdeafstudents.

“Many congratulations! The science signs website is an awesome achievement!”

Throughout the project we have made use of a wide range of communication channels to promote and disseminate the project in the Deaf community and among Deaf and hearing academics and interpreters. We also contacted Edexcel and the Science Museum to alert them to the availability of the resource. The websites were featured in the *Guardian Online* (<http://education.guardian.co.uk/elearning/story/0,10577,1392404,00.html>) as well as in many online and published journals (for example, *SignMatters*, Ten4) and were reported in the Irish RTE programme for the Deaf community in March 2005.

We have made every effort to disseminate the glossaries and the pedagogical issues underpinning the identification of terminology. Following the launch of the site we have had numerous emails giving positive feedback.

Key successes

The team worked closely with Academy Subject Centres for: Physical Sciences, Bioscience, Geography, Earth and Environmental Science,

"I had a quick look at the artsigns site and found myself in sign heaven!"

Engineering, Built Environment and Art Design and Media. Key personnel in each Centre not only became personally involved in the

project by contributing to the glossary terms and definitions, and in identifying other contributors, but also ensured that the project team could make regular and ongoing use of mailing lists/flyers/newsletters to update their respective academic communities.

Key outputs from the project were as follows:

- production of an online British Sign Language/English glossary for Science education (www.sciencesigns.ac.uk)
- production of an online British Sign Language/English glossary for Engineering and the Built Environment (www.engineeringsigns.ac.uk or www.builtenvsigns.ac.uk)
- updating of www.artsigns.ac.uk, the online BSL/English glossary for Art and Design education
- extensive electronic communications, telephone interviews, discussions with Deaf and hearing academics and analysis of module guides in order to collect, confirm and where appropriate, to define terminology
- a number of case studies and video interviews with Deaf professionals and experienced interpreters to collect BSL usage (on video)
- numerous staff development and awareness-raising events, relating to both language development and teaching and learning, mainly organised through the Subject Centres.
- a keynote presentation at the 1st International Conference on Innovation, Good Practice and Research in Engineering Education on 4-9 June 2004
- a 'Supporting Deaf Students' workshop event at 'Diversity in Practice: Implementing the Inclusion Agenda in Art and Design' hosted by the London College of Fashion and Council for Higher Education in Art and Design (CHEAD) on 3-4 March 2005.

Lessons learned

A key issue was that neither of the project core team are themselves Deaf. This was viewed as a disadvantage to the success of the project, so we engaged members of the Deaf community in aspects of the project delivery.

This 'disadvantage' was overcome in two ways. First, because of early dissemination of the project aims within the Deaf community, a much larger number of Deaf professionals, practitioners and academics came forward to be interviewed for the collection of signs. Second, influential Deaf academics from four UK universities, and one national agency representing the interests of the UK Deaf community, were invited to become part of a panel of 'critical friends'. This ensured that the project gained sector credibility and ensured that the glossaries met the needs of the Deaf community.

"I have had a look at all websites, and they are truly fantastic. Hopefully this will help increase the number of Deaf students to study for academic subjects at university level (like Ecology).

Well done and congrats!"

Added value

Additional outputs over and above original project aims were:

- production of an online booklet entitled *Learning, Teaching and Assessment: a Good Practice Guide for Lecturers teaching d/Deaf students in Science or Engineering*, available from **www.wlv.ac.uk/teachingdeafstudents**
- updating of *Learning, Teaching and Assessment: a Good Practice Guide for Lecturers teaching d/Deaf students in Art, Design and Communication*, which is now available in electronic format from **www.wlv.ac.uk/teachingdeafstudents**
- contribution to *Inclusive Learning in HE: Improving Provision for Disabled Students* edited by Mike Adams and Sally Brown and published by Routledge
- a glossary of commonly used HE terms, for use by the Academy and Subject Centres.

Commentary from the Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences Subject Centre (GEES)

Dr Helen King, Assistant Director

The ScienceSigns Glossary provides an invaluable resource to support students studying Geography, Earth or Environmental Sciences. These subjects involve many interactive learning environments including group work, laboratories and practicals and, most importantly, fieldwork. Such environments often involve considerable movement of people and discussions using many different technical terms and, hence, are not always conducive to effective lip-reading.

The Glossary offers BSL versions of all the key terms commonly used in first-year undergraduate teaching which will be of benefit to d/Deaf students, their interpreters and their peers who may be keen to help. Furthermore, the concise, plain English definitions could be of use to all students studying these subjects.

This Glossary has provided an excellent complement to the outcomes of the 'Developing an inclusive curriculum for disabled students: The case of Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences' project, also funded through this programme and showcased in this publication. Together these outputs offer an invaluable package of support to academics, students and support staff in these subject areas.

DisabilityCPD: continuing professional development for staff involved in the learning and teaching of disabled students

January 2003 to December 2005

Theme

Staff development

Host institution

University of Gloucestershire

Partner institution

University of Worcester

Project co-ordinator

Phil Gravestock, Head of the Centre for Learning & Teaching

Project overview

The DisabilityCPD project aimed to provide a disability awareness resource for academic and support staff in higher education through the development of an online course and an associated guide.

Project implementation and progress

The idea for the DisabilityCPD project developed from a problem identified with previous teaching and learning development projects, i.e. the difficulty in determining whether teaching and learning practice had changed. In order to address this issue, the DisabilityCPD project used an online asynchronous discussion forum as a method of 'capturing' the learning and development that was taking place during the course. In particular, we wanted participants to engage in online learning set activities to put into practice some of the key points addressed by the guide and online discussions. The motivation to engage with the online course was therefore through involvement in action learning set activities that were of

“The course has encouraged a wealth of responses from experienced tutors which have informed and broadened my own ideas – a forum of past experiences, present doubts, fears and suggestions which has added greatly to my own knowledge.”

direct relevance and benefit to the participant. Overall, staff from 40 higher education institutions took part in the online courses.

Key successes

One of the unexpected outcomes of the project was the level of demand: within a few days of

advertising for two forthcoming courses we had enough interest to fill seven presentations. The project now has a waiting list which it is hoped can be worked through by continued presentations of the online course.

Continuation of the online course forms part of a National Teaching Fellowship project. Information about the course and the associated guide can be found at www.glos.ac.uk/adu/clt/dcpd/.

Lessons learned

As the course developed, we discovered that introducing e-learning novices to online discussions via small support groups increased their confidence and level of active participation in the course.

Added value

Another unanticipated outcome was the number of disability advisers applying for the course. We originally intended this to be a fairly basic disability awareness course for staff who had little knowledge of disability issues, but the inclusion of disability advisers greatly enhanced the level of online discussion. The interaction between the academic staff, support staff and disability advisers also allowed for identification and awareness of the issues facing the different groups of staff.

Owing to the level of interest, we have set up a permanent alumni website, for current and former participants to use as an ongoing information resource and discussion forum.

“And then there has been the mutual online support and information system that the course has also provided. I didn’t expect this as I thought I was just signing up for a learning experience. I also didn’t expect the online bit to be so addictive!”

Commentary from Steve Outram, Senior Adviser, The Higher Education Academy

It is usually difficult to identify the impact that a project has had on learning and teaching and the quality of students’ learning experiences. In the case of the DisabilityCPD project impact can be demonstrated readily in a number of ways. First, it is evident that the project has secured an enduring engagement between tutors and continuing professional development for supporting students with disabilities; second, the project is an exemplar of how to apply values to learning and teaching practice; third, the project is able to enhance learning and teaching generically; and, finally, it is also an exemplar of how the use of online learning media can enhance CPD effectively and in a compelling way.

The DART (Disabilities:Academic Resource Tool) Project / (Enhancing the experience of disabled engineering students)

January 2003 to December 2005

Theme

Staff development

Host Institution

Loughborough University

Contributor

Alan Maddocks, DART Project Manager

Project overview

The DART project sought to enhance the experience of disabled students in Engineering and Built Environment disciplines by creating an online tool that academics can access for advice and guidance on accessible and inclusive practice in learning and teaching.

Project implementation and progress

We had a fairly clear vision of what we were intending to achieve from the outset, and the progress of the project implementation was much as anticipated. We worked closely with the University of Bolton and the University of Central England, Birmingham (UCE). The development of a survey method and protocol and the general template for the case studies were piloted and evaluated at Loughborough prior to passing on methodologies and protocols to the other HEIs engaged in the case study development process. Outputs included the online tool (**<http://dart.lboro.ac.uk/tool>**) and 25 student case studies. Each case study provides a comprehensive insight into the student's experience of higher education, with particular focus on learning and teaching issues.

The student case studies can be accessed from the project website at **<http://dart.lboro.ac.uk/case.html>**.

Key successes

A key success was the actual use of the outputs. This can be partly attributed to the comprehensive development and delivery of coherent action plans. These action plans provided a clear framework which encouraged the widespread use of the project outputs within the Universities of Loughborough, Bolton, and UCE. The plans continue to be implemented in the three HEIs.

Lessons learned

The project had a strong evaluation ethos and this enabled us to test our ideas with academic staff at different stages of development. The feedback received was important in terms of the way we progressed. One of the strongest messages was that academic staff did not appear to place the issue of disabled students high on their priority list. What most academic staff seemed to want was a quick list of what they needed to do. While we tried to accommodate this, we felt that there is still much to do to 'educate' academic staff that good practice for disabled students can be of benefit to all students. Finding a way to change the prevailing culture at a time when academic staff are under increasing time pressures is clearly no easy task. We found that the case studies were excellent in revealing to tutors the difficulties and challenges that disabled students experience. If we had had more time with the project, we would have worked on identifying more ways to influence the way that academic staff address the issue of meeting the needs of disabled students.

"This is exactly the kind of tool that I think would benefit our academic staff. They need something that they can refer to time and time again without it getting misplaced or lost, and that offers a whole kaleidoscope of advice and guidance."

Added value

What has become apparent from talking to academic tutors, disability specialists, and senior managers is the potential transferability of the DART tool (i.e. the fact that it can be used effectively by academic

staff across the full spectrum of subjects and disciplines). Indeed, one could argue that the tool provides a template or platform for developing similar tools addressing other areas of diversity, such as ethnicity.

We maintained close links with both the Engineering and the Built Environment Subject Centres. We disseminated through their regular publications, and they offered opportunities to make presentations to members of the academic community. This link with the Subject Centres ensured that our work reached our target subject discipline communities.

Commentary from the Engineering Subject Centre

Carol Arlett, Centre Manager

The DART project has provided a practical online tool that was designed with a focus on Engineering and the Built Environment. It has been effective on two levels: first raising awareness of the needs of disabled students with Engineering academics; and second providing an easy to use tool to enable departments to develop a more inclusive curriculum. It is supported by a wide range of case studies based on the experiences of disabled students studying Engineering. The Engineering Subject Centre has worked closely with the DART team over the duration of the project, providing opportunities to present at workshops and including articles in its newsletter. The Centre sees the DART tool as a valuable resource for Engineering academics and will continue to disseminate the outcomes of the project to the Engineering community. The tool complements the Centre's other activities on inclusivity and is referred to in the *Engineering Subject Centre Guide: Working with Disabled Students* as well as being highlighted as a resource on the Centre's disability webpage.

The CARS Project (Creating Accessible Resources for Staff)

January 2003 to December 2005

Theme

Staff development

Host institution

The Open University

Project coordinator

Robin Stenham, Manager Curriculum Access

Project overview

The website, 'Making your teaching inclusive' (www.open.ac.uk/inclusiveteaching/), was developed by the CARS (Creating Accessible Resources for Staff) HEFCE/Department for Employment and Learning (Northern Ireland) funded project to support teaching staff in higher education institutions in understanding the needs of disabled students and teaching them effectively, thereby contributing significantly to an acknowledged high priority need in national disability provision.

The website provides practical advice about teaching inclusively and also helps staff to understand and meet the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act. It provides insights into what study is like for disabled students, and what teaching and support staff and managers can do to make a difference.

Project implementation and progress:

The project started with a descriptive survey of the practical challenges facing academic staff in teaching, assessing and supporting disabled students. It then built on the Open University's (OU) reputation for developing high quality learning resources,

integrated within a coherent pedagogical framework and effectively and imaginatively delivered to a large, diverse national student population through a variety of media.

“I think it has a really positive role to play. I’ve used the site to inform my own practice as an OU Associate Lecturer. Moreover, as part of my work as Student Services Manager, I routinely recommend it to other Associate lecturers when offering guidance on how best to support students with disabilities.”

Dr Janine Liladhar, The OU in the East Midlands

The project was led by the Student Services (Teaching & Learner Support) Unit with contributions and input from over 20 higher education disability specialists, supporting the project as consultants, formative testers and critical readers. Originally conceived as a series of DVDs, the project was finally published as a website, ‘Making your teaching inclusive’ www.open.ac.uk/inclusiveteaching/, providing immediately accessible resources to meet the needs of

HE teaching and support staff who can work through the complete resource, dip in and/or select sections.

The website helps users learn about:

- how to enhance students’ learning experience
- common barriers to learning and ways to find solutions
- types of learning support
- assistive technologies and specialist staff.

Users are encouraged to adopt an anticipatory and proactive approach, recognise and meet the learning needs of individuals and thus create a learning environment that is inclusive by design. There are also resources that can be used for staff development.

The most compelling reasons for 'Making your teaching inclusive' came from the students themselves and the staff who supported them. There are video clips throughout the site which tell their stories.

"I have had nothing but praise for the site and the information on it."

Paul Crofts, Equality and Diversity Officer (Students), University of Northampton

Key successes

Information about the project has been disseminated to over 400 named individuals who have either attended presentations about the project given at six national conferences in 2004–05, or who are contacts for disability and teaching and learning issues at HE institutions and specialist interest organisations. Information about the project has also been disseminated to over 600 mailbase discussion groups, Academy Subject Centres and other special interest groups concerned with HE teaching and learner support. Further information has been distributed to national and specialist media during the first quarter of 2006. Finally a programme of face-to-face and electronic dissemination is being undertaken throughout 2006 to inform all OU Associate Lecturers and other OU staff concerned with teaching and learning about the resource.

Lessons learned

The project team originally intended that CARS be produced and disseminated as an interactive DVD-ROM, to named individuals in HE institutions responsible for disability issues. User feedback at the NDT conference included the difficulty of updating the resources, the problem (and cost to the project) of distributing sufficient DVDs to the sector so that the material would be available 'on-demand' to a multiplicity of institutional users, and the restricted access to HEFCE funded institutions. Offering a networked-based solution seemed the best compromise and one accepted by the NDT and HEFCE as the project funders in the final year of the project.

Added value

There has been considerable added value in deciding to launch the resource as a website rather than a series of DVDs as the project team have been able to disseminate outputs and outcomes of the project more widely. They have also been able to easily monitor the use of the website. User feedback has been particularly favourable. The website can be more easily maintained, avoiding reproduction of DVDs which could not be delivered once project funding ceased.

Commentary from Sal Cooke, Head of TechDis

The development of this useful resource is another positive step in moving the debate on inclusive learning and teaching practices forward. The website provides links to some of the resources that are now available from a variety of sector agencies and funded projects. The site does not claim to be totally comprehensive, as it can in no way represent all areas of work within this arena, however what is available has a synergy with national priorities. The information is easy to digest and most importantly, takes teaching and learning staff on a journey of understanding, introducing the issues relating to accessibility, legislation and inclusive practice in a meaningful and relevant way.

Improving provision for disabled postgraduate research students (Premia)

January 2003 to December 2005

Theme

Staff development

Host institution

University of Newcastle-Upon-Tyne

Contributor

Val Farrar, Project Officer

Project overview

The main aim of the Premia project was to increase the numbers of disabled postgraduate research (PGR) students. To achieve that goal, we aimed to identify the issues and barriers for disabled researchers, locate best international practice in supporting them and produce staff development materials.

Project implementation and progress

We analysed numbers of disabled graduates entering PGR programmes. From 2001 the proportion of researchers who are disabled has steadily risen. The project refocused on improving the experience of disabled PGR students.

We undertook qualitative research through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with disabled students. Over 30 students at UK institutions spoke about their experiences and the findings were presented in an interim report *Access to Research*. All said that their experience as researchers was very different from their lives as disabled undergraduates.

We commissioned students to write case histories and wove their words into new staff development materials. We designed the resources to address the issues and raise awareness of the unique requirements of disabled research students. The concerns were more numerous and complex than we anticipated and challenged some deeply held views of the researcher as a wholly autonomous learner.

The web-based resources were launched at the British Academy in September 2005 and we added student resources to support the self-management of new learning environments. Throughout we liaised with external organisations with an interest in research education – the Research Councils, the Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCE), the UK GRAD Programme and the UK Council for Graduate Education (UKCGE) – to ensure that disability issues are addressed in national initiatives.

Key successes

The main outcome of the project is the Premia Resource Base for all involved in research education: administrators, research supervisors and managers, careers and disability advisers, as well as students. Users can search the resources by their role. The materials include inclusive pre-entry advice and information, admissions, research induction, starting supervision, research language, intensive reading, writing the thesis, the viva and transition to employment, and are available at: www.premia.ac.uk. The resource base also contains a library with case studies, checklists, an e-mentoring toolkit, a glossary of research terms with plain English definitions, reports and data.

We have disseminated the resources at various conferences of academic staff developers, disability specialists, research staff and careers personnel, and through direct contact with those responsible for research, careers, academic staff development and disability services at all UK institutions. We asked national organisations to create links to the Premia site and the European Universities

Association has disseminated it to their 750 members. Articles in journals, websites, and national newspapers have favourably reviewed the resources which receive 10,000 page views per month (January - March 2006).

Lessons learned

It was originally proposed that data be collected, and resources piloted, on a regional basis. But early student interviews indicated very sensitive issues. To maintain anonymity and validate early findings, it was necessary to go outside the region.

We viewed the student voice as central to the design of the staff resources. But it was also recognised that academic staff, many with extensive experience of research supervision and management, would be more responsive to resources that recognised their skills, offered practical guidance and illustrated best practice within the context of the students' experiences.

Resources were initially tested in the forum of the project advisory group. Its members advised on tone as well as content, and we learned to use their feedback constructively.

Added value

The materials produced focus on disability issues in research environments, but users have commented that they are primarily about best practice for all. Those working on issues including internationalisation and widening participation have identified common themes and concerns.

"We all concluded that this is a very valuable and much needed resource. Although addressing the additional/ different needs of research students with disabilities, it is also an excellent resource for those engaged in learning and teaching at any level."

Andrew Brett, Head of the Learning and Teaching Office, Goldsmiths College

Academic staff developers commented that the materials had more credibility because of the underpinning research.

Commentary from Glynis Cousin, Senior Adviser, The Higher Education Academy

The quality of postgraduate research environments is of much interest to the Higher Education Academy. We have commissioned national surveys at doctoral and Masters levels to gain more information about students' needs and are exploring supervisory practices. This project offers an invaluable, complementary, research-informed evaluation of these environments and although it is from the point of view of disabled students, the findings and recommendations are of value to anyone supporting any postgraduate.

Disabled Students: A Staff Developers Handbook

January 2003 to June 2006

Theme

Staff development

Host institution

University of Central Lancashire

Contributor

Professor Alan Hurst, Department of Education and Social Sciences

Project overview

This project was aimed at mainstream staff responsible for the initial and continuing professional development of teaching staff. The intended outcome was to produce information which would set the context of policy and provision including funding, outline issues relating to continuing professional development, and consider the changing of institutional cultures. The main project activity was the development, piloting and dissemination of a series of exercises which were used in sessions directed towards 'educating' teaching staff about ways in which the challenges posed by working with students with a range of impairments might be overcome.

Project implementation and progress

The project worked with a small number of representative HEIs where sessions were piloted and feedback obtained. These included Brunel, Derby, Northampton, Kingston, Lancaster, Northumbria, and Manchester Universities.

The major dissemination activity will take place in 2006. The outputs of the project will be available in both print and CD-ROM versions, the latter allowing for HEIs to amend and change the materials to suit their own circumstances. In addition to distributing a minimum

“Using the learning from this session I will adjust assessment practices to meet the needs of my students”

of three copies to all HEIs in the UK, a number of regional events will be delivered in 2006. The events will be directed towards mainstream staff developers and

their specialist colleagues from Disability Services to present the materials and to allow for feedback and discussion.

Key successes

Positive feedback on the work of the project is demonstrated as follows:

- Positive comment in evaluation/feedback forms completed by participants in the sessions e.g. “Excellent. Alan was a very good speaker and kept everybody’s interest”
- Supportive feedback gained from partner staff who have used the exercises successfully themselves in a variety of settings.
- In at least one instance, participating in a session has led to a change in the assessment opportunities for students with specific learning difficulties
- A number of other Strand two projects (e.g. Gloucestershire, Loughborough, the Open University) have asked to include some of the materials within their own staff development products.

Lessons learned

If the project were repeated I would work with fewer nominated partners but ensure that they were aware of and met their agreed obligations. One stage of the project plan was the delivery of sessions by the institution’s own non-specialist staff with my presence so that if necessary I could intervene and offer assistance. This stage did not work as planned for a variety of reasons. An aim of the project was to provide materials which non-specialists might use, as I was unable to provide direct support when the materials were being delivered; evaluation of this aspect of the project was

not possible. This was disappointing as evaluation of how non-specialists found the materials and delivery would have been particularly helpful in their refinement for the future.

Added value

A particular spin-off benefit was the invitation to organise and deliver sessions in HEIs who were not partners in the project, as a result of presentations at conferences. Also the range of units/departments within HEIs such as disability services/staff development/human resources that requested sessions provided further opportunity to pilot the sessions in different departmental contexts. In addition there have been opportunities to use the materials outside the UK, which indicates that the project outputs are transferable to and applicable in other national contexts.

Commentary from Philip Price, Senior Adviser, The Higher Education Academy

The production of a staff development handbook with evaluated exercises and tasks designed to raise staff awareness of the experience of disabled students will provide a valuable asset for staff development teams and disability advisers.

Staff in all sectors of higher education recognise the imperative to raise their awareness of the needs of disabled students, not least to ensure that they fulfil their legal obligations and deliver inclusive learning and teaching opportunities for all.

Using this staff development handbook to enhance learning activities for new and experienced staff on development programmes in HEIs gives the potential for a range of significant advantages. These could include:

- fostering the development of practice by individual staff who have the intrinsic motivation to be more effective in providing learning opportunities for their own students
- meeting institution-wide objectives such as teaching and learning, CPD and staff development strategies
- providing significant opportunities for staff and institutions to demonstrate how they are meeting aspects of the new UK Professional Standards Framework, for example in areas of activity, core knowledge elements and demonstrating their commitment to the framework's values.

The use of this handbook will provide a valuable tool to meet the needs of both new and existing staff as they support the needs of disabled students and provide an enhanced, inclusive learning experience for all students.

Academic standards and benchmark descriptors: developing strategies for inclusivity

January 2003 to Dec 2004

Theme

Benchmarking, audit and validation

Host institution

University of Worcester

Project co-ordinator

Dr Val Chapman, Director of the Centre for Inclusive Learning Support

Project overview

The main aim of the project was to act as a catalyst for change and help promote a more inclusive approach to disabled students' engagement and achievement through the vehicle of Subject Benchmark Statements. Project staff worked in collaboration with the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), and in consultation with the Chairs of ten Subject Benchmarking teams, in developing a web-based resource to help academic staff become more inclusive in designing programmes of study in HE.

Project implementation and progress

When reviewing our own institution's new Students' Qualities Profile (a student-owned document that allows each student to reflect on and develop the range of skills needed to support learning whilst at university), I became aware that disabled students would find some of the key skills listed in the document extremely difficult, if not impossible, to achieve for reasons directly related to their impairments. This observation prompted me, wearing my QAA subject reviewer hat, to recognise that Subject Benchmark Statements also might contain learning outcomes that could be

challenging for disabled students. A quick check of a random sample confirmed my concern – and the project bid ensued.

The core achievement of the project was the development of the Strategies for Creating Inclusive Programmes of Study (SCIPS) website www.scips.worc.ac.uk/. The SCIPS resource has been made available for academic staff to consult during the interpretation of Subject Benchmark Statements when creating programme or course specifications. It helps academic staff identify potential challenges to the achievement of learning activities/outcomes for students with certain impairments or degrees of difficulty. The

potential challenges are cross-referenced with recommended adjustments to practice so that academic staff can enable disabled students to meet the learning outcomes as described in the Benchmark Statements.

“A really helpful resource for understanding the needs of disabled students in my subject area.”

Key successes

Information about the development of the SCIPS resource was sent to all Subject Centres together with an invitation to submit subject specific case studies of good practice for inclusion on the site and/or comments on the resources. The SCIPS site is currently populated with over 40 case studies obtained from a range of sources.

Lessons learned

On reflection, it would have been helpful to have had some discussion with chairs of Subject Benchmarking teams, some of the key stakeholders, prior to the writing of the project bid. This would have challenged many of our team’s initial assumptions about the nature and integrity of Subject Benchmark Statements and allowed the initial stages of the project to progress more quickly.

Added value

The SCIPS resource has been very well received across the sector and has formed the basis for a successful bid for Leonardo da Vinci funding for a project, 'Qatrain', that will see the extension of the UK SCIPS site to include a further six subjects, with versions of SCIPS developed in Poland, Greece, France and Bulgaria.

Commentary from PALATINE, the Subject Centre for Dance, Drama and Music

Lisa Whistlecroft, Associate Director

The SCIPS resource brings together in one place a collection of conceptually high-level documents and makes them accessible in a useful way to practitioners who are either designing new courses or re-thinking the way that they deliver existing schemes of study. So here in one place are statements of the essential characteristics of nine disciplines, well-written summaries of various disabilities and impairments, and thoughtful analyses of how these conditions or behavioural patterns may affect a student's learning or progress through a degree course.

Added to that are suggestions for teaching strategies and techniques that offer ways to remove the disadvantages that disabled students may face, and suggestions of good practice in teaching that genuinely treat all students equally.

The site also offers a number of short case studies, which provide valuable examples of ways in which awareness and thought in the presentation of teaching materials can achieve significant benefits for students without massive increases in workload for the tutor.

ALERT – Accessibility in Learning Environments and Related Technologies

July 2003 to July 2005

Theme

Online learning and multimedia

Host institutions

University of Durham and Bournemouth University

Contributor

Dr Barbara Newland, Manager Educational Development Services, Bournemouth University

Project overview

The aim of the ALERT project was to examine the role of a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) in disabled students' attainment of pedagogical objectives. The project was based on a series of case studies with disabled students and academic staff, and guidelines were developed from their opinions, comments and observations.

The project was run between the Universities of Durham and Bournemouth.

Project implementation and progress

ALERT was primarily concerned with how individual and institutional use of a VLE can pedagogically impact upon disabled students' experience, and in particular, support the achievement of learning outcomes.

Many earlier studies have focused largely on technical aspects of VLE use and how these affect the educational experience of disabled students. VLE software companies, such as Blackboard and WebCT, have accessibility policies which ensure that their products are in

compliance with international legislation, such as SENDA in the UK, Section 508 in the US and the Disability Services Act in Australia.

The project drew directly on the experience of disabled students across various academic disciplines. A series of semi-structured interviews form the basis of 14 case studies, centred around the use of different pedagogical methods and 'e-tivities' within a VLE.

The first interview session with students was largely based on multiple choice questions (MCQs) and focused on Communication and Information Technology (C&IT) skills and use of the VLE. The second was based on qualitative data and was more disability-specific. It investigated student attitudes towards learning process, chosen subject and a specific learning activity delivered through the VLE.

The analysis of the interview transcripts led to the identification of themes for the guidelines. Although the focus of the guidelines is the pedagogical support of disabled students, the recommendations that are made apply to all students. Based on the principles of accessibility and universal design, the guidelines promote a considered approach to the application of VLE capabilities, and thus the establishment a more diverse and inclusive learning experience and adaptive learning materials.

Students benefit from the capabilities of a VLE in a variety of ways, including the flexibility afforded to them through the digital delivery of learning support materials, the ability to take part in various types of online communication and the learning opportunities offered by online assessment. Advance provision of lecture support materials, for example, enables students to prepare for face-to-face sessions by familiarising themselves with terminology, vocabulary and concepts. Small changes can really make a big difference to the experience of learners.

“All the stuff that you put together is great and if they take your advice then a lot of good will be done.”

Key successes

The key outputs are the ALERT guidelines which aim to promote discussion, reflection and where appropriate modification of existing

practice and provision. Each of the guidelines is divided into sections relating to pedagogical, practical and strategic considerations of VLE use.

The guidelines are targeted at academics and staff within student support and staff development units, which include learning technologists and disability support staff.

The methods of dissemination include a website **www.bournemouth.ac.uk/alert** with the guidelines and case studies, journal publications, a book and presentation of papers at both national and international conferences.

Lessons learned

The success of the project was dependent on:

- willingness of disabled students to participate in the research project
- excellent quality of work and commitment of the project officer and research assistant
- support and collaboration from disability support units
- clear project management methodology including the use of the VLE
- an external evaluator who provided valuable comments on the questionnaire design and the guidelines
- use of qualitative analysis software on the transcripts of interviews.

The main barriers were:

- demands placed on student participants meant participation was sometimes a low priority
- time-consuming data transcription analysis process
- high volume of research literature and perspectives to include – pedagogical, technological and disability support.

Added value

The project provided the opportunity to learn more about disabled student support services. It illustrated the importance of professional services working together to identify the benefits of and barriers to the introduction of new technologies for disabled students and the support that may be required.

The use of the VLE for project management at a distance was very helpful in managing a project from Bournemouth with a project officer in Durham and research assistant in Glasgow.

Commentary from Eddie Gulc, Senior Adviser, The Higher Education Academy

This is a very helpful and timely study given the greater scrutiny that institutional learning environments are being placed under. Students use such services in different ways and any steps that can be taken to customise and personalise VLEs to help meet learner needs, especially those of disabled learners, is particularly welcome. The guides are useful and offer support to staff in a range of areas, covering issues like facilitating group work and developing assessment models.

The majority of staff in HE are still on the learning curve when it comes to getting the most out of their institutional VLE and issues of accessibility can often be another factor to try to get right. This project not only offers a great insight, through case studies, into how VLEs can be made more engaging for students across different disciplines, but also provides resources which will offer great assistance to staff when they come to design their students' learning.

Skills for Access: Producing High Quality Interactive Tutorial Materials on Accessibility (e-Learning)

January 2003 to September 2005

Theme

Online learning and multimedia

Host institution

University of Sheffield

Partner institution

University of Dundee

Contributor

John Stratford, Director: Learning Development and Media Unit

Project overview

When the Skills for Access project was conceived in 2002 there was little material available to which multimedia developers could refer to help support conformity with the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. Many developers were adopting a hostile attitude towards the legislation, seeing it as imposing limitations on both their creativity and the application of multimedia to learning. Skills for Access set about reversing these attitudes by providing a resource that would provide practical information that developers would value, offered via a rich multimedia resource that would demonstrate that accessible multimedia does not have to be bland. We wanted to demonstrate that rather than being a problem for disabled students, multimedia can be a great enabler.

Project implementation and progress

As a developer of multimedia learning materials in need of guidance itself, the Learning Development and Media Unit (LDMU) thought that if few materials existed it should take on the task. It saw that

this would give it the expertise that it and the University of Sheffield needed. Having little prior knowledge of accessibility LDMU teamed up with the Digital Media Access Group (DMAG) at the University of Dundee which already boasted an established track record. By coming together LDMU and DMAG complemented one another perfectly in terms of skills, and through the HEFCE/Department for Employment and Learning (Northern Ireland) special initiative funding, the project was born.

“Absolutely gorgeous site, well done for using modern accessible techniques.”

Key successes

The project was able to create the resource it set out to create, namely an optimally accessible website that showed both by example and through content how rich multimedia can enhance learning and teaching without undue compromise to accessibility or creativity (www.skillsforaccess.org.uk). Through case studies, articles and other rich resources the site presents a holistic approach to accessibility in which the technical aspects of how to achieve given outcomes are set in the context of the overall learning design. The message is that even where technology is involved in delivery the solutions are often not wholly technical ones. The continuing interest in the site from around the world is testament to its value to the learning and teaching community.

Lessons learned

One challenge faced by the project arose out of an early decision to deliver the resource via a website rather than CD. This was a sensible move, but it created significant technical difficulties down the line which cost us time and effort. This showed that changes to plans, especially ones as fundamental as ours, can have hidden consequences that can trip up any project. The lesson learned was the need for flexibility and to consider all options. In our case we brought in a third party web designer with particular skills in designing accessible websites.

Added value

Engagement with the Information and Computer Sciences Subject Centre, via membership on the Project Advisory Committee, enabled the team to recognise the potential of the Skills for Access resource as a valuable opportunity for computer science students to raise their awareness and understanding of accessibility issues.

Commentary from the Information and Computer Sciences Subject Centre

Sylvia Alexander, Associate Director

Multimedia development and website design is a core element of many information and computing science (ICS) related courses and there are many instances of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes dedicated wholly to this topic. However, there are few examples of optimally designed, accessible websites and literature outlining best practice in this respect is limited. The Skills for Access project has produced an exemplar website and practical information (in the form of case studies and related materials) which can be embedded within the ICS curriculum, thus providing access to both relevant reading and practical examples of best practice.

It is imperative that students enrolled on ICS related programmes are introduced to the concept of accessible design at an early stage so that it is viewed as an integral aspect of professional practice rather than a barrier to creativity. The Skills for Access materials will ensure that the multimedia developers of the future gain exposure to both practical information and well designed, visually appealing materials thus providing a sound basis on which to model their own practice.

Achieving Accessible Assessment

January 2003 to July 2006

Theme

Online learning and multimedia

Host institution

Nottingham Trent University

Contributors

Ivan Moore, Project Director

Claire Ward, Project Manager

David Jukes, Project Leader for Landscape Management

Project overview

Achieving Accessible Assessment (known as The Triple A project) aimed to develop and disseminate transferable resources to improve access to assessment for disabled students in three practically-based subject areas, Landscape Management, Art and Design and Broadcasting and Journalism.

The project team wanted to improve assessment procedures so that they were not only more accessible to students with impairments, but were inclusive. This meant removing potential barriers that could prevent some students from demonstrating their abilities in assessments and designing assessment methods that would enable all students to have the same quality of experience.

Project implementation and progress

Three subjects were identified (Landscape Management, Art and Design and Broadcasting and Journalism) and projects established within the three relevant Schools within the University. The individual subject areas were initially developed through project staff researching how learners with specific disabilities were affected by

“I used to have panic attacks when thinking about the assessment for Plant Knowledge. I relied on my short term memory and had to over-learn material. The online resource has helped me enormously.”

Feedback from a student with a visual impairment and dyslexia studying Land Management using the online resource

assessment processes in their area. Then the team liaised with staff and students to develop some inclusive methods and create a shift towards more inclusive assessment procedures. As the project developed further, the focus in the Landscape Management subject area moved from assessment to providing support for disabled learners,

especially dyslexic learners, using a range of online and mobile technologies.

Key successes

Our main successes have been achieved in the area of landscape management. A web-based resource, **www.plantknowledge.info**, has been developed and is being used by students to assist with the spelling and pronunciation of Latin botanical names. This has been built with all types of print disability in mind and therefore allows all students, regardless of impairment, the same quality of experience when using it. An assessment system known as CaPES (capture, process, edit, submit) has also been implemented which allows students to use mobile technologies in a way that suits them, to produce the information required for assessments.

Art and Design have implemented and evaluated an alternative method to a written third-year dissertation in the form of a visual product.

The Centre for Broadcasting and Journalism has concentrated on redefining the ‘professional practice mark’ within assessment on Newsdays. This now gives marks for inclusive working practices and includes peer feedback, instead of merely taking into account things like punctuality.

Lessons learned

There were setbacks relating to both staff and direction changes. Although funding was provided for the subject departments, there was little monitoring and guidance given to the relevant staff, no outcomes were agreed, and no expectations were attached to the funding. As a result, projects moved in a different direction to those established in the original project aims, and some work was significantly delayed. To overcome these problems, in future, a suggestion would be to identify a project manager from the beginning of the project with a remit to identify and apply requirements and timescales, particularly relating to any funded elements of the project.

Added value

The Triple A project team will produce a publication in addition to the resources produced. The content, details, process and outcomes in each of three case studies will give examples of inclusion and access to learning, teaching and assessment within higher education.

“[The] dissertation is just a weird test, an old school tradition. Universities want to cling onto this thing; if they are trying to make courses more applicable to real life, drop the dissertation – there are other ways of writing that would be brilliant and interesting.”

A student with dyslexia

“I am self conscious regarding appearance on camera – especially regarding things I recognise as part of my disability; don’t feel others notice these things though.”

A student on the Broadcasting and Journalism course with cerebral palsy causing mild mobility and speech impairments

Comment from JISC TechDis Service:

Alistair McNaught, Senior Adviser

New technologies and new teaching approaches provide students with a broader range of learning experiences than ever before, much to the benefit of inclusive practice. Yet most assessments are still based on extended writing – which may not accurately reflect a student’s understanding nor the requirements of a future career.

The aims of Achieving Accessible Assessment are significant because the Disability Discrimination Act demands that reasonable adjustments be made where a learner would otherwise be placed at “substantial disadvantage” due to the nature of their disability. Determining reasonable adjustments, with parity of academic standards, is not necessarily straightforward. Experience is only built by active engagement in the issues.

But the issue of accessible assessment is not just about disabled people. By developing a more imaginative range of assessment methods it is possible to add value to the learning experiences (and authenticity to the assessment) for all students.

Project funding can give an important kick start to activities, as this project has done, but essentially achieving accessible assessment is about good practice in supporting different types of learners and learning styles and engaging staff and learners in that development.

The website **www.plantknowledge.info** has great potential to reach a wide audience with the use of interactivities, images and alternative navigation. The inability to resize text on the website is unexpected and TechDis have advised reconsidering this aspect of the design.

DIVERSE: The UK Veterinary Medicine Disability Project

Theme

Employability, work placement, key skills and professional bodies

Host institution

The Royal Veterinary College

Partner institutions

Universities of Bristol, Cambridge and Liverpool

Contributor

Anne Tynan, DIVERSE Director

Project overview

With its unique combination of physical work and clinical skills, the work of a veterinary surgeon offers the most tantalising professional challenges for a disabled person. The DIVERSE project set out to address these challenges at veterinary school level, whilst having medical and dental schools in its sights as well. If young disabled people wanted to become vets, doctors or dentists, DIVERSE would try to forge a path enabling them to do so.

Project implementation and progress

DIVERSE was based at and led by the Royal Veterinary College, with the collaboration of the three other English Veterinary Schools and input also from the two Scottish Schools at Glasgow and Edinburgh. This UK-wide perspective was strengthened by the involvement of colleagues from medical and Dental Schools, as well as representatives from the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons, the General Medical Council and the General Dental Council. Work was not restricted to offices and meeting rooms. The collaborative nature of DIVERSE enabled me, the project Director, to carry out periodic placements at other Veterinary Schools. I was able to observe farm

work, clinical consultations or surgery. This work also provided the chance for front-line discussion with key stakeholders.

We analysed the potential impact of the competences on disabled people, exploring how reasonable adjustments might overcome any negative impacts so that disabled students could participate in every area of veterinary undergraduate training. This was crucial because without this, they could not qualify as veterinary surgeons at the end of their degree.

Key successes

Our key output from the project activity was a 200-page publication that condenses the project development entitled *Time To Take Stock: Disability and Professional Competence*. A working group analysed the essential competences required by new veterinary graduates, combining this with discussion with disabled students, professionals, disability specialists and other interested parties.

Lessons learned

One thing that I would do differently in the future would be to tighten up the consultation process. The draft text for *Time To Take Stock* was circulated to various stakeholders on numerous occasions, to ensure that effective consultation took place. However, this caused long delays and added enormously to my workload as Editor. I recommend that draft documents should be circulated only twice, with major corrections/additions on the first circulation only; the second circulation should be as a proof reading exercise only before final publication.

Added value

Credit for the speedy and willing take-up of the work of DIVERSE by colleagues in medicine and dentistry, and from other areas of healthcare education, has to be given primarily to the Subject Centre for Medicine, Dentistry and Veterinary Medicine. In 2003 and 2004, they funded me to carry out two studies on the admission of disabled students: *Pushing the Boat Out* and *The Sequel*. This enabled us

to expand our contact with colleagues in medicine and dentistry, producing an ongoing dialogue that culminated in the sector's enthusiastic reception of Time To Take Stock at the end of the project.

Commentary from Medicine, Dentistry and Veterinary Medicine Subject Centre:

Dr Megan Quentin-Baxter, Deputy Director

This was a seminal project in the area of understanding the potential of disabled people entering, being supported in and ultimately working in fields requiring professional registration. The outcomes are relevant to all professions where 'fitness to practise' is a key issue.

Critically and objectively analysing the core competences (day one skills) required of veterinary graduates, with respect to 'reasonable adjustments' (in collaboration with disabled people, disability specialists, advocates, academics, clinicians and policy makers), highlighted the learning opportunities for all those connected with education, and the shortcomings in awareness of the range of, for example, new processes and technologies to support disabled people. The project manager's style, to gently encourage and allow a story to tell itself, and facilitate an individual's reflection on his or her own beliefs, attitudes and behaviours, inspires commitment to open-mindedness and a new agenda for overcoming the inequity of inclusion of disabled workers in health care services.

This project provided space for key stakeholders to engage with the issues facing students by considering how to individualise the support given, therefore potentially enhancing the learning experience for all students. Congratulations to the host, partners, supporters, and all those who contributed to this project, for their vision in taking this agenda forward.

A Best Practice Guide in Learning Support for Disabled Students undertaking Professional Education (PEdDS)

January 2003 to July 2005

Theme

Employability, work placement, key skills and professional bodies

Host institution

University of Hull

Contributor

Jane Wray, Research Fellow

Project overview

This project aimed to explore the learning support needs of disabled students on placement as part of a professional education programme.

Project implementation and progress

The project started with a period of consultation with disabled social work students, academic and placement staff and disability support staff. They identified examples of good practice which we used to develop a pilot service to organise adjustments on placement. The service was evaluated by staff and students and we also produced a 'Best Practice Guide'.

Feedback from staff and students during the development of the Best Practice Guide was really useful. On their advice we created different sections for each group: disabled students, practice assessors, academic and disability support staff. It also helped us make the guide accessible as well as easily photocopyable. This was particularly important for many people as they most often wanted to copy the guide and then pass it on to others. Not everyone

had access to the internet and the cost of printing downloadable documents can be very high for students.

Key successes

The main outcomes from the project were;

- the learning support needs of disabled social work students on placement are now routinely discussed at programme level
- a copy of the best practice guide has been sent to all Heads of Social Work, Placement Co-ordinators and Disability Support Services in England as well as to individual practice staff and disabled students. The Research Report (from the consultation) and the guide are both available free to download from www.hull.ac.uk/pedds

We have also disseminated this information on other websites and to other professional disciplines (such as nursing and teaching) that use placements as part of their core learning.

Lessons learned

One of the main challenges we faced was involving all the relevant people in the consultation. They often had competing demands and different expectations of us and we had to make sure we were very clear about what we could (and couldn't) do. Often key people changed jobs or moved during the project (including our own project team) which meant that we had to constantly review people's involvement. Also, we would have spent more time on staff development and education *before* the consultation took place. I think this would have made it much easier to facilitate change and embed the outcomes in the last stages of the project.

Added value

The experience and outcomes of the project led directly to the funding of a new project 'Supporting Disabled Students in Off-

Campus Settings'. This new project is funded by the University of Hull's Widening Participation Committee. It focuses on off-campus learning activities such as field trips, placements and study abroad. A guide has been produced for University staff involved in the organisation and monitoring of off-campus learning and is available at **www.hull.ac.uk/disability**.

The Social Work and Policy Subject Centre was involved from the very beginning of our project and we signed a 'partnership agreement'. There were lots of advantages in having the support of a Subject Centre. We found that they were crucial when we needed to publish the project and disseminate any outcomes – they helped us reach a much wider audience than we might have done. They also gave us practical advice when we put our Best Practice Guide together.

Commentary from a learning and teaching perspective:

Professor Jonathan Parker, Academic Head of Social Work and Learning Disabilities, Bournemouth University

In 2002, two students, committed to raising the profile of disabled students undertaking social work placements, were appalled to find a paucity of adequate provision for disabled students and a lack of sympathy to make reasonable adjustments to facilitate their practice learning. The Best Practice Guide provides an excellent resource to address such issues, focusing primarily on the student, and offering guidance for other key stakeholders involved in enhancing practice learning.

The processes and structures outlined within the guidance provide a framework in which student needs and reasonable adjustments for placement learning are identified and debated in an open, solution-focused way. This focuses attention on planning and developing learning activities during placement rather than dissipating academic, student and practice teacher energies by multiple agency visits reacting to previously undisclosed issues. The Guide allows openness to be seen as positive rather than impeding student progress and learning.

The Guide also provides a sensitive means of challenging practice agencies and teachers. It acknowledges the demands, professional requirements and complexities of practice learning whilst seeking creative and reasonable ways of responding to the needs of students, which is especially valuable in embedding a 'whole programme' response to seen and unseen disabilities.

Managing off-campus Learning for Students with Disabilities – Toolkits for Success

January 2003 to December 2005

Theme

Employability, work placement, key skills and professional bodies

Host institution

The University of Manchester

Contributor

Chris Hughes, Project Manager

Project overview

The aim was to develop a web-based resource to enable disabled students to find and make the most of their off-campus learning opportunities. The result, **www.disabilitytoolkits.ac.uk**, developed by a small team within the Careers and Employability Division at the University of Manchester with funding from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) was successfully launched on October 2005.

Project implementation and progress

The final product comprises an interactive web-based service providing dedicated information, advice and resources for disabled students, for academics involved in work placements and for prospective employers. The website was developed in response to evidence that disabled graduates take longer

“Disability Toolkits makes everyone in higher education and employment aware of the steps to take in order to ensure equality of access to work experience for disabled people. I intend to make sure that all staff and students at MMU are aware of the site and its resources.”

Marina Matosic, chair of the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS)

to find appropriate graduate level jobs than their non-disabled peers. It is generally acknowledged that gaining good quality work experience during the undergraduate programme enhances employability and this may be particularly crucial for disabled students.

On the website, students are introduced to and guided through the work experience opportunities available to them, with specific information on 'disability-friendly' employers, appropriate work experience schemes and the thorny issue of when and how to address the disclosure of disability. Employers can find out about their responsibilities under the recently amended Disability Discrimination Act (DDA 2005), identify forms of best practice, and find sources of support in dealing with students and employees with disabilities. Academics and placement tutors can access information and advice to enable them to better understand the specific needs of disabled students and identify suitable placements. In addition to providing practical advice to all three user groups, the project aimed to highlight and promote the importance of sustaining diversity within academia, business and society at large.

Lessons learned

The most difficult part of the project proved to be obtaining profiles from employers and placement tutors to illustrate examples of good practice and pass on their learning to other site users. This process is consequently ongoing and we hope to add to the current profiles as we continue to maintain the site.

“Disability Toolkits is an invaluable resource for all responsible employers who recognise the need for a diverse workforce reflecting the structure of society.”

Adele Cunningham, recruitment manager at PricewaterhouseCoopers

“Disability Toolkits is an outstanding summary of all available resources for disabled students.”

John Robinson, a visually-impaired ex-student and current employee at the Co-operative Group

An important lesson learned was the importance of recruiting professional help (luckily from within the University) to plan and carry out an effective publicity campaign to promote the existence of the end product, i.e. www.disabilitytoolkits.ac.uk, to all its potential users. We produced spanner-shaped stress toys printed with the website address to hand out at conferences and also sent these out with targeted press releases to key press contacts, employers, Vice-Chancellors, careers services, academics, student job shops etc which proved to be very effective in attracting attention and resulted in requests to attend conferences, provide articles for publication and general requests for additional leaflets and posters to provide extra publicity within individual institutions.

Commentary from Eddie Gulc, Senior Adviser, The Higher Education Academy

This project brings together a range of important themes which have a particularly high profile in higher education at the moment. The project team have produced a set of resources which are already being successfully utilised across the sector by a wide range of audiences including teaching staff, support staff, students and employers. One exciting aspect of these materials is that they help to 'empower' disabled students and encourage the development of self-confidence when undertaking periods of off-campus/work-based learning. There is also the sense that the resource is alive and that it will further grow and develop as it is used to meet the changing and different needs of the differing audiences that it aims to support.

Professional Careers in Construction for people with mobility, hearing or visual impairment

January 2003 to December 2005

Theme

Employability, work placement, key skills and professional bodies

Host institution

University of Bolton

Contributor

Peter Farrell

Project overview

The focus of this project was to provide a framework for developing an accessible HE curriculum for disabled students pursuing a professional career in construction. The aim of the project was to work with the relevant professional bodies and the HE community to identify and remove those artificial barriers in HE curricula and professional body requirements that prevent people with mobility, visual or hearing impairment from entering professional careers in the construction industry. This was achieved through the development of guidance for employers, professional bodies, higher education institutions and students on how to remove barriers to qualification in construction for disabled people.

Project implementation and progress

Substantial portions of the guides were based on best practice from other subject disciplines, which was then applied to construction. Interviews were held with practising construction professionals with disabilities. Subject experts in the construction industry were asked to hypothesise their delivery to disabled students. Verification of findings was sought from construction academics who have some experience of teaching disabled students, and also from accessibility specialists.

Key successes

Four guides on *Accessible Built Environment Careers for All Students* (ABECAS) were published, targeted at each of the four stakeholder groups: employers; professional bodies; higher education institutions; and students.

The guides were printed and circulated as hard copies. Electronic copies have been placed on the CEBE and university websites **www.cebe.heacademy.ac.uk/news/abecas/index.php** and **www.bolton.ac.uk/be/research/projects/abecas.html**. There have been five presentations and papers to Built Environment conferences and two seminars. A further paper is to be disseminated at a national construction conference in 2006. Also one article has been published in a professional magazine.

Lessons learned

The project experienced some staffing issues in that seeking engagement outside the subject community presented challenges for staff in becoming conversant with the project aims as well as the specialist subject area. We overcame this issue by involving fewer staff without specific subject knowledge. This enabled more focused, relevant, specialist development of the particular issues in this specialist subject area.

Added value

We were always mindful that providing for the needs of disabled students would provide spin-off benefits for all students, for example, providing transcript instructions for Deaf students about how to conduct laboratory experiments can be useful for all students, including those who may have been absent from the practical demonstrations, and for other disabled students.

Commentary from the Subject Centre for Education in the Built Environment (CEBE)

Carole Baker, Centre Manager

The four ABECAS guides provide overarching, practical information to assist in the removal of barriers to disabled students becoming professionally qualified in the Built Environment professions. There are succinct guidance and beneficial suggestions for Built Environment academic staff endeavouring to ensure that their curriculum design and delivery is as accessible as it can be to disabled students (tailored to those with sight loss, hearing loss or mobility difficulties). Likewise there is the provision of sound advice to assist professional bodies in removing barriers in routes to professional qualification, and for employers in making reasonable adjustments in graduate training programmes. The main issues and concerns of disabled students themselves who may be thinking of studying for a Built Environment degree are also addressed with checklists and references enabling informed choice.

Academic departments now need to inform prospective students not only about degree content but also about accessibility. Subject-specific guidance needs to be provided to staff as well as training opportunities to raise awareness of disabled students' needs. Built Environment degrees are often perceived as less accessible for visually and mobility impaired students and they generally have a poor track record of attracting students with certain disabilities. Anecdotal evidence suggests that disabled students disregard construction when choosing their careers and that curricula may contain 'barriers' which act as a deterrent. They may also be unable to graduate or attain chartered status with professional institutions. The

ABECAS guides are therefore invaluable in highlighting a range of approaches for auditing Built Environment provision and making necessary adjustments.

A central message of disability equality is that accessibility, equality and respect are what every person can reasonably expect from the society in which they live. Fostering an ethos of disability equality is essential for compliance with legal requirements and for enhancing inclusive professional practices. The ABECAS guides form a valuable set of resources for taking plans forward and opening up the built environment field to more disabled people.

Supporting Laboratory and Practice-Based Learning in Sport, Health and Exercise Sciences (SIDE-STeP)

January 2003 to February 2006

Theme

Employability, work placement, key skills and professional bodies

Host institution

Staffordshire University

Contributor

Paul Ryan, Project Manager

Project overview

SIDE-STeP was aimed at supporting laboratory and practice-based learning for disabled students in Sport, Health and Exercise. We aimed to produce a survey report of the current provision for disabled students studying Sports and Exercise Science, a website, a tool kit for academic and technical/support staff, a peer mentoring information pack and good practice guides in relation to laboratory and practice-based learning and teaching. We also planned to disseminate our project outputs widely via national publications and the delivery of local, regional and national events/workshops for HE.

Project implementation and progress

We produced five main outputs:

- a survey report of the current provision for disabled students studying Sports and Exercise Science in higher education
- a set of good practice guides for laboratory and practice-based learning and teaching in Sports and Exercise Science
- a tool kit for adaptation of learning and teaching activities
- an information pack for establishing a peer mentor system for

disabled students

- a project website
- conference presentations.

All resources are available at: **<http://crwnpro2.staffs.ac.uk/sidestep/>**

In addition to conference presentations and internal events at Staffordshire University we held two events at Staffordshire University (one for each year of the project) inviting staff and students from Sports Science departments at HEIs throughout the country.

On completion of the project, all HEIs offering Sports and Exercise Science courses were emailed details of the project.

Key successes

The main achievements were:

A tool kit for adaptation of learning and teaching activities. This has been a significant output from the project. Academic colleagues have shared the methods that they have applied over many years to meet the individual requirements of different impairment groups. These methods are mostly anecdotal and demonstrate the innovative nature of teaching by academics in this relatively small subject area.

A project website **<http://crwnpro2.staffs.ac.uk/sidestep/>**, the first of its kind in both its content and operating/input methods. The site is easy to navigate and the input of data is very simple. The web page is still 'live' and we are actively looking for an appropriate home for it in the future.

The wide dissemination of the project's results was also key to its success and the team still contribute to the following internal forums:

- Staffordshire University Disability Forum
- Staffordshire University Teaching and Learning Conference
- Staffordshire University Staff Development Workshop

Lessons learned

We found that the involvement of disabled students and academic staff formed a crucial aspect of this project. The small number of disabled students on Sports and Exercise courses made this very difficult. Academic staff were represented on the Project Steering Group and academics in other departments such as science were contacted for their views. If the project were to be repeated, we would try and identify students to contribute and ensure that issues of confidentiality and anonymity were made clear from the outset.

In view of the relatively small numbers of disabled students in this subject area, we contacted similar projects to ascertain if there was scope to share access to students with particular impairments. This had limited success, especially with students with mental health issues.

The focus on the toolkit to overcome barriers to inclusion in sport and health science-based programmes and to suggest reasonable adjustments for academic, technical and specialist staff was a major success. However, the location of the web tool kit is still being negotiated and needs to be rectified if the project is to remain current and accessible.

Added value

We have been pleased to find that there has been more interest in the project from international contacts than was envisaged. We also found that the project provided a focus for drawing together what is still a fragmented approach to the support of disabled students within this field. Within the host institution, we noted that the project did raise the profile of the department in this area of disability support.

We have worked very closely with Loughborough University and it is hoped that the relationship we have developed will result in future work.

Commentary from Alan Maddocks, DART Project Manager, Loughborough University

The SIDE-STeP Project (Staffordshire University) has gone a long way towards developing resources and a toolkit that demonstrate the potential within the disciplines of Sport, Health and Exercise Sciences for providing a more inclusive curriculum. Based on the experiences of staff and disabled students within these disciplines, the advice and guidance offered is practical, relevant and timely.

The small number of disabled students choosing to follow degree programmes in Sports, Health and Exercise Sciences should be of concern to those offering such courses. The resources developed by the SIDE-STeP project should encourage these subject communities to actively promote their courses to disabled students.

Conclusion

This publication set out to promote and celebrate the successes of the last round of special initiative funding from HEFCE and Department for Employment and Learning (Northern Ireland) to improve provision for disabled students (2002-05). We actually wanted to go beyond just reporting on project outputs. We wanted to:

- make more explicit the connections between disability and the mainstream learning and teaching agenda
- encourage subject communities to consider how project outputs and outcomes continue to inform and support their work within their own discipline areas.

We hope that this publication will act as a catalyst for further collaboration and development rather than producing a 'finale' for this last round of special initiative funding.

There are numerous national initiatives such as FDTL, CETLs, LLNs and new legislation in relation to equality and diversity (and specifically disability) which are being used to support and encourage embedding of disability good practice across the HE sector.

It is evident that there has been a shift in institutional culture and practice over the past decade in relation to meeting the needs of disabled students. The outputs and outcomes from the HEFCE/ Department for Employment and Learning (Northern Ireland) 2002–05 Special Initiative funding demonstrate the positive impact on learning and teaching practice and provide a valuable resource for wider use across the sector.

Yvonne Dickinson

Adviser: Disability

The Higher Education Academy

Sources of support and advice: disability in the HE context

Organisations

Action on Access

National co-ordination team for widening participation initiatives.

www.actiononaccess.org [Accessed 01 June 2006]

Department for Employment and Learning (Northern Ireland)

Responsible for the implementation of higher education policy and funding in Northern Ireland.

www.delni.gov.uk [Accessed 01 June 2006]

Disability Rights Commission

Offers advice on measures to prevent disability discrimination.

www.drc-gb.org [Accessed 01 June 2006]

Equality Challenge Unit

The ECU was established to address all forms of actual and potential discrimination in the higher education sector.

www.ecu.ac.uk [Accessed 01 June 2006]

National Association of Disability Officers

A professional association for anyone who works in the post-16 education sector involved in the management or delivery of services for disabled students.

www.nado.org.uk [Accessed 01 June 2006]

National Bureau for Students with Disabilities (SKILL)

Information and advice on good practice for disabled students.

www.skill.org.uk [Accessed 01 June 2006]

TechDis

Educational advisory service working across the UK in the fields of accessibility and inclusion

www.techdis.ac.uk [Accessed 01 June 2006]

The Higher Education Academy

The Higher Education Academy works with the UK higher education community to enhance the student learning experience. The Academy provides discipline-based support for learning and teaching through its Subject Network.

www.heacademy.ac.uk [Accessed 01 June 2006]

The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE)

Has responsibility for distributing public money for teaching and research to universities and colleges in England.

www.hefce.ac.uk [Accessed 01 June 2006]

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HEFCE (2006) Guide 01/36 Strategies for widening participation in higher education: A guide to good practice [Internet] Bristol: HEFCE.

Available from: www.hefce.ac.uk/Pubs/hefce/2001/01_36.htm
[Accessed 01 June 2006]

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