Embedding Success: 
Learning from Disability Projects in Higher Education

Dr Caroline Davies
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Action on Access
The National Co-ordination Team for Widening Participation
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This publication was authored by Dr Caroline Davies of Impact Associates and produced by Action on Access, Edge Hill University, Ormskirk, Lancashire, L39 4QP. Email info@actiononaccess.org, call 01695 650 850, text phone 01695 650 874 or fax 01695 584 098.

Action on Access is the national co-ordination team for widening participation in higher education. We support the development, promotion and enhancement of social inclusion for the broadest possible access to higher education by:

- working with institutions and key stakeholders across the higher education sector
- working with partnerships, including Aimhigher
- working to promote inclusion and to integrate disability issues within higher education

We are funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and the Department for Employment and Learning in Northern Ireland to whom we provide advice and feedback regarding widening participation.

The Disability Equality Partnership (Action on Access, Equality Challenge Unit and the Higher Education Academy) answers questions through our helpdesk on disability-focused queries relating to higher education and widening participation activities.

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Contents

04 - 05  Background to the Strand One Project Special Initiative
06 - 07  Introduction: Small and Specialist Institutions
08 - 11  Developing Inclusive Policies and Procedures
12 - 14  Providing Access to Information
15 - 19  Raising Awareness and Promoting Understanding
20 - 26  Establishing and Improving Services for Disabled Students
27 - 32  Inclusive Learning, Teaching and Assessment
33 - 37  Conclusion
38  Acknowledgements
39  Glossary
Background to the Strand One Project Special Initiative

As part of their commitment to support higher education institutions in meeting the needs of a diverse range of students, the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and the Department for Employment and Learning in Northern Ireland (DELNI) have funded initiatives aimed at improving opportunities for disabled students since 1993.

In 2002 bids were invited for a final special funding initiative to run over two years from 2003-2005. The initiative had two strands:

- Strand one – to improve provision in small and 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.

Although previous special initiatives had developed the capacity of higher education institutions (HEIs) to support and meet the needs of their disabled students, it was recognised that there was work still to do in relation to small and specialist institutions.

31 Strand one projects and 23 strand two projects were funded through this special initiative. The work of the projects was supported, guided and monitored by the National Disability Team (NDT).

The strand two projects have produced valuable and high quality resources for the sector, providing important tools for subject communities, academic staff and disability practitioners to promote more inclusive approaches to learning, teaching, assessment and beyond. The outcomes of the strand two projects are described and celebrated in “Embedding success: enhancing the learning experience for disabled students” (Higher Education Academy, 2006).

The strand one projects in small and specialist institutions across England encompassed a broad range of subject specialisms including those relating to art and design, music, dance, drama, medicine, science, agriculture, horticulture, business, education, food and tourism. The strand one programme aimed to improve student choice by increasing the number of institutions providing at least base-level provision for their disabled students. The NDT identified five key elements of base-level provision:

- Policies and procedures on admissions and assessment for disabled students
- Nominated staff to ensure appropriate provision for disabled students
- Comprehensive staff development programmes to encourage the learning needs of disabled students to be taken into account in all areas of the institution, including learning, teaching and strategic decision-making

1 http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/publications/papersandmonographs
• An estates strategy that encompasses the needs of all disabled students
• Procedures to monitor and evaluate the impact and effectiveness of provision for disabled students, and to respond to such information

The strand one projects incorporated these key elements into their aims and objectives, customising them to reflect their own institutional ethos and their existing levels of provision for disabled students. Many of the strand one projects went further and set themselves wider goals. An example of this is the Institute of Education’s project objectives:

• To undertake a review of current provision for disabled students and to revise all policies, procedures and practices
• To establish an integrated and co-ordinated disabled student support service which is based upon an effective network of staff and which incorporates expertise within the Institute
• To co-ordinate and implement an effective staff development programme
• To establish an effective means of monitoring and evaluating developments in provision in order to assess the quality and impact of support to disabled students
• To identify and advise the Institute’s Planning and Resources Committee on priorities as a framework for strategic development

"Improving Policy and Provision for Disabled Students", Project Objectives
The Institute of Education
Introduction: Small and Specialist Institutions

Through the work of their strand one projects, many small and specialist institutions have made very significant improvements in their support and facilities for disabled students. For many institutions this has led to an increased awareness and understanding at all levels of issues relating to accessibility and inclusion and has helped to foster lasting cultural change.

This publication will provide examples of effective and innovative practice that has been developed through the strand one projects. It will look at the impact that the projects have had on their institutions and the way in which project gains have been sustained and embedded in order to make change last.

It is hoped that the examples and strategies described here will be of interest and use to small and specialist institutions as they continue to develop their provision. Larger, more complex, higher education institutions may also find useful ideas and new ways of looking at provision for their disabled students. The subject-specific examples presented here in relation to learning and teaching may be of particular interest to academic staff and subject communities.

The research for this publication took place in April 2007, just over a year after the strand one projects finished at the end of 2005. It was hoped that this would allow sufficient time for institutions to develop an overview of the impact of project outcomes and for these to be embedded in institutional practice. During 2006, institutions were developing their Disability Equality Schemes and this provided an opportunity to consolidate project gains and to plan for further activities and initiatives to promote equality for disabled students.

This publication is not an evaluation of the strand one initiative; it provides an overview of the work undertaken and in progress at eight small and specialist higher education institutions. All of the strand one projects were given the opportunity to provide an input into this publication. Interviews were conducted with staff at eight institutions, some were project staff who had carried on in-post and others were new staff who had taken over the work of supporting disabled students. The eight institutions, representing a range of disciplines, were:

The Central School of Speech and Drama
The Conservatoire for Dance and Drama
The Institute of Education, University of London
Royal Academy of Music
Royal Agricultural College
Trinity College of Music
Wimbledon School of Art (now part of the University of the Arts, London)
Writtle College (land-based education)
Small and specialist institutions often have a much higher than average level of disabled students. Figures provided by those participating in this study indicate that up to a quarter of students at some of these institutions are disabled with the majority having specific learning difficulties (SpLDs). Thus, at the start of the projects, institutions had often developed considerable experience of supporting students with SpLDs, such as dyslexia and dyspraxia, but were likely to have less experience of supporting students with other impairments.

The small size of these institutions means that all students tend to be known as individuals and their progress and achievement is closely monitored. Students are taught in relatively small classes and tend to know each other well, often through collaborative creative performance or other practical activities. In some institutions, student year groups follow the same curriculum with minimal opportunities for module choice. This means that curriculum delivery and assessment types are similar for everyone and it is potentially easier to agree adjustments and put them in place. There is generally less opportunity for students to ‘fall through the net’ in terms of student support.

The number of permanent staff at small and specialist institutions is also relatively small; this means that it is potentially easier to network and share good practice in relation to disabled students in general and the needs of specific disabled students in particular. Staff often have several roles within their institutions and so good practice and knowledge developed in one area can have a positive impact on other areas.

Some small and specialist institutions, particularly those specialising in art, design and the performing arts, use visiting professional staff to deliver aspects of the curriculum. These staff are notoriously difficult to reach when it comes to staff training. The ADEPTT project has developed staff development materials aimed at sessional staff in art and design institutions and has a large section on working with disabled students. The strand one projects have also developed useful and innovative strategies for reaching these staff and this is discussed in the raising awareness and promoting understanding section of this publication.

Many of the issues confronting small and specialist institutions in relation to inclusion and access will be similar to those experienced by larger and more organisationally complex HEIs. However, because of their particular characteristics, small and specialist institutions face different or additional challenges and they will also have different strengths when it comes to providing an accessible and inclusive environment and equality for their disabled students.

3 ‘Art and Design – enabling part time tutors’ http://www.adeptt.ac.uk/
Developing Inclusive Policies and Procedures

Developing policies and procedures to meet and include the needs of disabled students and applicants was a specific aspect of the strand one projects.

When the strand one projects began, most institutions had very few policies relating to disabled students and procedures were often ad hoc. This meant that decisions and provision were sometimes inconsistently applied and students were often not aware of the facilities and support available to them. In addition, mainstream policies (e.g. admissions, assessment, learning and teaching) often did not cover issues to do with disabled applicants or students and were not inclusive. In some institutions there was a lack of mechanisms for monitoring the effect of policies, procedures or practices on disabled students through data collection, feedback or review.

A number of projects started off with a review or audit of their policies, procedures and practices, which looked at their major institutional policies and also their specific policies and procedures for disabled applicants and students. Some reviews were conducted by an external consultant, others by project staff or other staff internal to the institution. These initial reviews helped project managers and steering groups to refine objectives and provided a useful benchmark against which project outcomes could be measured and assessed.

The very first stage of the project was a comprehensive audit and analysis of the School’s policies, procedures and practices by an external consultant against the precepts in the Quality Assurance Agency’s Code of Practice on disabled students; the funds for this were built into the project proposal. The recommendations in the audit report were used to produce a more detailed project plan.

Central School of Speech and Drama

Some of the key areas where policies, procedures and practices or systems were revised or developed from scratch during the strand one projects included:

- Institutional admissions policies, to ensure the inclusion of a policy statement on the admission of disabled students
- Procedures relating to the selection and admission of students to ensure that disabled applicants were able to demonstrate their potential
- Policy and procedures on confidentiality and disclosure and the sharing of information

A specific aim of the project was to develop a comprehensive set of institutional policies relating to disabled students that co-ordinated with institutional strategies for learning and teaching and equal opportunities. Policies and procedures were developed in relation to assessment and admissions that are part of mainstream processes. These policies and procedures are available on the staff intranet.

Writtle College
Admission policy and procedures

For all HEIs, it is essential that policies and procedures are in place to ensure that applications for courses from disabled people are dealt with fairly and without discrimination. They must be understood and systematically applied by all staff involved in admission and selection processes so that ad hoc and potentially discriminatory decisions are not made. Information also needs to be transmitted to disabled applicants so that it is clear to them what they need to do and how they can be supported to demonstrate their potential during the selection process.

Application for courses in some small and specialist institutions is through an institutional application form and not via UCAS. It is essential that these application forms provide an opportunity for applicants to say that they are disabled and to say something about the adjustments they require on-course and for selection activities. It should also be made very clear why this information is being sought and how it will be protected.

All institutional application forms for courses now include an opportunity for applicants to disclose a disability and it is made clear on the form that this information is sought in order to meet their needs during the selection and admissions process (i.e. for audition and/or interview) and during their course of study.

Conservatoire for Dance and Drama

Many small and specialist institutions, particularly the conservatoires of music, dance and drama, have a high number of applications for a small number of places; the selection process is highly competitive. For these and other small and specialist institutions, selection for a place on a course is the gateway to a chosen professional career.

Although selection is by interview for many courses, a range of other types of selection activities are used in some small and specialist institutions. For example:

- Group interviews and portfolio presentations for art and design courses
- Performance of prepared pieces of music as well as performance of sight-read pieces (where only minimal preparation is permitted on the day) for music courses
- Performance of prepared speeches, sight-reading from a script, and engaging in workshops with other applicants for drama courses
- Some courses may ask applicants to do a piece of writing on the day, e.g. applicants may be asked to view a film and to write about it

Without suitable reasonable adjustments for these selection activities, some disabled applicants may be placed at a significant disadvantage and may not be able to demonstrate their potential. For example, many people with specific learning difficulties may find sight-reading very difficult; group interviews may be problematic for applicants who are deaf, hard of hearing or who have Asperger’s syndrome; and engaging in drama workshops could present barriers for those with mobility difficulties or sight impairments.

Strand one project institutions have developed excellent and transferable examples of good practice in making selection activities inclusive and accessible.
Changes have been made in the audition process to accommodate the difficulties that many dyslexic students have with sight-reading and playing a piece of music. Applicants are invited to say whether they require any adjustments for audition. Dyslexic applicants are given additional time to read through and prepare the sight-reading piece. Sight-reading sheets can be provided on coloured paper or can be enlarged. In the selection decision, more emphasis is now placed on the prepared pieces of music that applicants perform at their audition and less on the performance of the sight-read piece.

*Trinity College of Music*

The sight-reading activity at drama auditions has now been discontinued because it was recognised that it was particularly difficult for some candidates with dyslexia, even with reasonable adjustments such as extra time for preparation. For one course, candidates are no longer asked to undertake a written task on the day of the interview; instead, they are asked to bring along a piece of written work on a topic they are given in advance.

*Central School of Speech and Drama*

Conservatoire selection processes are often complex and may be in several stages. It is important that the procedures in place for managing any adjustments required by disabled candidates are robust and understood.

Disabled candidates called for audition or interview who require adjustments can now discuss and agree these adjustments with the Disability Support Officer. With the candidate’s permission a set of written recommendations (similar in format to the learning support agreement for disabled students) is passed on to the Admissions Tutor so that they are aware of the candidate’s name, date of interview or audition and the adjustments that are required.

A procedural flow chart for the admission of disabled students has been developed. The procedure is set out as a sequence of steps; the roles of the Disability Support Officer, the Registry and the Admissions Tutors are very clearly described. The flow chart is supported by guidance notes and staff training.

*Central School of Speech and Drama*

The Admissions Officer is responsible for setting up audition/interview adjustments for disabled candidates and has a simple tracking spreadsheet to facilitate this. It includes monitoring information on how appropriate the adjustments were in meeting the candidate’s needs.

*Conservatoire for Dance and Drama (affiliate dance School)*

**Confidentiality and disclosure policies and procedures**

The institutions that contributed to this report have all developed confidentiality and disclosure policies and procedures relating to sensitive personal information about disability. Staff development activities have been used to promote these policies and procedures and to ensure that staff are aware of their duties and responsibilities.

Although being known as an individual in a small and specialist institution has many advantages for disabled students, it has implications for the way in which confidentiality and disclosure of disability-related information is managed. In order to protect such confidential information, it is
important that a confidentiality and disclosure policy is in place and that associated procedures are understood by staff and students.

During the project, the affiliate schools have developed policies and systems to ensure that confidential information is respected and protected. This is particularly important in small schools where all students are known as individuals and is an important strategy for creating an environment where students feel confident to disclose. In the letter that is sent to all candidates for audition or interview, candidates are told that they can disclose an impairment or medical condition at any stage of the selection process. This additional opportunity for disclosure represents good practice because some candidates may choose not to disclose when they apply but may feel more comfortable about disclosing at a later stage in the selection process.

One of the advantages of small schools is that, through regular one-to-one tutorials, students are given opportunities to disclose at any time during their course.

*Conservatoire for Dance and Drama*

Policies, procedures and practices in other important areas will be dealt with in subsequent sections:

- Access to information for disabled applicants and students (Pages 12-14)
- Staff development policies and activities (Pages 15-19)
- Services for disabled students (Pages 20-26)
- Institutional policies on learning and teaching, assessment and the provision of accessible course materials (Pages 27-32)
Providing Access to Information

Access to information for disabled applicants and students formed a major part of strand one project plans.

Information for applicants

Marketing materials should provide sufficient and accurate information about courses and facilities so that potential applicants can make informed choices. Marketing materials, such as the prospectus, should be available in alternative formats and the website should be fully accessible. It should also be clear that applications from disabled people are welcomed.

Some of the ways in which these aims have been achieved by the strand one projects that contributed to this publication include:

- A clear printed statement that the prospectus is available in alternative formats and how to request copies
- A spoken version of the prospectus on CD
- A text copy of the prospectus on CD which can be output in different formats, including Braille
- The Disability Service is asked to check and revise prospectus information for disabled applicants each year
- Reference to the institution’s Disability Equality Scheme for further information
- Providing contact details for applicants to request further information

The Conservatoire has produced an attractive and informative brochure for disabled applicants including profiles from current disabled students. Its web site describes the support and facilities for disabled students and the introduction to these web pages is welcoming and positive.

“The Conservatoire welcomes applications from disabled people and judges applicants solely on their talent and potential to develop the skills required for their chosen profession. We are committed to admitting and supporting disabled students and warmly encourage you to inform the school so that appropriate support can be put into place as soon as possible.”

Conservatoire for Dance and Drama

At an early stage of the project, the College completely revised its web site. The web developer sought advice from the RNIB and worked with a blind member of staff to ensure that the revised web site is accessible to those using screen-reading software such as JAWS.

Trinity College of Music

4 'Conservatoire for Dance and Drama: support for disabled students' http://www.cdd.ac.uk/student-info/disability-support/
There is a section on the website which gives detailed information about access into and within the Academy’s buildings and facilities. Another page gives full information on travelling to the Academy, particularly for those who are blue badge holders or those who need accessible public transport. There is also a video on the web site that gives information about support services for students, including disabled students.

**Royal Academy of Music**

Improved information about services for disabled and dyslexic students in the prospectus has led to increased numbers of enquiries from disabled people interested in applying for courses.

**Central School of Speech and Drama**

**Information for students**

Improving access to information for disabled students was a major aspect of the strand one project at Trinity College of Music where there are a significant number of students with specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia and several blind students who are Braille users. Trinity provides a compendium of essential and useful information on CD for its disabled students.

All disabled students are given a CD that provides a broad range of information about their course (e.g. the course handbook, assessment regulations, etc.), on the College’s services for disabled students, including forms that may need to be completed (e.g. those relating to the DSA) and instructions for using the assistive software (e.g. TextHelp) that is networked on the College’s computers. This CD has been specifically designed to be easy to use and navigate and to interface with TextHelp so that the content can be read aloud. Each set of documents is also available in a format that can be easily converted to Braille. This initiative was started during the project and has continued with excellent feedback from disabled students. At present the Disability Officer produces the CD; in future, production may be transferred to the IT department and the CD may be replaced by a memory stick.

**Trinity College of Music**

Improved mainstream web information for students can be of particular benefit for disabled students who can use assistive technologies to output information in a format they prefer.

The student intranet has a section with comprehensive information on the support available for disabled students and how to access it. A simplified version is available on the public website and can be accessed by applicants. The student intranet also includes lecture notes and course information, which is of considerable benefit for disabled students (see the Inclusive Learning, Teaching and Assessment section, pages 27-32).

**Royal Agricultural College**

Information for students should be presented in a way that is accessible for all. This should reduce the need for additional, and sometimes costly, individual adjustments.
and represents an important anticipatory adjustment. For example, the Student Handbook for one institution is colour-coded to facilitate easy location of information; it provides clear information on course content and methods of assessment as well as information on support for disabled students.

Some institutions provide a specific handbook or other guidance material for their disabled students.

A comprehensive guide to services for dyslexic and disabled students with useful flow charts is available in print format or on the service web site. A concise, easy to read dyslexia leaflet giving core information on the services available can be picked up from outside the disability and dyslexia service office and from the library.

**Central School of Speech and Drama**

The disability service has produced a handout in the form of a mind map that shows all the College’s services and provision for disabled students in a format which is particularly accessible for students with dyslexia. This is reproduced in the staff and student handbooks.

**Trinity College of Music**

Producing accessible information materials is not just a job for the disability service, accessibility needs to be taken into account by all those who produce information (including learning resources) and a whole institution approach is best.

The Head of the Marketing and Development Unit, in consultation with the Disabilities Support Office and the Equalities Officer, has produced accessibility guidelines that set out policy for good practice in producing information and documents. These have been promoted through internal publicity and through the Institute’s committee structures.

**Institute of Education**

The Disability and Dyslexia Service has produced a ‘Style Guide’ which supports access to written, electronic, audio and visual information and learning materials for disabled students. It provides guidance on barriers to accessing information for people with different impairments, Clear Print guidance and information on maximizing accessibility, how to provide materials in alternative formats, checking for ‘readability’, plus useful websites for further information. Copies are provided for all staff, including visiting lecturers, and new staff receive a copy at induction. An electronic copy is available for staff to download.

**Central School of Speech and Drama**

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5 Central School of Speech and Drama. ‘Student Guide to Disability and Dyslexia Services’ [http://www.cssd.ac.uk/bkpage/files/student_guide_to_disability_and_dyslexia_services.pdf]

6 Institute of Education. Accessibility guidelines for good practice in producing publications and documents [http://www.ioe.ac.uk/mdu/accessibility/accessibilityprintguidelines.doc]
Raising Awareness and Promoting Understanding

An explicit aim of many strand one projects was to raise awareness of disability issues at all levels across their institution, thereby promoting understanding and ownership and securing long-lasting cultural change.

*The project will engender a shift in institutional culture, whereby provision for students with disabilities is integrated into college mainstream activities and will move away from being an isolated activity managed by a small team of specialist staff.*

*DIS-TRIBUTE project proposal, Writtle College*

Institutions set about achieving this aim in a number of ways:

- Staff development sessions and materials
- Informal contacts and discussions
- Disability `Champions` on courses and in departments
- The work of committees and line management arrangements
- Awareness-raising amongst the student body

Staff development activities

At the beginning of the strand one projects it is probably true to say that staff awareness and understanding of disability issues was patchy. Where it was good, it was most likely to relate to students with SpLDs and was less likely to cover the learning and teaching needs of students with other impairments. To address this, institutions used a mix of formal staff development sessions and less formal contacts between project staff and other key staff in the institution. Formal staff development programmes have focussed on:

- Understanding the Disability Discrimination Act and what this means for small and specialist institutions and their staff
- The social model of disability in an educational context
- The learning, teaching and support needs of students with particular impairments in the context of subject specialisms

Because of the small size of the strand one institutions, less formal activities were particularly successful and had a considerable impact on staff awareness and understanding of disability issues. Some particularly successful and innovative examples of promoting staff awareness of disability issues included:

- Securing the support of a senior academic or senior manager to promote and encourage attendance at specific staff development sessions
• Including talks on disability issues in new staff induction. Providing new staff with a pack of information about support services for disabled students. Including a visit to the disability service as part of the induction checklist for new staff

• Disability Officers allocating time to make individual contacts with colleagues and to develop productive working relationships

• Smaller, more focussed, development sessions with groups of staff to cover a particular issue or to explain a particular process, e.g. disabled students’ learning support agreements, confidentiality and disclosure policy and procedures

• All-staff emails on topical issues

• Inclusion of disability issues in staff magazines

• Making presentations on disability issues at the Annual Staff Conference which is attended by all staff

The Conservatoire for Dance and Drama concluded its project by drawing together examples of good practice in a publication which celebrated the achievements of the project and also provided a useful staff development resource.

At the end of the project the achievements and progress of each of the affiliate schools was monitored. Arising from this, the Conservatoire produced ‘Examples of Good Practice’, which drew together examples from all the affiliate schools. This publication was made available to all the schools and was an important vehicle for disseminating and sharing the good practice that had been developed during the project. This guidance includes generic examples of inclusive practice in support and in learning and teaching. It also includes examples that are very specific to the performing arts, e.g. how to support a deaf student in a dance audition or how to support a dyslexic student with sight-reading on an acting course.

Conservatoire for Dance and Drama

Many small and specialist institutions employ a large number of sessional staff or visiting lecturers, who are usually contracted and paid for a specific number of hours, and are often unable to attend staff development. As a consequence, some part-time staff members may be lacking in disability awareness and understanding. Some innovative ways of reaching these staff have been developed during the projects.

A high proportion of the staff at the College are visiting lecturers who are professional musicians and specialists in their particular field. In small and specialist colleges it has traditionally been difficult to reach these staff to inform them of their duties under the DDA and the individual needs of the students they teach. The College has tackled this in two main ways. Their duties under the DDA are specified in their contract and the Deputy Principal has written to all visiting lecturer staff emphasising these contractual duties. The Disability Officer attends inductions for new hourly paid staff to explain his role and to explain to new staff how they will be informed about the needs of their disabled students, the adjustments that have been agreed and the College’s confidentiality procedures. All new staff, including visiting lecturers, receive the College Disability Handbook and this is also available on the Intranet.

Trinity College of Music
One of the strand one projects that participated in this study now has a rolling programme of mandatory disability awareness training.

A rolling disability awareness programme, delivered by disabled trainers, was established during the project in conjunction with the Institute’s staff development team. With the advent of the Disability Equality Duty there is now mandatory role-based disability equality awareness training.

Institute of Education

Before the projects, staff development sessions on disability issues were often separate from the institution’s main staff development programme. An important outcome for some projects has been to integrate disability issues within institutional staff development strategies and to budget for them accordingly.

Staff development sessions on disability issues are now firmly integrated within the College’s staff development programme with core sessions on dyslexia and deafness and sessions on the learning and teaching implications of other impairments and conditions (e.g. mental health) as required. Funding for disability staff development sessions has been built in to the main staff development budget. Disability issues are also included in mainstream staff development activities such as the regular Wednesday afternoon sessions for academic staff and in equal opportunities events. The training day for external examiners incorporates disability issues and makes use of the specialist guidance materials produced by Action on Access.

Writtle College

Some institutions produced staff development resources during their projects that continue to be useful, either in sessions or by individual staff members; they are particularly useful for reaching sessional staff members.

Staff development events that were delivered as part of the project were filmed and put on the staff Intranet. The video on the Academy’s website about support services for students, including disabled students, is also a valuable resource for new staff.

Royal Academy of Music

As part of its project, the Conservatoire commissioned an inspirational DVD of disabled dance and drama students talking about their experiences, ‘You will always surprise others by just being who you are’7. Clips from it can be viewed on the Conservatoire website and the DVD can be purchased. The DVD has been used for student and staff inductions and has been promoted to all staff at the annual conference. It was also successfully used in focus group discussions with disabled students as part of the Conservatoire’s Disability Equality Scheme involvement activities.

Conservatoire for Dance and Drama

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7 Conservatoire for Dance and Drama. ‘You will always surprise others by just being who you are’, DVD. http://www.cdd.ac.uk/student-info/disability-support/student-videos/
Disability Champions and networking

The recruitment, training and support of key staff or ‘Disability Champions’ in departments across institutions was an important feature of a number of projects. This has helped to provide a network of staff who have developed a knowledge and understanding of disability issues and who have a continuing interest in improving support, facilities and access to the curriculum for disabled students. It has raised awareness and has helped to engender a whole institution approach.

The strand one project at Writtle College had, as one of its main objectives, the recruitment of Disability Champions in each of its departments. It has proved a particularly successful strategy for cascading awareness and promoting staff involvement. The work of the Disability Champions continues through the College’s Disability Working Group.

The project established a group of departmental Disability Champions in academic and service departments. Disability Champions were chosen by Heads of Department as people who had an interest in disability issues, had sufficient time to undertake the work and were good communicators. Disability Champions have a job description and their role is included in their annual appraisal. The role of the Disability Champion is described in more detail in the project publication, ‘Dis-Tribute project: improving provision for disabled students in land-based education’. The Disability Champions worked together as a group to consider how accessible and user-friendly their departments were for disabled students; many changes were made as a consequence during the project and since.

A Disability Working Group was established after the project ended. It consists of key members of staff, including the departmental Disability Champions and has been working on a series of scenarios. Using the student life-cycle model, members are looking in depth at the experience of students with various impairments to see how their impairment impacts on their study and life at the College. Each member of the group is looking at this in the context of their own department’s work. Members of the group include staff with responsibilities for the Registry, transport, catering, marketing, international students, as well as academic areas; the student representative on the group is a disabled student. Any recommendations that the group might make to improve or develop certain areas will go to the department in question to be acted upon or, if the implications of the recommendations are wider, they may be passed to the Equality and Diversity Group for discussion and decision.

Writtle College

The involvement of senior staff in projects has been an important mechanism for raising awareness of disability issues across their institutions.

The project was originally managed by the Academic Registrar who was very committed to its success. Other senior staff in key positions relating to academic standards and quality were also very supportive of the work of the project. These senior staff members chair important College committees and their commitment has been very influential and continues to be so. The impact of the involvement of senior staff has been a lasting legacy of the project; in this way the project has acted as a catalyst for change.

Royal Agricultural College

Raising awareness amongst the student body

Several projects aimed to increase awareness of disability issues amongst the general student body. This helped to encourage students to disclose and come forward for screening for specific learning difficulties. It also helped to develop a culture amongst the student body where difference and diversity was understood and valued. Activities included:

- Providing information on disability support for all students at student induction sessions
- Showing a DVD about disabled students at student inductions
- Providing information for disabled students in all student handbooks
- The involvement of the Students’ Union in project activities and in producing a newsletter for disabled students
- Recruiting disabled students as ‘ambassadors’ at open days and other events
- Postgraduate students acting as mentors and providing individual support for disabled students

In the institutions participating in this study, it is evident that there has been a cultural shift in terms of disability awareness and understanding at an institutional level.

The project has led to increased awareness and understanding of disability issues amongst the Institute’s staff, including senior managers and decision-makers.

_Institute of Education_
Establishing and Improving Services for Disabled Students

The development and improvement of services for disabled students was a key element of the strand one projects. All the institutions that contributed to this publication have substantially expanded and developed their services for disabled students and these have all been lasting changes.

The intention was always that the institutions take over the funding of these core services once the projects ended. Services to support disabled students are now part of institutional structures and are usually located in mainstream departments such as the registry or student services or within equality and diversity areas. Strand one project staff have been employed on permanent contracts by their institutions as Disability Officers or, in one of the institutions participating in this study, as the Equality and Diversity Manager. In many cases, fractional posts appointed during the projects have been increased and some staff now have full-time contracts to reflect their increased workload.

An explicit objective of the project was to embed the project gains at a strategic level. An important part of this was that, when the project ended, the Institute made the Disability Co-ordinator and Disability Administrator posts permanent and funded these costs through core funding.

Institute of Education

Some institutions recognised that they needed to further expand staffing for their disability services and have taken on additional permanent staff such as a Dyslexia Support Officer or a part-time administrator. Many institutions also now employ their own sessional staff to provide individual support for disabled students such as note-takers, IT trainers and Dyslexia Tutors.

The School has moved from a position where there was a basic service for disabled students but with students being referred to specialist external services for individual support, e.g. for dyslexia study skills tuition. There is now a one-stop shop to provide a comprehensive service and to meet the needs of disabled students in-house. Since the project ended, the Disability Support Officer post has been made permanent and a new post of Dyslexia Support Officer has been created with additional sessional dyslexia tutors recruited. The School has now developed considerable expertise in the particular issues that dyslexic and dyspraxic students experience on performing arts courses.

Central School of Speech and Drama

Institutions have now taken over the costs of running their services for disabled students.

Funding for disabled students has been well thought out and the Academy now provides a budget for running costs. Students requiring diagnostic assessment for specific learning difficulties have this funded through the Institute using various sources of funding, such as the Access to Learning Fund (ALF). Funds from charitable sources are used to fund the individual requirements of disabled international students who cannot access ALF or the Disabled Students’ Allowances.

Royal Academy of Music
The Disability Co-ordinator now has responsibility for disbursing the Institute’s mainstream disability funding; this is used primarily to fund anticipatory adjustments including the provision of assistive technologies and environmental aids such as induction loops. The Institute has also established a designated fund to support the individual needs of disabled students who are ineligible for DSA, such as international students. Since the project finished, departments have incorporated spending on disabled students as part of their own budget planning and spending. So for example, providing learning materials in accessible formats is funded by the individual departments and is regarded as making their materials accessible to all.

*Institute of Education*

A wide range of new services and facilities has been developed and established during the strand one projects and this has significantly contributed to the capacity of these small and specialist institutions to meet the needs of disabled students.

Significant developments have been made in these five key areas:

- Screening and diagnosis for specific learning difficulties
- Assistance in applications for the Disabled Students Allowances (DSAs)
- Learning support agreements
- Individual learning support for disabled students
- Access to assistive technologies

**Screening and diagnosis of specific learning difficulties (SpLD)**

Some students enter higher education not knowing that they have a SpLD such as dyslexia or dyspraxia. Without appropriate support they are likely to have problems with learning and progression. Institutions have recognised this and have provided opportunities for students to be screened for SpLDs. Because of the small size of the strand one institutions, many can offer screening to all students who wish to take up the offer as part of the new student induction programme. After a positive screening for SpLDs, the next step is to have a full diagnostic assessment from an Educational Psychologist. Some institutions have developed a productive relationship with an Educational Psychologist who can get to know the requirements of their courses.

Screening is the gateway to the provision of individual support for students with SpLDs and so the development of these services has been an important feature of the strand one projects.

**The School has developed a system to offer screening for specific learning difficulties to all new students during the induction period. The screening is done by a team of Dyslexia Tutors who look at dyslexia and dyspraxia signs particularly in relation to the performing arts. Screening is promoted by tutors at induction and take-up is high.**

*Central School of Speech and Drama*
The project funded a dyslexia specialist for one day a week who was able to provide screening for all incoming students who thought they might be dyslexic. Through this process, 15-20 students a year were identified as having specific learning difficulties; nearly half of these were unaware of their specific learning difficulties. This was regarded as a huge positive benefit because support could then be put in place at a very early stage which helped with progression and retention. The value of this work was recognised and the College provides funding for this work to continue.

**Royal Agricultural College**

The Disability Officer provides a screening service for students who think they may have specific learning difficulties. The School has set up an arrangement with an Educational Psychologist who conducts the diagnostic assessment and who is familiar with the demands of the School’s courses. The Disability Officer discusses the diagnostic assessment report with the student to answer any questions they may have.

**Wimbledon School of Art**

**Assistance in applications for the Disabled Students’ Allowances (DSAs)**

The process of application for the Disabled Students’ Allowances is quite complex and can be daunting for many disabled students, particularly for students with specific learning difficulties who may also have to undergo diagnostic testing before they are able to apply. At the start of the projects there was little support to assist students in their applications for the DSA, other than supplying information on how to apply.

Institutions have now developed strategies to support their students in applying for the DSAs therefore individual support arrangements can be funded and put in place as soon as possible after diagnosis or disclosure. The following examples present slightly different approaches in two of the strand one project institutions. In both cases, the majority of disabled students have specific learning difficulties and it is these students who may have most difficulty with the levels of organisation required to negotiate the process.

The School has established a database to track applications for the DSA and to trouble-shoot where necessary. All students who are eligible for DSA are encouraged to apply as soon as possible after acceptance to maximise this element of support. The Disability Officer supports the student in their application by writing to their local LEA to initiate the process and by arranging for an appointment at an Assessment Centre. Similar support is provided for students with other impairments. When the DSA report is received from the Assessment Centre, the Disability Officer goes through it with the student so that they understand exactly what has been recommended both from the DSA and in terms of institutional support. With the student’s agreement these recommendations are passed on to their tutors. Throughout the process the student’s progress towards receiving DSA support is logged and tracked. Where there are problems or delays, the Disability Officer expedites their prompt resolution.

**Wimbledon School of Art**

A comprehensive electronic record-keeping system has been developed which has
significantly improved the capacity of the Disability Office to provide support and to produce statistical information.

The Disability and Dyslexia Service has developed a series of ‘What happens next’ leaflets to support and guide disabled students through the DSA process which cover screening, diagnostic assessment, application for DSA, needs assessment and arranging for support. They have also produced a ‘big picture’ flowchart setting out the whole process. After each stage of the application process, students are given a leaflet informing them about what to do for the next stage and are sent an email to remind them. With this focused support, students are now handling more of the diagnostic assessment (for SpLDs) and DSA application processes themselves. This has increased independence and "students are now feeling more empowered and confident."

Central School of Speech and Drama

Other institutions have similar support arrangements in place and the numbers of students in receipt of DSA significantly increased during the course of the projects and subsequently. Trinity College of Music reported that the numbers of students in receipt of the DSA increased six-fold during the two academic years spanned by the project.

Some specialist institutions have recognised that DSA assessors need information about the courses, the teaching and learning environments and the types of assessment that the students will be undertaking. Because of the specialist practical and/or performance aspects of courses, assessors may not necessarily be familiar with what students are required to do. This problem has been tackled in three main ways:

- Students are referred to a local Assessment Centre where several of the assessors have developed a knowledge and familiarity about the particular requirements of the institution’s courses (Institute of Education)
- Institutions have produced written guidance for DSA assessors giving information about the particular learning and teaching processes that the students will be undertaking (Royal Agricultural College, Trinity College of Music)
- The Dyslexia Support Tutor is a trained DSA assessor working under an arrangement with a local Assessment Centre; she has a thorough understanding of students’ learning environments and the performance aspects of courses and can make appropriate recommendations (Central School of Speech and Drama)

Learning support agreements

Part of the process of encouraging and providing opportunities for disclosure and developing procedures to manage confidential information is the necessity to have robust systems in place for sharing information about students’ needs and agreed reasonable adjustments with the staff that are responsible for putting these arrangements in place. Many larger institutions already have well-developed systems of providing learning support agreements for disabled students but, at the start of the strand one projects, most small and specialist institutions were still making ad hoc arrangements to meet the individual needs of their disabled students.
Through the work of their strand one projects, institutions that contributed to the research for this publication have now developed procedures for producing personal learning plans for their disabled students and for disseminating this information to staff. The recipients of personal learning plans are primarily teaching staff but, in art and design and performing arts institutions, technical support staff and performance managers are also included as they have a significant role to play in the student’s education and progress.

The Academy has established a Personal Learning Plan scheme which is used to document needs and reasonable adjustments and is sent to teaching staff. The student agrees which staff they wish to disclose this information to and this is listed on the Plan. Staff are then clear about the boundaries of confidentiality and who they may discuss the student’s support needs with. This facilitates a more joined-up approach to the provision of adjustments. The Disability Adviser sends a copy of the plan to the programme tutor who is then responsible for sending it to other teachers on the course, including visiting lecturers. This system is working well.

Royal Academy of Music

The learning agreement for disabled students includes sections on the student’s strengths as well as their areas of difficulty. There is information for tutors about the student’s requirements in performance and technique classes and also in the more academic contextual studies aspects of the course. A guidance section is provided for the student emphasising their role in the process, e.g. asking them to contact Learner Support for guidance on assignment planning and organisation.

Conservatoire for Dance and Drama (an affiliate dance school)

Training and support for staff in how to respond to learning support agreements is an important part of the process.

Providing training for staff to support them in their use of learning support agreements was considered to be vital. Emails were sent to heads of department offering short focussed training sessions that explained the purpose of the learning support agreements and what staff should do when they receive one. For students with complex needs a three way meeting with the Disability Officer, the student and the course leader is usually held.

Central School of Speech and Drama

Individual support for disabled students

Prior to the projects, students often had to seek individual support from external sources for example, dyslexia tutors who were employed through outside agencies and who may not have been familiar with study in higher education or with subject-specific issues. Through the work of the strand one projects a range of in-house individual support can now be provided for disabled students. This helps to ensure that the support is appropriate and relevant, that it is meeting students’ needs and that it can be monitored and quality-controlled. Below are some examples of good practice in providing individual support for disabled students.

The Disability Officer now manages a service for disabled and dyslexic students and employs specialist sessional staff for IT training, mentoring and dyslexia tuition. These staff are familiar with the requirements of art and design courses; they work together as a team with
periodic team meetings. Study skills workshops are also provided for dyslexic students who are waiting for their DSA-funded support or who are ineligible to receive the DSA.

**Wimbledon School of Art**

The Institute now has a bank of suitably qualified note-takers through a contract agreement with an external provider who builds in monitoring and quality control.

**Institute of Education**

A mentor scheme using postgraduate students at the College has been developed to support disabled students to get performance experience. This experience is an important part of their music education as it prepares students for future employment. Some disabled students, particularly those with mental health difficulties, find it daunting to perform in public. This scheme helps to organise performances at smaller venues and those where the performers will be less of a focus of attention, such as performances in libraries and shopping centres. This helps students to build up their confidence more gradually. The postgraduate mentors also provide other types of support for disabled students, for example by providing piano accompaniment for instrumental and vocal practice and by acting as readers.

**Trinity College of Music**

The School has been successful in securing DSA funding for students who may need additional support in practical workshops and in relation to organising and planning practical coursework. Specialist individual support can be provided through a learning mentor who has experience of practical work in art and design and an understanding of the support required by disabled students.

**Wimbledon School of Art**

Group sessions for PGCE students with specific learning difficulties have been very successful. As a result of feedback from these students, the Institute is developing a virtual support environment through Blackboard. This will benefit students with SpLDs as study skills tutors will be able to provide support in an informal web-chat format. Students will also be able to post messages and interact on line. This form of support is particularly useful for students on placement.

**Institute of Education**

Because of their small size, institutions may have difficulty providing the full range of individual support for disabled students. One institution has developed an interesting partnership arrangement to extend the range of support they can offer.

The service for disabled students works in partnership with the other ‘Bloomsbury Colleges’ (SOAS, Birkbeck, etc.), all of which are small institutions. Together they have developed a shared approach to providing services for disabled students, e.g. training in the use of assistive technologies and specialist study skills support. This model works well as it provides access to specialist staff and shared resources, as well as an opportunity to share good practice.

**Institute of Education**
Access to assistive technologies
During the projects, many institutions purchased and installed assistive technologies to support the learning of their disabled students. In some institutions assistive software for students with specific learning difficulties has been networked so that it is available on all the institution’s student computers and students do not have to use designated workstations.

Students who are eligible for the Disabled Students’ Allowances are able to purchase their own assistive technologies. For those students who are not able to apply for the DSA, such as international students, some institutions have set up loan schemes.

The Institute has established an equipment loan scheme for small items of equipment for disabled students, such as laptops, digital recorders and various ergonomic aids. This was originally funded by the project and is now funded by the Institute through its mainstream disability funding. The scheme uses a similar system to library book loan and is managed by Media Services; it is easy and efficient. This scheme is particularly useful for international students and those awaiting DSA. The Institute is also able to buy small items from its earmarked Disability Fund for individual disabled students who cannot access the DSA.

Institute of Education
Inclusive Learning, Teaching and Assessment

The small and specialist institutions that contributed to this publication represent a wide range of areas of study including art and design, drama, dance, music, education and agriculture. Each of these institutions has improved access to the curriculum for their disabled students during the strand one projects and this has been built-on since the projects ended.

Some institutions concentrated on reviewing all their policies and procedures relating to teaching, learning and assessment to ensure that they were inclusive and that they recognised the diverse needs of their disabled students, both current and potential. This led to practical changes in the ways in which courses are delivered and assessed as well as in the reasonable adjustments that are available to disabled students. Innovative practice has been developed through the work of some of the projects in relation to curriculum delivery and assessment within subject specialisms. Many of the contributors commented on the increased awareness and understanding of the learning needs of disabled students amongst academic staff that had been developed during the course of their strand one projects and since.

Through the work of the projects, an inclusive approach towards access to the curriculum for disabled students has also been embedded in institutional learning and teaching strategies and in the work of key academic committees. This section draws together some examples of the ways in which curriculum access has been developed during the strand one projects.

Validation and review

If courses are to be made more inclusive by design and if anticipatory adjustments are to be built into curricula and assessment strategies, then this should be considered during validation, re-validation and review. Those designing courses and setting learning outcomes need to be aware of potential barriers to learning for disabled students and to consider ways in which unnecessary barriers can be removed; this may lead to different approaches being taken in course delivery and assessment. When courses are reviewed the experiences of disabled students and those who teach them should be actively sought and considered.

A number of institutions contributing to this review have recognised the importance of ‘getting it right’ from the outset and have worked with course designers to develop guidance for validation and review.

During the project, guidance and documentation was produced for those validating new courses and undertaking periodic review to ensure that the needs of disabled learners were incorporated from the outset. This work has continued and is now firmly embedded into these key processes. The project also developed guidelines and policy on marking the work of students with specific learning difficulties.

**Writtle College**

The Disability Project Officer was a member of the working party considering the revalidation of the BMus degree to ensure that the needs of disabled students are considered at every
stage of course design and implementation. As part of the revalidation process, new and more flexible forms of assessment for all students have been developed.

Trinity College of Music

Through the project, systems have been established so that validation review panels systematically check that disabled students are not disadvantaged by learning, teaching and assessment strategies. A list of examples has been provided to support the work of review panels and the Disability Officer (who is also a senior academic member of staff) is consulted in all validations, revalidations and reviews. In particular, it is important to review learning outcomes to ensure that they do not inadvertently discriminate and that they are not unnecessarily prescriptive.

For example, students need to have the knowledge and understanding to identify weed plants growing in crops and to know how they should be treated to eradicate or control them. Is it necessary for the student to be able to go into the fields and visually identify weeds? This would have implications for students with mobility difficulties or visual impairments.

This approach is gradually changing academic thinking and is well embedded in the rolling 5-year validation and review programme.

Royal Agricultural College

The Institute has developed an audit tool, which is being trialled by academic departments during 2007-08, to look at course design and assessment. This has been based on the Teachability resource from the University of Strathclyde, which has been adapted to suit the Institute’s particular needs with modular courses and a large proportion of part-time and postgraduate students.

Institute of Education

Delivery

Project staff and their successors have worked with academic staff to support them in making their teaching more accessible to disabled students. A number of institutions now provide written and web information for teaching staff about the barriers to learning experienced by disabled students and good practice suggestions that could be used in developing teaching strategies.

Information on inclusive teaching strategies for disabled students is photocopied and given to all pathway leaders. Teaching staff can access fact sheets on teaching students with different impairments on the College intranet and there are links to other sources of information and guidance.

Wimbledon School of Art

All academic staff receive a copy of the College Disability Handbook which is also available on the Intranet. This provides detailed information on the types of barriers to learning and performance experienced by music students with a range of impairments and makes useful suggestions on appropriate teaching strategies and reasonable adjustments.

Trinity College of Music
The implementation of adjustments recommended in individual disabled students’ learning support agreements has also been a vehicle for raising awareness and developing new approaches to teaching.

Students doing art and design courses have a theoretical aspect to their curriculum, often called Contextual Studies, where they have more formal lectures and are usually required to produce essay-style written course work and eventually a lengthy dissertation. This aspect of their course is often particularly problematic for dyslexic students. In the past, tutors for this part of the course may have been unaware of the individual needs of the disabled students that they taught. This has been tackled through the provision of learning support agreements and some institutions have developed additional strategies.

Dyslexia Tutors from the Disability Service are working with the tutors who deliver theory courses to support them in developing delivery strategies that meet the needs of their students with SpLDs. There is also a senior academic member of staff who co-ordinates academic provision for disabled students and who liaises with the Disability Officer. This joined-up thinking not only improves the quality of support, but also helps staff to better understand the learning and teaching needs of their disabled students.

**Wimbledon School of Art**

For most art and design students, workshop sessions form a major part of their course. Disabled students with certain impairments may experience particular difficulties in workshop sessions, particularly in relation to following and remembering procedural instructions. This is being tackled in an innovative way by one art and design institution.

During the project, the Disability Officer attended practical workshops in art and design to help her understand what the issues were for disabled students, particularly in relation to health and safety. As a consequence, the College is working on an initiative with film tutors giving practical instructions and demonstrations to their students so that students who have difficulty following instructions can watch the process again in their own time to aid understanding. The Disability Officer continues to work closely with technical teams to support their understanding of the needs of disabled students in practical learning environments.

**Wimbledon School of Art**

The affiliate schools of the Conservatoire for Dance and Drama have developed a number of ways of making dance and drama training more accessible for their disabled students.

Examples of adjustments in place to support access to learning for disabled students at the Conservatoire include:

- For a sight impaired drama student, movement class instructions were given verbally rather than by in addition to demonstration

- An acting student with a physical impairment undertook some movement classes by ‘walking through’ the moves and doing hand gestures only

- Several dance schools are working towards strategies to encourage ‘over learning’ by dyslexic students by giving them the opportunity to repeat what they have been taught. This requires the provision of additional studio time and space. Students can also video-record
the tutor teaching the routine and this can be used to reinforce their learning

• Graduate students are employed to help dyslexic students learn and memorise dance routines

Conservatoire for Dance and Drama

Assessment

A considerable amount of work was done during the strand one projects on developing assessment policies and procedures and on making adjustments to assessment strategies and tools so that they were more inclusive and accessible to disabled students.

Several institutions formally reviewed and made changes to their assessment and examination policies and procedures, to ensure that disabled students had an equal opportunity to demonstrate their achievement of learning outcomes.

Written guidance ‘Alternative Forms of Assessment’ has been produced which covers assessment policy and procedures for disabled students. A flow chart has been developed to explain the agreed process for seeking modified forms of assessment. It provides examples of acceptable alternative forms of assessment for both written and performance assessments. Information is provided about the assistive technologies and human support (e.g. amanuenses) that may be required by disabled students undertaking assessments. The guidance also covers situations when a different form of testing may be required (e.g. oral presentations instead of written work) as well as situations where a different skill set can be tested (e.g. a memory test in place of a sight-reading test). Following revalidation, options for presentation rather than essays have been included.

Trinity College of Music

Assessment methodologies have been reviewed and changed at a number of institutions when it became evident that the standard format might disadvantage disabled students. Guidance has also been provided for markers on how to mark the written work of dyslexic students.

Changes have been made in the structure of the BMus degree which has benefited disabled students.

• In technical performance aspects of the course there is now more emphasis on informal assessment, which reduces some of the stress previously associated with more formal assessments

• There are now no longer any written exams; this change recognised the difficulty that dyslexic students have with demonstrating their knowledge and understanding using this form of assessment

• Dyslexic students are provided with a coversheet to attach to their written coursework, which is stamped and signed by Student Services, it includes guidance for markers on the common difficulties experienced by dyslexic students and how this should be dealt with in marking. It is planned to extend this guidance to cover the marking and assessment of written musical notation
Trinity College of Music

The MA in voice studies is the only course with a timed examination where students are required to transcribe speech into the written international phonetics alphabet. Feedback from students and discussions with staff led to a reorganisation in the way that this assessment is delivered. Students with dyslexia have a separate room with additional time and an answer sheet that is modified to make it more user-friendly. This examination involves students listening to the tutor reading a speech and watching their mouth for visual clues. Because the group included a visually impaired student the decision was made to pre-record the speech and to present the face of the tutor reading the speech on a large screen. The speech is normally read twice and in this case the pre-recorded version was simply repeated. This met the needs of the visually impaired student, was helpful to the dyslexic students and was also appreciated by many non-disabled students in terms of consistency between the two readings.

Central School of Speech and Drama

Within Accommodated Assessment guidelines, the School is able to consider ways for disabled students to present theoretical assignments other than by dissertation or essay. A disabled MA student recently produced their dissertation by video.

Wimbledon School of Art

At an affiliate dance school, end of term examinations in ballet and contemporary technique included a sequence demonstrated by the teacher that had not been seen before. This was seen as unfairly disadvantaging dyslexic students who often take longer to learn routines. The procedure was changed so that all students now have a week to work on the sequence and can take as much time as they need to rehearse before being assessed. This allows students to be examined solely on their technique. This affiliate school does recognise that it is important for dancers to be able to pick up material quickly, particularly in professional auditions, and now runs ‘mock audition’ sessions which are not assessed.

Conservatoire for Dance and Drama

Learning resources

Some institutions have provided guidance for teaching staff on how to maximise the accessibility of written documents and other teaching materials; for example the ‘Style Guide’ produced by the disability and dyslexia service at the Central School of Speech and Drama [see page 14]. Institutions are now putting more learning resources on their student intranet pages so that these can be read or downloaded in the most suitable format.

Through the awareness-raising work of the project, the College has developed a policy that all lecture notes and other teaching materials are made available in advance on the intranet, with guidance provided for staff on format and structure. Also on the intranet are course guides and reading lists as well as important information about coursework, such as deadlines and marking criteria, provided in a standard template. This information is available for all students but it particularly benefits those with SpLDs who may wish to use assistive technology to read it or use different formats (colour, font, etc.). This provision also anticipates the needs of potential deaf or visually impaired students who may enrol for courses in the future.

Royal Agricultural College
The College has developed considerable expertise in providing learning resources for blind music students. Text and music scores can be converted into Braille or audio formats using specialist software and blind students are trained in how to produce accessible formats for themselves. The Disability Officer provides a service to produce Braille versions of music or text that are required by a teacher for their class. The teacher is then able to provide the blind student with a Braille version when giving out handouts in class. If necessary, blind students can come into the class early to read through the Braille copy.

Trinity College of Music

Placements

PGCE students at the Institute of Education spend a significant amount of their time on professional placements/teaching practice. The Institute has developed a number of ways to ensure that this major aspect of the PGCE course is as accessible as possible to disabled students.

A review of all partnership schools and colleges has been undertaken and data on this is available on the placements database. This data has been useful in helping disabled PGCE students to find placement schools that are accessible for them. A range of support is available for disabled students on placements in schools and colleges. Case studies of support arrangements are being provided for PGCE staff to support their understanding of the needs of disabled PGCE students undertaking placements. Agreements with partner schools now include issues relating to accessibility for disabled students and the Partnership Handbook includes a section on how support is provided for students with disabilities at the Institute and how this may impact on partner schools.

Institute of Education

Through the strand one projects, teaching staff at small and specialist institutions have further developed their awareness and understanding of the learning and teaching requirements of disabled students and many examples of new approaches to curriculum delivery and assessment have been put in place. In some cases major changes have been made to learning and teaching strategies and to the structure of courses but there are many simple examples of where doing things differently can have a significant positive impact on the learning experience of disabled students.
Conclusion

Embedding project gains in institutional thinking

The evaluation of the HEFCE special initiative funding in 1993-95 identified common features in those projects that were able to embed lasting changes after the projects had come to an end.

“The most important of these features appeared to be, first, a clearly articulated commitment to longer-term change from senior management coupled with the high-level strategic support required to achieve change. The second feature was imaginative forward planning by project staff which anticipated the need for embedding beyond the funding period.”9

Both these requirements were recognised and planned for in the 2003-05 round of special initiative funding. From the outset, institutions were required to show how their project would enable them to develop a more strategic approach to improving disability provision and how the project would help them to embed disability issues in core institutional activities and strategies.

This report has already looked at ways in which institutions have developed and embedded their provision for disabled students in both practical ways and at strategic levels in relation to:

• Institutional policies and procedures
• Improving access to information
• Raising awareness and promoting understanding
• Developing and maintaining specialist services for disabled students
• Improving access to the curriculum

This section will look at some of the ways that project gains have been incorporated within mainstream institutional decision-making processes and strategic planning.

A number of strategies have been put in place to keep disability on the agenda at all levels in institutional decision-making.

• Project steering committees which supported the management of projects and reported on progress and achievements have been reconstituted as permanent sub-committees of established institutional committees
• Institutional activities relating to disabled students have been included in the terms of reference of key committees, such as the Equality and Diversity Committee
• Key institutional committees have a standing item on their agendas where disability issues can be raised and considered, often in relation to equality or diversity

9 ‘Making Change Last’, 1996, Skill
• Some institutions have disability working groups to look at specific aspects of disability provision

• The Disability Officer may attend key institutional committees such as estates committees, Academic Board, course committees and programme boards to provide an input on disability issues

An aim of the project was to integrate disability issues into mainstream thinking and strategic planning processes. The Equality and Diversity Group has now taken responsibility for disability issues. The group of Disability Champions still meets as the Disability Working Group every six weeks to look at practical aspects of the disabled student experience and they report to the Equality and Diversity Group. All college committees now have a standing item on disabilities on their agendas under the umbrella of equal opportunities or widening participation. Established reporting lines ensure that these discussions ‘travel upwards’, for example, to the Governing Body via the College Executive Group and Academic Board.

**Writtle College**

The Disability and Dyslexia Service produces an annual report that is considered by the School’s strategic planning committee. Thus disability issues are considered at the highest level in strategic planning and resource processes; this has led to the recent appointment of an administrator to support the work of the service.

**Central School of Speech and Drama**

A reconstituted Equality and Diversity Group now carries forward the work of the project. A Principal from one of the affiliate schools chairs this group and there is representation from senior staff and disabled staff members from across the Conservatoire. This group reports back to the Principals’ Management Group through the chair and also provides regular reports to the Academic Board, which is also attended by the Equality and Diversity Manager. In addition, the Equality and Diversity Manager meets twice a year with representatives of the affiliate schools to discuss issues relating to disabled students and staff are encouraged to identify issues for discussion in advance. These meetings are opportunities to share good practice amongst the affiliate schools and also incorporate a staff development input from specialists.

**Conservatoire for Dance and Drama**

The outcome of these activities is that responsibility for access, inclusion and equality for disabled students is shared across the institution and is no longer regarded as the exclusive preserve of specialist disabilities staff.

There is now an expectation that activities and associated costs will be built into mainstream strategic planning and budgeting processes. Responsibility for providing an accessible and inclusive learning experience for disabled students is placed at both institutional and departmental levels.

**Institute of Education**

Disability issues now have their place in mainstream planning documents and annual reports and have a much higher profile within.
• Disability issues are included in the School’s business plan (Wimbledon School of Art)

• The Annual Review includes information on the numbers of disabled students at the School as well as information about a workshop provided by a company of disabled actors and a commitment to making a prestigious new building accessible to disabled people (Central School for Speech and Drama)

• Accessibility and health and safety issues have been incorporated into the Institutional Estates Strategy (Institute of Education)

The work of the strand one projects has extended institutions’ capacity to monitor the effectiveness of their provision for disabled students. Reports on disability issues are included in the work of mainstream committees and can form part of their monitoring activities. The development of services for disabled students has improved the capture and collection of data on all aspects of service provision. Institutions are now better able to use this monitoring information to impact on strategic and financial planning and to improve and develop their provision for disabled students.

Keeping disability on the agenda

The projects that contributed to this study have been particularly successful in putting disability on the agenda in their institutions, and keeping it there. This has been an explicit aim of many of the projects and has been achieved by permeating institutional thinking, planning and decision-making at all levels so that disability issues are an integral part of all activities. These projects have created a momentum for inclusion within their institutions.

The momentum created by the project ensured that subsequent major reviews of the College’s assessment strategy and its learning and teaching strategy included a consideration of disability issues and inclusive practice.

*Writtle College*

The projects have raised the profile and influence of designated staff for disabled students within their institutions. In the past, where they existed, designated disabilities staff were often isolated and had little influence or access to decision-makers. In many institutions this is no longer the case and disability professionals are seen as an important source of expert advice and guidance for the whole institution.

Because of the size of some small and specialist institutions the Disability Officer may also have other roles, for example, they may also be a member of the academic staff. Shared roles mean that there is the potential to put disability issues on new agendas.

*The Conservatoire affiliate schools are very small and will never be big enough to have a member of staff whose sole responsibility is supporting disabled students. This means that the person who has this responsibility will always have other roles (e.g. student support, Head of School or Registrar) and this can be an advantage in that disability support is incorporated within mainstream activities.*

*Conservatoire for Dance and Drama*
Through her membership of a broad range of committees and boards, the Disability Co-ordinator has been able to take the disability agenda forward, to influence thinking and to enhance awareness across the institution. She acts as a resource for the Institute and provides specialist information and advice on disability issues.

Institute of Education

This publication describes some of the innovative and sustainable ways that small and specialist institutions have achieved this aim. A key element has been to place disability on the agenda at all levels and in different contexts so that it is truly absorbed into mainstream thinking. This important overarching outcome of the strand one projects has helped institutions as they developed and implemented their first Disability Equality Schemes.

The work of the project has had an important effect on the way that the Institute’s Disability Equality Scheme has been developed and implemented. Student involvement activities have been well attended and were carried out in collaboration with other ‘Bloomsbury Group’ institutions. A joint disabled students’ group is being established to continue these involvement activities.

The Institute of Education

The work of the project across the Conservatoire affiliate schools has helped develop an awareness and understanding of disability equality in the context of dance and drama. Work begun during the project to review policies and procedures which helped inform the Conservatoire’s approach to equality impact assessment. Improvements in data collection have led to a much improved baseline of information and data on disabled applicants and disabled students for the DES.

Conservatoire for Dance and Drama

It is evident that the strand one projects in the participating institutions have been an important catalyst for lasting change and that issues of access and inclusion for disabled students are firmly on the agenda.

A tangible outcome from the project has been putting disability on the agenda for senior managers and Heads of Faculty with an increased awareness amongst academic staff of the learning needs of disabled students.

Trinity College of Music
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Rachel Hewings (Joint Project Manager and Head of Learning Information Services), Writtle College
Glossary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ADEPPT</td>
<td>Art and Design Empowerment of Part-time Tutors Project</td>
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<tr>
<td>ALF</td>
<td>Access to Learning Fund</td>
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<td>BMus</td>
<td>Bachelor of Music</td>
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<td>Clear Print</td>
<td>Print guidance from the Royal National Institute for the Blind</td>
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<td>DDA</td>
<td>Disability Discrimination Act</td>
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<td>DSA</td>
<td>Disabled Student Allowance</td>
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<td>HEFCE</td>
<td>Higher Education Funding Council for England</td>
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<td>HEI</td>
<td>Higher Education Institution</td>
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<tr>
<td>JAWS</td>
<td>Computer screen reader software</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEA</td>
<td>Local Education Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA</td>
<td>Master of Arts</td>
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<tr>
<td>NDT</td>
<td>National Disability Team (disbanded in 2005)</td>
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<td>PGCE</td>
<td>Postgraduate Certificate in Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>RNIB</td>
<td>Royal National Institute for the Blind</td>
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<tr>
<td>SpLDs</td>
<td>Specific Learning Difficulties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TextHelp</td>
<td>Computer software</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Publications from Action on Access

- Embedding Success: Learning from Disability Projects in Higher Education, July 2008
- University Admissions & Vocational Qualifications: Two Years On, June 2008
- Post-16 Education and Disabled Learners, January 2008.
- Progressing to Higher Education: Vocational Qualifications and Admissions, March 2006.
- The Learner Perspective in Educational Transitions, February 2006.
- International Comparators of Widening Participation to and through Higher Education: Policy and Practice.
  - Australian Universities, their Students and Social Equity, September 2005.
  - Canada: Widening Participation in Rural and Coastal Areas, September 2005.
  - Higher Education in the USA, Student Fees, Financial Aid and Access, November 2005.

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✉️ info@actiononaccess.org