Editorial
Welcome to the 20th Anniversary of NADP edition of the Journal

Most of the papers in this edition are from the 20th Anniversary Conference held in June 2019. I wonder if the original group who got together to set up NADO [as it then was] would have imagined their gathering growing to such a large and successful organisation! We have over 1400 members and count almost all universities in our membership as well as a good number of colleges and independent members.

NADP has great plans for the future even though the profession faces challenges from a seemingly never-ending stream of tinkering with the Disabled Student Allowances scheme. As I write this, everything is technically on hold as the election looms, but I am also responding to a consultation by the Welsh Government on their proposed changes to the DSAs.

Despite this, NADP is re-establishing its individual accreditation scheme to raise further the professionalism of our members; we are embarking on a programme of training days for both established and newer members. We also intend to introduce some training specifically for FE colleges.

This edition of the journal contains both conference papers and submitted papers across a range of topics from understanding autism to increasing employment prospects for disabled students. Two papers result from high level research projects. We also have a review of a book [or perhaps more of a compendium] offering advice across a wide range of topics for disabled students.

I commend these papers as interesting and highly informative; I also encourage readers to consider writing their own tips, best practice, work experiences, research results, summaries of their MA or PhD, or reflections on their conference presentation/workshop. We are ready to receive papers at any time of the year, for inclusion in the following edition.

John Conway
Editor
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Difficult Conversations (Keynote Presentation at AC2019 Conference)

Glenys Wilson, Senior Clinical Psychologist

The topic of ‘difficult conversations’ should be a familiar one for us all – firstly as children, then students, trainees, employees and maybe moving to being supervisors and managers. If you work as a disability adviser or in a non-medical help support role, then having difficult conversations is likely to be a daily event with students.

Difficult Conversations crop up across all our roles in all our lives and I was asked to speak at the NADP Anniversary Conference 2019 to offer ideas and suggestions drawn from my own experiences. These experiences include acting as a supervisor of psychology students and trainee psychologists for over 30 years; Head of the Department of Psychology at a large teaching hospital in Sydney; and working as a young trainee psychologist myself. I have had a lifetime of difficult conversations as a child, friend, supervisor, colleague and partner.

Avoiding Difficult Conversations

Difficult conversations are a part and parcel of life, yet most of us fear and avoid them at all costs – even to the detriment of our colleagues and students and ourselves.

Why do we avoid them? We became disability and inclusivity professionals because we care about people. We want to assist students and many of our difficult conversations are those which are needed to assist students or colleagues but may also cause upset and pain.

An illuminating moment for me came whilst I was Head of the Department of Psychology at one of Sydney’s teaching hospitals. I had taken on the supervision of a trainee psychologist from another senior psychologist who was struggling to find ideas to assist with them after a year.

The trainee had chosen a career which really did not meet their strengths; they refused to listen to instruction or guidance; and refused to adapt their practice even after formal warnings.

I was bracing myself for every meeting and dreading the difficult conversations, but I finally realised that the process was not about me or my relationship with the trainee - it was about my role as Head of Psychology; and
as a supervisor - my role as a gatekeeper for my profession. I needed to terminate his employment because it was about keeping future clients safe. That made the conversation so much easier.

Types of difficult conversation
Challenging and asking difficult questions in a therapy session was not a problem for me, I was trained and experienced in that area. It was as a Supervisor and Department Head, where I was dealing with colleagues and administration that I found difficult. I became interested in why I found it easier in one setting compared to another, and what I could do about it. I started to examine my conversations and realised that there are a variety of difficult conversations ranging from the personal to the professional:

- those you want to have with your teenager about sex;
- talking to your children about their choice of friends;
- confronting a friend who’s always wanting you to do things for them;
- ending a relationship;
- speaking to the colleague who needs to be spoken to about their lack of punctuality or not meeting deadlines or being rude to everyone
- addressing the situation with the colleague who has poor hygiene or bad breath;
- approaching the colleague or student about a possible mental health issue that’s affecting their work;
- informing senior management about a manager who is a bully;
- letting a student know they have failed a course;
- asking a student if they are suicidal;
- addressing disciplinary meetings;
- terminating the appointment of a colleague or team member
- informing a student or colleagues about the death of a friend;

There’s a huge range of potentially difficult or awkward topics that might need discussing, and you’re the one who has to do it.

What makes a conversation a difficult one?
My own reflections have been backed up by literature research and we all agree it all comes down to our own fears.

In the ‘caring’ professions such as disability and inclusivity support, I believe we are generally nice people who want our interactions to be nice. We are supposed to support and assist people. Not make them cry, upset or angry.
Our own basic fears include:

- not wanting to hurt another’s feelings;
- feeling scared of what they might think or do;
- feeling scared of being wrong;
- feeling scared of being disliked or appearing mean;
- what happens if the other person might become angry and start a fight;
- what if they kill or hurt themselves?
- what if they burst into tears?
- what if I’m so anxious, I burst into tears?

In many ways we may be more concerned with how we will look and how we will cope than with the actual reason for the conversation.

We also avoid difficult conversations for other reasons:

- We may fear it will make the situation worse;
- We may fear that having the conversation will be worse than putting up with the bad behaviour or whatever it is about;
- We don’t want to feel bad;
- We worry we might get some feedback we don’t want to hear;
- It might get emotional and therefore embarrassing;
- We are worried about the consequences

Handling Difficult Conversations

Many people don’t feel confident in their ability to handle difficult conversations and don’t understand or even trust the policies and procedures supposed to underpin them.

Managers are rarely taught how to hold difficult conversations with staff and very few businesses run courses on grievance procedures and how to manage them. The result of this lack of training is that relationships are frequently damaged by poorly managed grievance processes and are very hard to repair. In my experience, outcomes from such processes are often unpredictable and seem to vary widely from case to case.

Disability and inclusivity professionals and their managers are not always supported by senior management who may be even more risk- or challenge-adverse!

Another possible factor behind our avoidance might be a very old one – we still have some fears of a primitive nature. There is a great fear of being cast out of the tribe, to be viewed as different, or not belonging. It was literally a matter
of life or death in primitive times and to risk losing the approval of our peers is still troubling to us at a very deep level.

However, the costs of avoiding difficult conversations can be sizeable, whether within work teams or with students. It may involve continuing problems in the team with increased resentments, anger, low morale and poor productivity. It could also mean students not achieving on their course due to continuing problems and the situation worsening. Eventually this will lead to stagnation and depression for both students and staff; and even self-harm or suicidal behaviours.

**Financial & Reputational Costs of Avoiding Difficult Conversations**
The financial costs of avoiding difficult conversations are huge. Statistics are easily available for businesses and a clear parallel can be drawn with student experience.

In 2010-11 businesses spent £84 million at various workplace tribunals due to conflict; unresolved issues cost business £33 billion, 20% of management time and 370 million workdays. All these are recorded costs. It doesn’t include the loss of expertise, knowledge, productivity and low staff morale.

McDonald & Heart (2019) analysed the situation in workplaces. They reported that few managers have the tools, training or higher management support to take early action. However, it is always best to act early as a manager. Once grievances are raised and acted upon, relationships between staff are damaged and very difficult to repair. They also reported that most managers lack confidence in their company’s grievance policies and fear if it goes wrong, they will be blamed.

It seems the area of dealing with conflict is one avoided by all – on a personal, team, and management level.

Despite the lack of research and information in the area of handling and resolving problems within the student body – we can get some indication from the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA, 2019) who report that figures vary form year to year but they received 1,967 complaints in 2018, an increase of 20% on the 2018 (1,635).

However, this is not the whole story, the OIA do not handle all complaints; only those not been resolved by the university. In other cases students choose to take legal action and the majority of these cases are settled out of court.
How do I detect issues?
There are many signs to look out for that indicate that there may be issues on a personal level of within a team:

- behaviour that is out of character, and/or disruptive;
- poor hygiene;
- visible distress;
- anxiety & depression;
- poor or unpredictable performance;
- sudden drop in productivity;
- poor timekeeping or absenteeism
- harassment or bullying of any kind;
- malicious gossip;
- withdrawal from others;
- being quiet when usually talkative;
- irritability;
- increased use of drugs and alcohol;
- poor judgement and decision making;
- tiredness or low energy.

When do I start the conversation?
The actual time of an outburst or event may not be the best time to start a conversation about how to resolve any problems. There are times when conversations are unexpected but, if it is at all possible, then planning is best.

Firstly, let the person know you want to make a time to discuss an issue or event. Don’t surprise them as it will only make them defensive. Remember those times as a teenager when Mum ambushed you in the car or in your room? Did you have any intention to do anything you promised to do when you were cornered? Did you say anything they wanted just to finish the conversation and get them out of your room? Remember this before you ambush anyone for a difficult conversation!

It is well worth taking the time and effort to examine how you think about confrontation generally well before any event happens. Difficult conversations can be approached in many ways and your approach will have its rationale in your past experiences and personality. If certain approaches have not worked for you in the past, there are ways to rethink how you approach conflict.
You could try to re-think your ideas:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>They are being deliberately difficult!</th>
<th>I wonder why they do the things the way they do?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Why do they keep on annoying me?</td>
<td>This is difficult but it’s important that I protect them/their colleagues/other students/university reputation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why do I have to do this?</td>
<td>Why do they need to get attention in this way? Can they find other ways?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They are attention-seeking!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They’ve lost it! Who knows what they’ll do next?</td>
<td>They have really changed. I wonder what is wrong? Bullying? Something at home?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I hate this! I’ll leave it and perhaps things will improve over the weekend.</td>
<td>The sooner we have this conversation, the faster things will settle down. It will give me time to organise things and then I can have a good weekend!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Planning**
There are several ways you may choose to start the conversation after an incident has occurred, or you become aware that you need to talk to a student or colleague.

- I’d like to talk to you about... but first I’d like your perspective
- I need your help with what just happened. Do you have a few minutes to talk, or shall we make a time later today?
- I’d like to talk about... I think we have different ideas about it.
- We need to talk about... I think we can work better. I have a few ideas and I’d like to hear any ideas you have.
- I’d like to talk about team dynamics and get your perspective.

I have found it really helpful to remember that the situation was not about me. It was about my helping the person and protecting them, other people and the team, department, university or even the profession. You, as a friend, partner, adviser or manager need to understand that these conversations are important and necessary and put your plans in place.
Various workplace training organisations (Business Disability Forum, 2014; Knight, 2015; Martinuzzi, 2013; Ringer, 2016) recommend aspects of planning that you need to consider.

Here are my priorities:

1. Choose a time and place carefully. Private place, no rush, no interruptions.
2. Let them know what the meeting is about. Don’t ambush them.
3. Prepare. Have concrete examples of problems and be clear about what you want to say and achieve. Make sure you are aware of any relevant organisational procedures and policies, and sources of support and information for both you and the person.
4. Get a positive mindset. Be open and curious.
5. Start with a compliment about positive aspects of the situation.
6. Plan the conversation but don’t script it. What do you want to achieve? What is negotiable, what is not.
7. Simple, clear, direct and neutral language.
8. Breathe slow, deep and gently to stay calm. Take breaks if needed and be comfortable with silence.
9. Acknowledge their perspective, ask what they think is/was happening? Put yourself in their shoes and try to understand their perspective and show compassion.
10. Try to preserve the relationship. More likely if they believe you understand them – even if you disagree with them.
11. Be consistent and fair; keep on task and relevant to meeting purpose.
12. Raise specific problems and do not generalise
13. Watch your body language; remain open and respectful.
14. Slow down and listen. If it’s a difficult conversation, it’s unlikely to be a short one. Slow is less likely to escalate.
15. Don’t assume that you know what the problem is – listen and pay attention to try to discover the root of the problem.
16. Move beyond the problems to how to work on them to improve the situation.
17. Balance your feedback – positive feedback builds confidence and reinforces the behaviour you want to see. Negative feedback needs to have suggestions for improvement.
18. Take a joint approach to solving the problem. Once you have given your feedback, it’s ‘what can we do about this?’
19. Offer alternatives and ask for their ideas.
20. Don’t criticise the person. Keep focused on the problem you both have – not them as a person.
21. Be willing to accept feedback yourself.
22. If person gets upset and leaves, keep it private, ensure they have someone to talk to, or ring, do they just need time to recover.
23. Be prepared for it to go badly and having to escalate it to a formal level or to a manager above you.
24. How they respond is their choice. You need to remain neutral.
25. Don’t take it personally. Ask them to explain why they are angry/upset. It may help clarify misunderstandings.
26. You are there to help them be as happy and productive as possible within the work setting – you are not a therapist and there are rules.
27. Keep minutes.
28. Send copies of the minutes and decisions to the person and your manager – as soon as possible to make sure all are clear on what was agreed or why nothing could be resolved.
29. Debrief and learn.

**Conversations about Suicide**

These conversations don’t tend to happen often, unless you work with a population that is at risk. Most people have great fears about raising the topic, but I can state that after having to ask the question on many occasions, the reaction I received in the vast majority of cases was one of relief. Here was someone asking about something they’d been hiding and scared to raise with others. They were relieved to finally have an unemotional talk about just how bad they felt.

If you are worried about suicide or self-harm, then **ASK**. If you are concerned, it’s most likely already in their head. You are not suddenly introducing the idea to them. Ask in a normal conversational manner. Be calm, confident and direct.

- ‘How bad does it get?’;
- ‘I’m so sorry you feel so down. Does it ever get so bad you think about hurting or even killing yourself?’

When asking about suicide, you can’t ignore a positive response. You do need to ask some extra questions to get an idea of risk level.

- Do you really want to die, or do we need to work together to reduce the pain you are feeling?

You can’t keep it secret, but you can discuss who is told first and by whom. Do not let them leave after giving you vague promises about telling a parent or doctor.
It is less clear cut with non-lethal self-harm. Discuss policies and procedures with your manager so you are clear as to what is within your job role. You may be able to explore the situation and judge risk, or you may have to immediately refer.

Given the rates of violence in the community at large, maybe you should consider asking if they think about harming others. If you do decide to ask that, then consult your manager and look into what options you have if the answer is a yes. Who to notify, call, do you need to call police? Security? What, if any, procedures are there?

Know what your workplace policies are. Unfortunately, if the worst happens, you need to be able to prove you acted professionally according to policies and procedures. It is why prior discussions with your manager are so important – any objections or improvements can be considered in a calm rational way, not under the pressure of facing a student in your office. You can also consult with your Counselling service without giving a name. Do consult if you are at all uncertain.

Never forget that duty of care outweighs confidentiality and you need to keep your manager informed. Hopefully, this will also give you support.

**Conclusions**
The skills of managing difficult conversations have become an integral part of the success of disability or inclusivity professionals, their managers, departments, and organisations as a whole.

Avoiding difficult conversations may keep you comfortable in the short-term but it can cause lasting damage to relationships and institutional reputations. This is because the resulting high-cost conflicts consume energy, destroy teamwork, and wipe out creativity.

However, when difficult conversations are managed well, feedback can be obtained and learning within the college or university is made possible; productivity and collaboration are enhanced; and stress is reduced for oneself as well as others. Consequently, better decisions are made.

Most important of all, managing difficult conversations help us all build and maintain healthy personal as well as work relationships.
References


Three Approaches to Understanding Autism.

Roddy Slorach: Imperial College London

(This article is based on my recent research project as part of an M.A. in Education (Autism) at London South Bank University)

Many of the competing theories of autism fail to reflect the lived experience or opinions of autistic people themselves. My study asked a sample of autistic Higher Education students to assess three contrasting approaches to understanding autism - as a medical category, as a form of identity and as a social phenomenon. A large majority of participants slightly or strongly agreed with all three approaches. Many saw diagnosis to be an important part of confirming and validating autistic self-identity and emphasised the strain of coping with expectations of ‘normality’ as well as the negative impact of both impairment and discrimination. It is hoped that these findings can help to promote a more balanced understanding of the diversity of autistic experience, and in doing so assist the ongoing struggles of autistic advocates for social justice.

Relevance of the research

Teenage climate change activist Greta Thunberg has explained how Asperger syndrome helps her “see things from outside the box”, and to see things in “black and white”. In an interview on BBC Radio 4’s Today programme, she said, “It makes me different, and being different is a gift, I would say... I don’t easily fall for lies. I can see through things.” It is rare to hear such a positive account of autism, particularly by a young autistic woman whose impact on popular consciousness has led to her being viewed as a positive role model. It also, however, raises the issue of how other autistic people see this difference.

Disability services in FE & HE often publicise their support for the social model of disability, implicitly acknowledging the reality of discrimination against people with impairments. In practice, however, these services are governed by a medicalised approach to disability, allowing students access to support only if they supply medical or specialist evidence proving that their impairments meet the legal definition of disability.
This friction between two distinct – some might say incompatible – ways of looking at disability has been the subject of much debate, not least in how the phenomenon of autism is understood.¹

Few autistic people are familiar with the ‘big three’ cognitive theories about autism debated by scholars and scientists² (Chown, 2017, p.8). This study discusses three less specialised approaches to understanding autism with which autistic people are likely to be more familiar. The ‘medical model’ perceives autism to be a neurological deficit, the neurodiversity approach sees it as a neurological difference, and the ‘social model’ sees the difficulties associated with autism as principally about social discrimination.

Social factors relating to autism are a prominent feature of Higher Education (HE). One study estimates that the “increase from 2008-09 to 2014-15 in the number of HE students with autism may have exceeded 200%” (Chown et al., 2017). This has led to more barriers to study being identified as well as ways to overcome them. Other recent research projects such as Madriaga et al. (2008), Beardon et al. (2008) and Hastwell et al. (2013) have also examined the experiences of autistic HE students in relation to support and reasonable adjustments. The transition from school to HE is often dramatic and sometimes traumatic, particularly if it involves leaving the family home. The lack of structure and routine typical of the HE environment may lead students whose autism has not yet been diagnosed to seek an assessment (Madriaga et al., 2008). These same pressures result in many other autistic students disclosing their diagnosis and seeking support from the range of services available. This combination of factors makes it easier to identify autistic people in HE than in other environments - not least for researchers studying autism.

Although there has been much academic debate on the three approaches to autism discussed here, autistic people themselves are rarely asked the key questions at stake. How far, for example, are autism-related difficulties faced by autistic people attributable to ‘symptoms’ identified in their diagnosis or

¹ This study uses the term ‘autistic people’ rather than ‘people with autism’ because it is the one most often preferred by autistic people themselves (Chown et al., 2017). As of 2013, Asperger Syndrome (AS) has no longer been a separate diagnosis on the autism spectrum in the DSM. However, many of those already diagnosed with AS feel the term describes a distinct identity and therefore uphold the distinction, in contrast to those who see it as confusing and as undermining the notion of a united autism community (Kenny et al., 2016). The use of the term ‘autism’ throughout this study covers all autism spectrum diagnoses.

² These are theory of mind, executive (dys)function theory and central coherence theory
otherwise? Are these difficulties a consequence of ‘differently wired brains’, or are they principally due to social factors? This study asked a sample of autistic HE students to assess three contrasting approaches to understanding autism, then investigated further the reasons for their responses. Consideration of the range of autistic experience and opinion, and how this illuminates autism as a social and political issue, may help to bridge some of the unnecessary divisions in what Silberman calls the ‘Autism Wars’ (Silberman, 2015a).

The study and the results
Forty-one autistic students from a range of UK universities participated in the study. Of that total, 37 completed the questions in an online survey, of whom 19 chose to submit an additional personal statement. Five of these respondents went on to take part in an interview. These interview participants are identified below by ‘IP’ then number (e.g. IP3).

The initial questionnaire asked participants how much they agreed or disagreed with statements in relation to each of three distinct approaches to understanding autism. The statements were chosen according to how well they concisely and accessibly summarised each of the approaches to understanding autism.

Statement one is a summary of the social model of disability as it applies to autism:

The social model of disability suggests that society disables people by the way structures are designed. Many theorists go further, and suggest that people are further psychologically ‘disabled’ by a culture and ideology of ‘normalcy’... Much literature on autism would suggest that autistic people are in some way predisposed to difficulties in psychiatric ill-health... This view however is a ‘medical model’ view of mental well-being that does not account for the ‘problems of living’ people on the autism spectrum have in navigating a social world that was not designed for their needs (Milton, 2012a).

Statement two, an abridged version of the diagnostic criteria in the fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Psychiatric Disorders, represents the most authoritative and familiar summary of the medicalised approach to understanding autism in the UK.

Symptoms of Autistic Spectrum Disorder.
Persistent deficits in social communication and social interaction across multiple contexts... Restricted, repetitive patterns of behaviour, interests
or activities... Symptoms must be present in the early developmental period (but may not become fully manifest until social demands exceed limited capacities, or may be masked by learned strategies in later life). Symptoms cause clinically significant impairment in social, occupational or other important areas of current functioning. These disturbances are not better explained by intellectual disability (intellectual developmental disorder), or global developmental delay (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p.31, pp.50-51).

The final statement, written by an autistic advocate, represents the neurodiversity approach to understanding autism:

To me, neurodiversity is the idea that neurological differences like autism and ADHD are the result of normal, natural variation in the human genome... Increasingly... science suggests conditions like autism have a stable prevalence in human society as far back as we can measure... people with [such] differences do not need to be cured; they need help and accommodation instead... [R]acial or sexual orientation differences do not functionally disable a person whereas neurological differences can. That reality makes this situation much more complicated... [N]eurodiverse people generally look just like anyone else. Therefore, when we act in unusual or unexpected ways, we may elicit unwanted negative responses from an unaware public. For that reason it’s important... to learn the basics of getting along in neurotypical society (Robison, 2013, paras 1,4,7,8).

Respondents chose one of five choices, ranging from ‘strongly’ or ‘slightly’ agree through to ‘strongly disagree’, including a fifth option, ‘Neither nor disagree’. The following graph provides a summary of the results, with responses converted into percentages.
The majority of respondents slightly or strongly agreed with all three approaches. Over two-thirds (70.27%) strongly or slightly agreed with the summary of the social model of disability as it applies to autism. More than three-quarters (78.38%) strongly or slightly agreed with the second statement, an excerpt from the current diagnostic criteria for autism (the medical model approach). For the final statement summarising the neurodiversity approach, almost exactly three-quarters of the total (75.67%) strongly or slightly agreed - a larger majority than for statement one, but smaller than for statement two.

The fact that all three approaches found such a degree of support is perhaps more significant than the single-figure percentage differences between them. At the other end of the scale, significantly more respondents strongly or slightly disagreed with the summary of the social model then they did in respect of the other two approaches. A substantial minority of participants therefore disagreed at least to some extent with the view that autism has anything to do with social issues.

**Reconsidering the medical model**

The best known and most widely accepted of the more general approaches to understanding autism is the diagnostic or medical model. This understands autism to be a cognitive disorder or deficit within individuals, the cause of which is wholly neurological. It is an approach seen by many autistic advocates as a wholly negative view of disability and autism.
The experience of autism as impairment was expressed in several statements. One, for example, read: “I would concur with the description of the symptoms based on my own experience, and that which I have observed in neurodiverse friends and associates.” Another participant wrote, “I fully subscribe to the biomedical model”.

Several statements and interviews accepted either the medicalised or neurodiversity approach (or possibly both), in perceiving autism to be an ‘in-person’ issue, “an inherent part of myself”, rather than one that has anything to do with society. One disclosed “some sympathy for the neurodiversity movement and certainly for the role of 'psycho-educating' both NT's and Aspies.”t Another who also rejected the neurodiversity approach (“Socially, I don't feel different, I feel broken”) drew a parallel with physical impairment: “I don't look disabled... My wheelchair is invisible.”

The central reason as to why the medical model found such favour among the research participants may have appeared so obvious to them that none actually raised it. Evidence of a diagnosis of autism is an essential gateway to accessing support services, particularly at school and in Higher Education. The medical model may therefore be seen as a significant factor in forming and validating autistic self-identity, rather than – as is commonly held – in negating it.

As shown in a study by Baron-Cohen et al. (in Timimi and McCabe, 2016, p.169), those who meet the criteria may not receive a diagnosis of autism if they do not complain “of any unhappiness”. Disability advisors have their own experience of university students who scored highly on autism screening tools but chose not to be referred for an assessment, because they did not consider these indicators or difficulties to be a significant enough problem in their lives.

Four of the fifteen personal statements disclosed a diagnosis of Asperger Syndrome (AS). However, participants did not necessarily see this as a positive identity. As one put it, AS “prevents me from enjoying things most people do or to understand why people do what they do”. No statements or interview responses questioned the validity of Asperger Syndrome as a category, despite its abolition from the highly influential Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Psychiatric Disorders (DSM) in 2013. These responses predate the much more recent news of Hans Asperger’s active participation in the Nazi mass murder of disabled people (Czech, 2018). They nevertheless illustrate the persistence of

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3 NT’s: neurotypicals – a term used by some autistic people to describe non-autistic people. ‘Aspies’ is a term used widely in the neurodiversity movement for people who identify as having Asperger Syndrome.
AS as an identity for those diagnosed prior to the new DSM criteria (as well as others who continue to receive the diagnosis under the criteria in the DSM’s rival publication, the International Classification of Diseases).

It is worth reflecting on the comments by IP3 about “the way Asperger’s affects me”: “I can go about my day fine but as soon as something unexpected comes along and disrupts my routine I start to feel overwhelmed, lost, disorientated and anxious... I find it difficult to trust people when I don't know them and I take a long time to feel comfortable enough with someone to allow myself to be open and not unafraid to say how I really feel. I also struggle to relax and unwind and feel settled in places when there is a lot of uncertainty around me that I cannot control.” On the one hand, these difficulties are arguably not hugely removed from the experiences of many others who are not autistic. On the other, it is hard to read them as a celebration of a positive identity.

**Neurodiversity, diagnosis and identity**

The statement summarising the neurodiversity approach to autism by Robison states, “neurological differences like autism and ADHD are the result of normal, natural variation in the human genome...people with [such] differences do not need to be cured; they need help and accommodation instead (Robison, 2013, paras 1,4). Descriptions of autism in the statements included “a difference in the way I perceive language and the way I have developed”, “an alternative means of cognitive processing”, and “a natural biological variation... an inherent part of myself”.

Many people’s neurodiverse identity is based at least to some extent on either a prior medical diagnosis or the diagnostic criteria (in the case of IP4, an earlier variant of these). Supporters of the medical and neurodiversity approaches alike endorse the view that autism is a neurological condition. For some, “the difference is pathological”, while for others “differently wired brains” are “just that – a difference, rather than a disorder” (Mallett and Runswick-Cole, 2016, p.123). Although autistic advocates may sharply oppose medicalised definitions, most of this study’s participants did not share this perspective. Even IP5, who expressed the most detailed objections to the medical model approach, said in their personal statement, “I am in some respects impaired by my autism”.

None of the statements or interviews during the study referred to other neurodiverse groups. Perhaps few autistic people are aware that neurodiversity is an umbrella term applying to other groups such as people
with specific learning difficulties, or perhaps many do not see it as any kind of political term.

Several respondents took a positive view of neurodiversity as “natural variation” or “natural biological variation”. For one, “The world would not be as advanced as we are without autism”. The context suggested strongly that participants saw the terms ‘autism’ and ‘neurodiversity’ as largely synonymous. Where autism was referred to explicitly, it was described as ‘difference’ or ‘diversity’. Other participants wrote, “Autism augments the identity” of individuals or that it has an “inherent neuro-diverse nature”.

Another saw the issue as more double-edged: “As an autistic person, I see having a good memory to be very good. However, I am aware that I can take language literally and have had some developmental issues linked to being autistic.” A further statement agreed that “society has not been constructed for the autistic” and “a strong assumption of neurotypicality from others… leads to a great deal of difficulty and anxiety.”

One participant believed they had a “positive view of myself… because I suffer from high-functioning autism” (in itself a slightly contradictory formulation), implying further that this self-image differentiated him/her from “people with lower-functioning autism [who] obviously need much greater help in learning how to function.” The problematic nature of the notion of high- and low-functioning autism was recognised by IP5, who “would be classified as high-functioning” but on the other hand lives with a carer, and when highly stressed, becomes non-verbal and neglects their basic self-care. These statements offer confirmation that, as suggested by Davidson and Orsini (2013, p.20), some autistic people use this distinction as a way of distancing themselves from others who they see as more severely impaired.

**Discrimination and the social model**

The famous founding statement of the disability movement, “Disability is something imposed on top of our impairments by the way we are unnecessarily isolated and excluded from full participation in society” (Union of Physically Impaired Against Segregation, 1975, p.4) fits with the descriptions and personal experiences of social discrimination and ‘othering’ in several of the study’s statements and interviews. It seems particularly appropriate to autism, as per one participant’s comment: “Pretending to socially engage like other people is exhausting and causes deep frustration and anger that I can't explain to people who aren't on the spectrum.” This mutual incomprehension is detailed in Milton’s ‘double empathy’ problem (Milton, 2012b) as well as a more recent study (Sasson et al., 2017).
Two participants contrasted the more obvious obstacles faced by wheelchair users to the less visible needs of autistic people. One who felt “broken” wrote, “If I had a wheelchair, nobody would expect me to reach the top shelf. My wheelchair is invisible”. IP4, however, who found the social model described effectively “the ways in which autism is disabling” compared the respective barriers faced: “with a person in a wheelchair... it might be stairs, for the person with autism it might be... the amount of people around or the intensity of lights or intensity of sounds.”

Another participant believed that to “see myself as 'disabled’” meant “viewing myself as a victim”, thus showing that individuals who perceive disability to be synonymous with impairment are likely to wish to avoid the label. On the other hand, a social understanding of disability enabled IP4 to draw parallels with the discrimination faced by wheelchair users. The social model may therefore enable autistic people to find common cause with others, even though their specific experiences of discrimination may appear to be very different.

The perennial and thorny issue of impairment is a concept hotly debated for many years in Disability Studies and among disability activists. One point of relevance in this study is that many participants referred, in their statements and interviews, to the negative impact of both impairment and discrimination. The relationship between these concepts is particularly complex in relation to autism, given the disputes over whether or not particular behaviours should be seen as ‘deficits’ or impairments at all (Chown, 2017, p.18).

Closely linked to the acceptability or otherwise of specific behaviours is the issue of ‘normality’ - a recurring theme in the statements and interviews. These focused on the pressures associated with accepting or rejecting such a concept, as well as in conforming to what participants perceived this to be. One described him/herself as recently ‘normalised’, another referred to how their AS prevented an understanding of “social norms.” Other participants variously described learning to function “as a largely 'normal' person socially”, how “some developmental issues... are now normalised” and of struggling to control “my 'unusual behaviours’” until learning “what is considered normal” and in so doing now “actively adhere to most of these standards”. IP1 asked whether anyone is “socially normal”. As one statement put it, “a strong assumption of neurotypicality from others...leads to a great deal of difficulty and anxiety”. This echoes the formulation in the statement summarising the social model approach, which links “difficulties in psychiatric ill-health” among autistic people with problems in “navigating a social world that was not designed for their needs” (Milton, 2012a).
As stated above, a substantial minority of participants disagreed at least to some extent with the view that autism has anything to do with social issues. This dissenting minority was larger than that who disagreed with the medical or neurodiverse approach and was more likely to endorse their emphasis on ‘in-person’ issues.

**A pragmatic approach**

Most research participants supported all three approaches to autism to at least some degree. The complexity and diversity of views is demonstrated in how participants adopted elements which best describe or illustrate the difficulties they or others experience and criticised others which do not. This study provides evidence to suggest that the polarised debates among activists and in Disability Studies do not necessarily reflect the experiences of autistic individuals, who may often seek and value an autism diagnosis, for example, without endorsing a wholly medicalised view of autism.

The evidence in the research supports the findings of Ryan (in Davidson and Orsini, 2013, pp.191-209); namely, that autistic individuals often allocate value and legitimacy to their diagnosis as well as the identity it gives them. Many participants expressed a multi-faceted understanding of their own autism as well as autism in general, combining elements from each of the different approaches discussed here.

**Ethical considerations**

All research participants received an initial invitation providing details as to the content and purpose of the project. The invitation guaranteed that all written responses and recorded conversations would be anonymised to guarantee confidentiality, and also that any participant could withdraw from the research at any stage without a need for any explanation. The researcher sought to minimise the challenges of a one-to-one interview for autistic individuals, providing details of the process well in advance and by email to ensure “they had time to process and make informed decisions regarding consent” (Vincent *et al.*, 2017) and secondly by ensuring the interview venue was fully appropriate.

**Limitations of the research**

Over half of the participants comprised students from two universities – the University of Chester and Imperial College London. These institutions, however, differ greatly in terms of prestige and in their curriculum, so it is unclear if a more diverse sample would have led to different research results.
It is likely that the autistic students who volunteered to participate in this study have more interest in – and possibly more knowledge about – the issues involved than those who did not. This may be particularly true of those who supplied a personal statement, and even more so of those who agreed to be interviewed. Of more important concern is the sample’s limited generalisability: autistic university students are not representative of the autistic population, so these research results should be treated with some caution.

**Conclusion**

The above findings may well surprise supporters of each of the approaches to understanding autism addressed here. What conclusions are possible on the basis of these results?

Many of this study’s participants perceived autism to be an ‘in-person’ issue and saw little conflict between diagnostic criteria and the notion of neurodiversity. Diagnosis was regarded to be an important part of confirming and validating autistic self-identity. On the other hand, many participants emphasised the negative impact of both impairment and discrimination in their lives, with the strains of coping with expectations of ‘normality’ also a recurring theme.

The slogan of the disability movement, ‘Nothing about us without us’, articulates the experiences of a marginalised and isolated social group whose welfare is often the object of paternalistic concern by ‘experts’ and professionals. There is, however, a difference between the experiences and outlook of a relatively thin layer of neurodiversity advocates, who may have gained a degree of influence in certain areas, and that of most autistic people. This study suggests that the hostility of the former group to the medical model – like that of disability activists before them – may not be as strongly felt, or even shared, among the wider autistic population. There is a widespread belief that medical practitioners, psychologists and psychiatrists are in general motivated by a desire to help their patients. That belief does not necessarily extend to thinking these groups are all free of paternalistic views or that their practices should be above criticism.

The social model approach to autism attracted many positive comments in this study, and clearly relates well to the experiences of autistic people, not least in questioning the social construction of normality. There were objections too:
the model was often not seen as fully accounting for ‘in-person’ difficulties – in other words, on the impact of impairment.

Greater social awareness about autism is at least in part due to the efforts of autistic advocates, undoubtedly helping to reduce stigma as well as to make neurodiversity a concept widely known and accepted among the significantly increased numbers of autistic university students. As most of this increase occurred after the UK Autism Act was passed in 2009, today’s autistic HE students may be more confident and knowledgeable about their rights and when these are being denied – issues closely related to the social model approach.

The multi-faceted nature of autism – as a medical category, a form of identity and as an evolving social phenomenon – has been confirmed by this study. Its relatively small sample of autistic people facilitated a detailed discussion about some of the associated complexities, including important differences between autistic lived experience and the outlook of many neurodiversity advocates.

Disability-related services, including those in which medical and other professionals work – and on which many autistic individuals depend – face a deeply uncertain future. There is good reason on all sides to abandon mistaken notions of opposed interests, and instead to seek to emphasise the shared interests of service providers and ‘users’ in campaigning for more and better services for all.

References


**Lego® Serious Play®: An innovative and creative tool for supporting neurodiverse identity [AC2019 Workshop Presentation]**

Jackie Hatfield & Tina Horsman, Loughborough University

**Abstract**

This paper details research conducted by two Specialist Study Support and Strategy practitioners who are trained as Lego® Serious Play® Facilitators. It will document their use of the Lego® Serious Play® methodology to support neurodiverse (ND) students to understand, accept and celebrate their neurodiverse identity. Through the presentation of both the Lego® Serious Play® methodology and specialist study support theoretical foundations it will become evident how multi-sensory, multi-dimensional and metacognition are common and overlapping features of the Lego® Serious Play®, and mediums necessary to support ND students.

The underpinnings of Lego® Serious Play® are rooted in the theories of Constructivism (Piaget, 1951) and Constructionism (Papert & Harel, 1991) which uses the concept of thinking with objects or thinking through our hands to unlock unconscious knowledge, creative imagination and allows us to think differently. This multi-dimensional, reflective and directed discovery tool frequently results in comments such as ‘I had no idea I knew this’.

The theory of Autopoiesis is key to both the Lego® Serious Play® methodology and to our drive to help students to understand and embrace their neurodiverse identity. The consequence of this, combined with the Lego bricks, quickly facilitates the tutor’s knowledge and understanding of the student’s identity which in turn leads to an open, productive, shared and deeper tutor-student relationship.

The examples of this playful practice demonstrate how this innovative combination, of Lego® Serious Play® and specialist neurodiverse support, results in a joyful and fun experience for the individual by creating a state of positive emotion and well-being, which in turn results in the student being ready to learn more effectively. This burgeoning practice is empowering students to take ownership of their neurodiversity which in turn will give them knowledge and confidence to advocate for themselves in academia, the workplace and socially.

**Key words:** Multisensory, multidimensional, Lego Serious Play, identity, neurodiverse, well-being
Introduction
As Specialist Study and Strategy Support tutors, we are always looking for multisensory and metacognitive strategies to allow our neurodiverse students to unlock their knowledge and creative and innovative ideas to ensure that they can demonstrate their full potential academically, socially and within the workplace, which in turn will support their mental well-being. Our ongoing research led us to the Lego® brick and the Lego® Serious Play® methodology, which is underpinned by a range of pedagogic and positive psychology theories that directly align with our professional theoretical foundations. As trained Lego® Serious Play® Facilitators we quickly recognised that the methodology would provide a tool to aid critical thinking, planning and hence writing, but it also had the ability to provide a medium, through co-creation, to explore identity and ultimately allow students to embrace the advantages of their individual neurodiversity as well as contextualising their challenges.

One of the fundamental theoretical underpinnings of teaching neurodiverse individuals is that successful learning requires a pedagogy that employs multisensory methods and materials. Consequently, the focus of a Specialist Study and Strategy Support tutor’s practice and research is to develop methods that engage the senses, which requires the provision of input through hearing (voice, music and other sounds); sight (text, diagrams, pictures, symbols) and touch/ kinaesthetic (activity, movement, speech) (Rawson, 1970). A benefit of developing multisensory learning is that it is particularly beneficial to neurodiverse learners, whilst also being beneficial to all (Cottrell, 2001; DfES and NIACE, 2004; Price and Skinner, 2007). Any multisensory strategy employs a constructionist learning philosophy (Papert and Harel, 1991) which recognises that we learn best when we make things and from these items or artefacts, we create new knowledge.

Alongside employing multisensory teaching and learning activities it is important to encourage and allow neurodiverse, as well as neurotypical, students to come to their own conclusions. Our professional good practice guidelines instruct us that our teaching process needs to be ‘collaborative, exploratory, investigative and power sharing rather than deficit laden and technicist’ (Burwell and Kelly, 2013:18). Thus, adopting a constructivist approach where the teacher provides an environment of directed discovery that leads the learners to answers without being spoon fed, allows transferable metacognitive development which in turn provides a platform for students towards Baxter Magolda’s (1992) Independence and Contextual Stages. Embedded within the multisensory and metacognitive focus is the persistent drive to encourage a constant reflective approach (Schon, 1987) which
supports independence in all contexts within and beyond the academic environment.

As a result of our Lego® Serious Play® training, we quickly recognised that using the identity aspect of the methodology could, because of its multisensory nature, provide a comfortable and accessible medium to investigate individual identity, this is supported by Gauntlett’s (2018) understanding of how making things provides a means of sharing experiences and knowledge as well as exploring emotions. We began to consider that integrating Lego® Serious Play® into our process of producing an individual learning and strategy plan for study and strategy support sessions, referred to as the Living Plan. In a fun way, it provided an initial non-verbal and non-judgmental way of exploring our students, often damaged, self-concept and identity. However, we recognise that because of the power of Lego® Serious Play®, tutors need to recognise that there may be deep outcomes and emotions that need further support.

Lego® Serious Play® in underpinned by many theoretical perspectives including business and positive psychology theories. From our practice we believe the key applicable theories are: Constructivism (Piaget 1951), Constructionism (Charel & Papert, 1991), Flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1993), Circumplex Model of Affect (Russell, 1980), Autopoietic Organisational Epistemology (Van Krogh & Roos 1994, 1995, Weick 2000) and Johari Window (Luft & Ingham, 1955). These theoretical foundations provide a sound framework to support any student. We strongly believe that listening to their story and teasing out their educational and personal background history is vital to tutors tailoring support strategies to their individual identity and needs.

The biological theory of Autopoietic Organisational Epistemology (Van Krogh & Roos 1994, 1995, Weick 2000) supports the work of tutors because it explains that the knowledge is in the system and therefore this can be used to induce understanding and development. Autopoiesis (Greek for self-production) put simply, means that the system, in this case the student’s experiences and knowledge of self, plus the theoretical and diagnostic knowledge supplied by the Specialist Tutor, has the capability of adapting to change because the information/knowledge is within the system (student and tutor). Therefore, an individual has the knowledge of themselves to find solutions to allow them to adapt, survive and thrive as the world around them produces challenges and opportunities.

To unlock this knowledge and allow our students to understand their profiles and to reach their often hidden potential, the theories of constructivism and constructionism combined with the often unrecognised potential of the hand
are fundamental to how and why the Lego® brick and Lego® Serious Play® methodology can help meaning-making and hence develop an understanding of individual identity. The evolution and combination of firstly Piaget’s and then Papert’s theorisations are that when we think with objects or think through our fingers/hands we unlock creative imagination and start to think differently (The Science of Lego Serious Play, 2002: 12).

Papert & Harel noted that when tangible objects are used complex and complicated abstract ideas become “more concrete, visual and therefore more understandable” (Papert & Harel, 1991). Groth champions the hand when she states, “that our hands are our interface to the world and body-based knowledge is our key to understanding more abstract concepts and ideas” (Groth, 2017: 14). Blair and Rillo (2016) recognise that knowledge is stored deeply in our brains and in different locations such as the cortex and even the hippocampus and the consequence of this is that it is not easily accessible. However, their experience has demonstrated how Lego® Serious Play® unlocks this unconscious knowledge because of hand knowledge. Which put simply acknowledges that our hands have the capacity to know what our brain is not entirely conscious of, thus they encourage participants to trust their hands and the outcome of this is ‘I had no ideas I knew this’ (Blair & Rillo, 2016: 87).

Gauntlett consolidates this notion with the view that people ‘think differently when making something using their hands – it leads to deeper and more reflective engagement’ (Gauntlett & Holzwarth, 2006: 89). A methodology that places the senses at its core, touch (the hand), visual (the eye) and auditory (the ear), as specialist tutors, this was always going be of interest. Hence, promoting metacognition, self-awareness and independence.

Once we understand that the knowledge is in the system and multi-sensory mediums and the hand are important factors, we need to ascertain what is effective learning. When effective learning takes place, we experience a feeling of enjoyment and satisfaction (Kristiansen and Rasmussen, 2017) which also promotes mental well-being. These feelings are a natural, biological feedback and is one of our driving forces in our development and understanding. This biofeedback uses positive sensations and emotions to motivate us to learn. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) coined this mental state as ‘flow’. He explained that flow happens when we are thoroughly immersed and engrossed in a task and are, therefore, utilising our learning potential to the fullest. The diagram below (figure 1) illustrates how the optimum mental state of flow balances between challenge and boredom. Too little challenge leads to boredom, therefore, reduced learning. Whilst on the other hand, too difficult a challenge creates anxiety, which again, reduces learning (Alexander-Passe, 2015). The diagram
also shows how we develop and become more competent because of experiencing flow i.e. anxiety may rise with a more difficult challenge, but then reduces as flow is initiated, progress is made and the task is developed and completed. Flow is found when using the Lego® Serious Play® methodology as the process is structured, incremental and cumulative, thus supporting Orton’s (1967) and Gillingham and Stillman’s (1969) longstanding theorisation that adopting this process will help neurodiverse students ameliorate their difficulties. It therefore provides competence and success from the first initial warm up skills building exercises, motivating the participant to accomplish the more complex challenges to come, further in the process. It, therefore, can be understood that the optimal mental state of flow is integrated with the Lego® Serious Play® methodology additionally helping students gain an understanding of how they achieve flow and learn effectively.

Figure 1: The Flow Concept (Knoop cited in Kristiansen & Rasmussen, 2014: 112)

At the core of our practice is the need to develop a trusting, honest and equal relationship with each student. To achieve this, we need to ensure that we have an understanding of how to create an environment where the student’s emotional state is aroused and is ready to work efficiently. The Circumplex model considers different emotional states and social behaviours and provides an insight of how according to Russell that “all affective states arise from two fundamental neurophysiological systems, one related to valence (a pleasure-displeasure continuum) and the other to arousal or alertness”. Locke (2017)
recognises it as a tool for navigating the social world and provides an understanding of how we process emotions. He notes that it is both a clinical and research tool because of its ability to be descriptive and prescriptive. Figure 2 provides a diagram of this theory and we are suggesting that the hands-on minds-on and playful aspects of Lego® Serious Play® places students in the top right hand quadrant and therefore in an affective emotional state to engage and learn thus supporting Nerantzi’s view that Lego® Serious Play® in higher education is ‘immersive and engages their head, hands and heart’ (2018: 293). Gauntlett (2018) recognises how Lego® Serious Play® evokes feelings of ‘joy’. At the end of a Lego® Serious Play® session with a PhD student she noted that, ‘Lego is associated with the enjoyment of playing and links to happy memories which takes the stress away that prevents thinking’ thus supporting Darling-Hammond’s (2018) belief that we learn more effectively when we are in a state of positive emotion, consequently finding a medium such as Lego® to facilitate this is important for us as tutors of both neurodiverse students as well as the wider neuro-typical population. We believe if learning can be playful and fun, we engage fully and have the potential to be innovative and creative in our thoughts and outcomes.

Figure 2: Circumplex Model of Affect (Russell, 1980)
However, the concept of play within the HE environment can be seen to be controversial and can be regarded as the antithesis of being academic, as it can be seen as ‘trivial and non-serious’ (McCusker & Clifford-Swan, 2018: 190), which can produce resistance to join in. Mouratoglou (2018) points out that some participants see Lego® Serious Play® as a fun distraction rather than providing a learning opportunity. However, we must recognise that play is everywhere and that it is part of our cultures and our behaviours as well being a learned and instinctive activity. Plato regarded ‘play as one of the quickest ways of learning about someone’, Benn noted ‘whoever wants to understand much must play much’ and Einstein, ‘Play is the highest form of research’. Therefore, we should seek to re-align our understanding of play within the academic arena.

There is an important need for our students to understand themselves in the context of both their neurodiversity and their learning. Using the Lego® Serious Play® methodology can quickly facilitate increased self-awareness and understanding. The Johari Window Model (Luft and Ingham, 1950) can be used to explain how Lego® Serious Play® allows the student to discover both conscious and sub-conscious areas of themselves and their life. The diagram below (figure 3) shows how each person has four forms of themselves. My public self (Open Room) is what both you and others see. My hidden self (Hidden Room) is what you know about yourself but choose not to share. My blind spot (Blind Room) is what others know about you, but you do not see or know yourself. Finally, the unconscious self (Unknown Room) is what you do not know and what others do not know about you. It may be positive, such as, un-tapped potential or may be negative, such as, repressed feelings or attitudes (Blair & Rillo, 2016).

Within the tutor/student relationship and the development of the Living Plan, it is helpful when the student is able to share their public self and start to reveal their hidden self, therefore the window gets larger (see figure 4). From the tutor’s perspective, by using Lego® Serious Play® it allows them to ask questions and therefore uncover some of the student’s blind or unconscious self. Consequently, this shared activity quickly facilitates the tutor’s knowledge and understanding of the student’s identity which in turn leads to an open, productive, shared and deeper tutor: student relationship.
Figure 3: Johari Window – Four Rooms (Rillo & Blair, 2016)

Figure 4: Johari Window – Four Rooms (Rillo & Blair, 2016)
Supporting students to understand their neurodiverse identity

In the higher education context, students are often required to have a formal diagnostic assessment before they can gain access to funding in order to receive 1:1 Specialist Study and Strategy Support. A diagnostic assessment is often 30 pages long and contains a high level of professional jargon. Given that neurodiverse students often find reading challenging, most students have often not got beyond the first page of their report before their reading, processing and concentration skills are challenged. Consequently, we frequently encounter students who have not understood how the content of the report applies to them and therefore have been unable to use the diagnostic process to help to understand why they can experience difficulties in their academic life and beyond. As practitioners we seek to decipher this report for students through sharing the content, the words, with the individuals.

At Loughborough University, as a team of support specialists, we have strived to develop and improve a method to help students understand their report which is visual and less wordy. This collaborative process has culminated in a diagrammatic representation of the numeric results (see figure 5) and a one-page document that summaries their strengths, challenges and strategies (see figure 6). This document has become regarded as a Living Plan and is used to support the student’s academic study as well as helping them to understand their cognitive and behavioural identity. This process is undertaken during the student’s initial weekly 1:1 sessions and it is then referred to and added to during subsequent sessions. We emphasise to students that by taking ownership of their Living Plan by accepting, adopting and adapting its content they will have strategies that will be effective in their life beyond the academic world.
Figure 5: Diagrammatic representation of numeric results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strengths/assets/talents</th>
<th>Strains/challenges/obstacles</th>
<th>Strategies/tactics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• High average intellectual ability (82%)</td>
<td>• Reading:</td>
<td>Reading:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Visual spatial reasoning ability</td>
<td>• Slow (decoding)</td>
<td>• Claro Read (Text to speech)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Receptive and expressive vocabulary</td>
<td>• Lack of fluency when reading due to decoding weaknesses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Writing:</td>
<td>Writing:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Spelling</td>
<td>• Dragon (Speech to Text)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 24 wpm (25 wpm)</td>
<td>• Mindview (Mind mapping)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Processing:</td>
<td>• Audio Notetaker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Speed of phonological and visual processing</td>
<td>• Systematic notetaking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Memory:</td>
<td>• Claro Read (Text to speech)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Auditory working memory</td>
<td>• Mac Text to Speech</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Visual working memory</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Memory:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Digital recorder</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 6: One-page summary
As a result of our Lego® Serious Play® training, we recognised that we could easily adopt and adapted the Identity application of the methodology to enhance the exploration of our students’ neurodiverse profiles and lived experiences. Consequently, we combined our existing Living Plan method with the Lego® Serious Play® Identity methodology to explore how integrating Lego® bricks could become a catalyst to help students to investigate, explore and reflect on their own individual neurodiverse identity. After some brief initial warm up activities, we then progress onto the Lego® Serious Play® 4 stage methodology, which has much in common with Kolb (1984), Gibbs (1988) and others ‘plan, do, review’ models:

• Pose the question
• Respond to the question by building an individual model
• Share the model using metaphor and storytelling
• Reflect

The student is tasked with building a model that reflects their Lived Experience of their neurodiversity and the tutor creates a model of the student that reflects the findings of their diagnostic report, the theoretical knowledge and understanding of neurodiversity and the knowledge the tutor has gained about the student during their 1:1 sessions. Once the modelling phase is over, both student and tutor share their stories and then use this exploration to develop a Living Plan that highlights strengths, strains and strategies, see Figure 7. The building and shared storytelling provides a context for what Schon (1983) describes as reflection in action and provides a place for the reframing of familiar events and actions as well as allowing a new perspective on one’s identity. Brown and Collins (2018) found that ‘Lego models became a powerful tool for self-expression’ (199) and their research found that the PhD students they were working with gained a better understanding of their emotions.
The Lego® models combined with the Living Plan are then used to guide the 1:1 support sessions but ultimately to allow the individual to understand their identity which will allow them to become independent and to self-advocate beyond the academic world. A student noted that it ‘Made me think who I am and provided a visual summary of how I experience the world’ and a mature student recognised that ‘The models help my understanding especially Jackie’s model will help me explain myself to others. It has given me confidence to ask for time to process information/conversation’. These two statements reflect how quickly using Lego® bricks can support the student to unlock and understand their identity, help the tutor to discover the student’s individual and unique being, and empowers the student to find and use their strengths which will instil self-belief, success and independence.

The outcomes of these hands-on building and reflecting sessions have been significant for both the students and us, the support specialist. Often the result of the storytelling and metaphor is that the student and tutor develop a useful
shorthand vocabulary that is meaningful and dynamic which creates rapport, humour, trust and strengthens the tutor-student relationship and thus goes a long way to supporting their understanding of their neurodiverse identity. The methodology produces quick and deep results that result in emotional responses from the student but often a recognition of why their educational experiences have been negative, challenging and impactful on their self-identity and well-being. Ultimately, we believe that as a result of this process students will have a better understanding of how they can achieve their full potential and will be able to independently advocate for themselves.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion as 1:1 Specialist Study Skills and Strategy Support tutors we use a range of tools and strategies which produce positive outcomes. As a result of adding and adapting Lego® Serious Play® into this tool kit we have found a multi-sensory, metacognitive and multi-dimensional tool that produces quicker outcomes in a playful, non-threatening and non-judgmental way. It allows students to quickly prototype, reflect, reconcile and articulate past experiences. Then they are in a position to reflect and re-evaluate their identity which will allow them to critically consider future responses, behaviours and strategies within the academic world and beyond.

Lego® Serious Play® has the potential to reduce stress and anxiety by allowing those who access our services to explore their identity which in turn allows ownership and a celebration of their profile, especially their strong abilities, and thus the knowledge to advocate for themselves in the academic world, work and social context. As tutors using Lego® Serious Play® provides a method of getting to know a student’s history very quickly and also provides personalised shorthand metaphors to swiftly respond to our students support needs and well-being. As our work has unfolded it has become evident that we have found a tool that supports the neurodiverse students we work alongside. The method is transferable to many other contexts, such as the workplace, where an understanding of an employee’s neurodiversity identity can improve self-esteem and achievement for the individual and the institution. Furthermore, like many strategies used to support neurodiverse students they are appropriate and beneficial for everyone.
References


Deaf and hard of hearing students across the country are struggling to reach their full potential.

Chloe Winyard, Clarion UK

Abstract
The journey through education can be daunting for a Deaf or hard-of-hearing student. People with a disability are only 40% as likely to enter higher education (Polly C, 2002.) It is crucial that we make this process as accessible as we can and highlight the support that is available to these students when they are going through critical stages in their educational career. We use “D” to define those people who are British Sign Language users and may identify culturally and linguistically as part of the Deaf community.

In 2015 UCAS received 507,108 applications from students wanting to enter further education, 1 in 6 of whom had a hearing impairment; totaling around 84,500 students in the UK (Davies, no date).

This paper explores the journey of Deaf or hard-of-hearing people into higher and further education as well as the considerations that should be made by universities to ensure that they have an accessible and inclusive learning environment.

Barriers faced by Deaf students when choosing Higher or Further Education

According to the National Deaf Children’s Society (NDCS), 78% of Deaf students are ‘mainstreamed’, 6% attend mainstream schools with extra resources, 12% attend other special schools, and only 3% attend Deaf schools. Further, there has been a 14% decline in teachers of the Deaf and a 31% increase in demand between 2011 and 2018. With this in mind, many Deaf students’ education takes place in settings which are not necessarily adjusted for their needs.

A student at the University of Exeter states that “People aren’t disabled; environments are disabling.” (Theis, 2019) Educational setbacks begin in infancy, when caregivers use spoken English rather than sign language. The impact of such setbacks for Deaf students can be observed at GCSE age, where The Guardian found that 59% of Deaf children struggle to get 5 good GCSEs compared with 36% of non-Deaf individuals (salisbury, 2017.) For Deaf students, the closure and lack of funding for specialist schools mean that they are increasingly finding themselves in mainstream environments. Whilst technology is helping to create more accessible environments in mainstream schools, large class sizes, huge amounts of background noise, and other environmental barriers can provide a deaf student with many challenges. This can lead to feelings of isolation and a loss of faith that they have any chance at educational success. It is imperative that mainstream schools provide
adequate and effective support to their Deaf students, looking after their social and emotional wellbeing and making sure that they can thrive within the environment.

Evidence from the NDCS suggests that Deaf students are also advised against choosing specific courses based on the assessment criteria (University of Manchester); for example, if the course contains speaking and listening modules this may rule out a Deaf individual from being able to take this course. By contrast, prioritising Deaf students at the front of the decision-making process empowers them and allows them to pursue what they want to achieve rather than having their opportunities limited. Helping them to know their options and prioritising support and adjustments that would be required is a more appropriate and inclusive practice, rather than excluding Deaf students from some courses. Such efforts allow a Deaf student to confidently work towards their goals and achieve their full potential.

**How to best prepare Deaf students for Further or Higher education**

There are many ways to streamline the experience of transitioning to Tertiary (Further or Higher) Education for a Deaf or hard-of-hearing student. In particular, time is a critical factor; no student wants to start their course without the correct support in place.

Once a Deaf student has made the decision to pursue Tertiary Education, they need to apply for funding (for example through Student Finance England) and attend a needs assessment at their local assessment centre. Needs Assessors evaluate a student’s needs and make recommendations to the funding body about the support required. In turn, the funding body writes to the student to advise them of the support awarded and the company that will provide this support. Stressing the need to see a Needs Assessor as soon as possible significantly improves the chance of support being in place right from the very start and enables students to start on the right foot. Likewise, providing timetables to students who need support in the classroom or lecture theatre as early as possible allows support to be arranged in-time. The importance of having support allocated accurately, with a skilled and experienced team of support, cannot be overstated.

Specific support for Deaf students includes BSL Interpreters, Specialist Notetakers, and Specialist Support Professionals – and less commonly, Lipspeakers and Speech-to-Text-Reporters.

**Support available for Deaf students**

Specialist Notetakers produce a set of notes for students which will provide the student with an account of what is being communicated from a lecturer. Notetakers should be confident and competent in the subject that they are
transcribing and have knowledge or experience of the subject matter in order to understand specific terminology or jargon. Deaf students need a notetaker to enable them to get the best out of the lecture and have a good set of notes to take away as they would need to focus on what is being said or translated by their interpreter.

BSL Interpreters work to enable effective communication between lecturers and Deaf students. Interpreters work to translate spoken English into BSL for easy and clear understanding of course materials, lectures, seminars and exams. The number of interpreters required depends on the task; often two interpreters work together to ensure the quality and consistency of translation – in particular when interpreting in complex contexts, for a long time, or where accuracy is imperative.

Specialist Support Professionals (also known as ‘Teachers of the Deaf’) are trained to work with students with hearing loss, profoundly Deaf students or those with multiple sensory impairments. They provide advice on effective planning and preparation and can modify the language of course materials to give access to text in an easier to understand manner for Deaf students. They also can provide support with grammar, spelling and structure of essays whilst helping to unravel technical jargon. SSPs are qualified teachers with additional experience and qualifications.

The specialist nature of this support comes with a much higher cost per individual: the cost of support for Deaf students is on average £10,000 higher per year than their peers who require support for other reasons. Funding through Student Finance England is capped at £21,500, whilst the actual cost of a years’ support typically exceeds this – to the value of up to £50,000. With this in mind, it is crucial that Tertiary Education Providers are able to fund support beyond a student’s initial budget.

**Inclusive practice in Tertiary Education**

It has been found that the drop-out rate for Deaf students within further education is twice that of the general population (University of Manchester) and therefore it is important we all work towards a more inclusive and accessible learning environment. There are a number of ways that Tertiary Education Providers can support Deaf and hard-of-hearing students once they begin university and have their funded support place; some practical and some institutional.

**Practical Considerations**

On a practical level, it is crucial that each Deaf individual has team around them who knows both the student and the university well; each Deaf person has unique needs which are nuanced by their background, context, and
communication preferences. Changes which might seem insignificant – such as last minute room changes – can cause considerable stress and problems for Deaf students due to the knock-on impact of having to share this information with the people supporting the student. Having interpreters and support workers in place who know where they need to be going can significantly reduce stress for students, as can having a supportive team (whether Disability services, or the student’s faculty, or both).

If your student has a support professional for example a BSL interpreter, it is key to allow them to carry out their role as effectively as possible to allow the Deaf individual the best understanding of the information being communicated. An interpreter will work to translate everything being said into BSL so that the Deaf individual being supported can effectively understand. A BSL interpreter will sometimes require information to be repeated and may interrupt when they see fit to ask for a repetition of the information to ensure that they have given the best translation. It is important that as lecturers you help the interpreter to gather all the information and allow for this type of interruption.

Ultimately this person has been put in place to allow the students the best possible chance of reaching their full potential, they are highly skilled and qualified to fulfil this role. They are often the voice of the student they are supporting, as many students are reluctant to speak up out of fear of being judged for their disability. Learning Support Professionals are an integral part of the university experience for a disabled student and they should be treated with respect and used as a basis of knowledge for things that may be lacking in the lecture hall or university to further help these individuals. Even if they are provided by an external organisation a learning support professional should be seen as a part of the university’s inclusion and diversity team and their knowledge and experience can often prove invaluable.

There are also practical and pedagogical considerations within the lecture theatre or classroom. Having an awareness of the students within a session and their needs significantly improves the experience of a Deaf student. Reducing any unnecessary background noise allows students to focus on the lecturer. Likewise, staying still and always facing the students allows a Deaf individual to be able to follow lip patterns and (depending on the student) possibly lipread what is being said. In particular, remaining still and talking at a normal pace and volume causes lip patterns to be clearer and easier for a Deaf individual to follow.

Similarly, in a group discussion it is key to talk one-at-a-time to ensure that a deaf student can follow the conversation and understand what is being said. It is also important to be creative when communicating and not necessarily rely on speech; small gestures like writing a message down can go a long way if someone is struggling to understand what is being said. It can be isolating for a
Deaf person to be told “it doesn’t matter” when they have not understood a message - therefore it is always worth trying to add gestures, or rephrase what you are saying – which makes different lip patterns which may be easier to follow (some words look very similar).

In contexts outside of the classroom or lecture theatre, it is crucial to consider any reasonable adjustments that may need to be made. For example, changing the way that a practical session is demonstrated to ensure that your Deaf students are able to follow what you are saying whilst watching or taking part. As another example, field trips need special provisions to ensure a Deaf student is included. The student may for example cope well within the university but open air and places with lots of background noise can prove challenging; discussing this with the student or their support professionals in advance will guarantee that everyone is getting the best out of the day.

There also comes a more practical aspect, to ensure you deaf students are safe in case of an emergency. It has been advised that each Deaf student has a Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan to allow for safe exit in the event of an emergency. Implementing things such as visual fire alarms will also help a deaf student identify when there is an emergency as they may be unable to hear an audio alarm.

Institutional Considerations

There is also much that universities and colleges can do at a more fundamental level to ensure that Deaf students are included and empowered. Many Deaf or hard-of-hearing students are somewhat reluctant to address their support requirements (Davies, no date) and some may think that they can get by without the support - deafness can be seen as a hidden disability. A Deaf student ‘trying to get by’ will work on a basis of lipreading and reading materials but this can cause serious hindrance with their progression within the course. It is therefore crucial that universities and colleges work to be accessible for everybody as a norm; support should not be a knee-jerk reaction to a Deaf student’s enrolment or request for support.

If we make universities inclusive environments, without having to be prompted, it would help encourage Deaf students to enroll in their courses and take those next steps into Tertiary Education. Around 77% of teenagers say they have no idea how to communicate with a Deaf person (The Buzz) which can cause Deaf students to feel isolated during their education. By making universities more Deaf Aware – encouraging and educating people about how to effectively communicate with Deaf individuals – this can create an environment where Deaf students can feel confident in studying and interacting with their peers. This can be achieved through Deaf Awareness Training, BSL classes, note-takers as well as looking at your campus and seeing
where visual aids can be used. Equally, the provisions of accessible websites through Video Relay Service (VRS) and information in BSL can help (which become mandated on Sept 23rd 2018 through the EU Web Accessibility Directive).

**Deaf Awareness Training**

*Deaf Awareness Training* is a great tool to allow a university or college to become more inclusive and supportive of the deaf students within it. By educating the staff and students on the basics of BSL, the best ways to effectively communicate and some of the taboos in the deaf community this will help to develop people’s understanding of how to communicate with a deaf peer. This would lead to a deaf student feeling much less isolated and would as a result, contribute to the wellbeing of deaf students, decreasing the likelihood of them dropping out of their course. By enabling and encouraging interaction between Deaf and hearing students this would significantly improve inclusivity for Deaf students. Things covered by Deaf Awareness trainers include:

- Terminology and types of deafness and hearing loss
- Deaf statistics
- Medical and social models of disability
- The Equality Act 2010 and definitions of disability
- Deaf culture and language
- Basic communication tactics
- Working with communication professionals

**Conclusion**

Overall, the lack of support and success for Deaf individuals within higher and further education stems from a lack of understanding of their needs – and how to respond to these needs. By creating an environment that actively seeks to support and help these individuals communicate effectively, with all parties within the educational institution this will consequentially enable a deaf student to feel included within the environment and allow them to make friends more easily and really feel as though they are equal to everyone else. This is about levelling the playing field and allowing deaf students the same opportunities and access to the things they need in order to succeed and reach their full potential.

By working collaboratively with support professionals, deaf awareness trainers and deaf individuals this can open up a whole new light into making your university or college more deaf-friendly and ensure that you aren’t leaving Deaf students behind. Implementing such simple strategies such as facing a deaf person so that they can lipread what you are saying can make deaf
students feel more included within larger communities. This is so vital: no-one deserves to feel isolated or held back because of a disability.

In the last 12 months, Clarion has supported over 900 students within tertiary education - deaf and hard of hearing as well as those with other disabilities - working with universities, colleges and needs assessment centres.

To find out more information on support for deaf people, visit Clarion UK Student Support. Their services include BSL Interpreters, Specialist Study Skills Tutors, Specialist Notetakers and many more.

References
The Buzz, Look, Smile, Chat [online] available at https://www.buzz.org.uk/looksmilechat/

Davies, P. (no date) Are universities deaf to students’ needs?, Fireco [online] Available at: https://fireco.uk/universities-deaf-students-needs/ [accessed, 10/09/2019]


Abstract
This paper comprises four parts: it uses the metaphor of the difficulty of identifying and removing access barriers at a Higher Education Provider (HEP) to a physical disability (mobility impairment) to suggest that achieving the same with an invisible disability, Autistic Spectrum Condition (ASC), is likely to be difficult. The landscape of training in inclusive teaching for academics in English HEPs is illuminated by 2018 research indicating that it might be patchy and only partially effective at best but frequently non-existent. The positive and challenging aspects of ASC characteristics are then presented in the context of their potential effects on academic work together with potential teaching adaptations to improve inclusivity given those effects. Finally, a discontinuance problem amongst its autistic students encountered on a technically orientated creative HE course is investigated through a workshop-based problem analysis leading to potential options to further adapt teaching to reduce discontinuance rate and achieve better inclusivity. The paper is based on a workshop presented by the authors at the National Association of Disability Practitioners’ 2019 Annual Conference.

Introduction
This paper comprises four parts. The first recounts the difficulties of identifying and removing access barriers to a physical disability at a Higher Education Provider (HEP) suggesting that if such removal is difficult for visible difficulty it will be harder for an invisible disability such as Autistic Spectrum Condition (ASC) students. Recent, 2018, research into the status and nature of inclusive teaching and education about inclusive teaching at English HEPs is reported, indicating that a disability such as autism is unlikely to be anticipated. A small project undertaken by a disability support team with the leaders of a creative design course with a discontinuance problem is reported, illustrating that working with academics who know they have a problem can be a productive way of helping them become more inclusive teachers. Lastly, the output of an academic conference workshop session is reported in which attendees imagined themselves as the course’s leaders, to reanalyse the discontinuance problem and identify potential alternative approaches.
1 Removing barriers to a visible disability is easy, right?
The authors wished to demonstrate that universities’ senior management decisions need to take due account of all their students’ (and staff’s) needs or risk undesirable outcomes.
Taking the visible disability of impaired mobility, the authors travelled between a number of buildings at a Midlands-based HEP. Travel between two buildings, part of the same Faculty, presented a particular set of issues. One was built this decade (2012), the other was acquired in 2016 but had an ancient lineage. Although this narrative is based on one campus, the authors have experience of others with similar accessibility issues.
In a direct line, the two buildings were just a couple of hundred metres apart, however the route included approximately 75 metres of an historic street the surface of which could not be negotiated by one of the author’s motorised wheelchair. However, the only feasible alternative route, of approximately 500 metres presented other issues:
- Exiting the 2012 building was problematical, it had a split ground floor linked by steps and a narrow stairlift, the author’s wheelchair and bags barely fitted,
- Multiple raised kerbs and poorly constructed small ramps caught the suspension,
- A parked van blocked the pavement, forcing the wheelchair into the roadway,
- Wheelchair had to swerve to give way to oncoming traffic in that narrow roadway,
- Wheelchair had to drive in the roadway through a single width ancient archway (there was no footpath) with an entirely blind corner into oncoming traffic,
- Wheelchair pavement access was blocked by two parked cars and a bollard,
- External, exposed ramp to the acquired building for access,
- Presentation room (in the ancient building) constructed with multiple levels, steps (no stairlift) and a dais, making wheelchair access highly problematical.

It could be argued that either route between the buildings involved travelling on footways/roadways which were not under the university’s control but maintained by the local authority. However, the accessibility problems of both buildings, old and new, still illustrate the issue of the consequences of senior
management decisions being taken without fully considering and anticipating all students’ needs, this latter to fulfil its Public Sector Equality Duty, as legally required (UK Government, 2010). Should the university have even acquired the ancient building or accepted a design of new building with split level ground floor if by doing so it excluded or made life difficult for some of its students and staff? Indeed, was the university in breach of its anticipatory Public Sector Equality Duty?
The authors ask rhetorically that if such major decisions can so easily ignore a visible disability then what greater issues might there be for invisible disabilities such as ASC, one type of Specific Learning Difficulty, (SpLD)? Some answers lie in the research conducted by one of the authors (Newman) in 2018.

2 Research into Inclusive Teaching at English HEPs
As part of doctoral research Freedom of Information Requests (FOIRs) were sent by email to 133 English Higher Education Providers (HEPs) in mid-2018, using the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act (2000). These allow publicly funded bodies to be questioned about their activities and require responses within 20 working days; 132 responses were ultimately received. Some information, such as personal data, is exempted. The research also drew on public domain data provided by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA).

Definition of Inclusive Teaching
The FOIR showed that only 37% of English HEPs possessed a definition of inclusive teaching, often based on Hockings (2012), Appendix 2, as endorsed by the Higher Education Academy (now Advance HE) or a variation thereof, leaving 63% responding that they had no definition in their institution, Figure 1. Without a definition of inclusive teaching it is hard to conceptualise how an HEP might achieve greater levels of inclusivity.
Knowledge of Inclusive Teaching
The author’s (Newman) research reasoned that even if an HEP did not possess a definition of inclusive teaching, individual academics may have a knowledge of and be delivering such teaching. The research therefore investigated numbers of academics who may be trained in HE teaching, and the content of that taught material.

HE Teaching Qualification
From the early 2000s, the Higher Education Academy (HEA, now part of Advance HE) has promoted membership of its Fellowship scheme as a way academics can demonstrate their capabilities. Many HEPs’ postgraduate qualifications in HE teaching are either based on the Fellowship scheme or provide evidence of achievement for entry into the scheme. However, even after a decade-and-a-half of Fellowship promotion, although the trends are in the right direction, in 2017/18 only 56% of academics are reported as holding a teaching qualification, 29% are known not to and for 14% their status is unknown (HESA, 2019), Figure 2 and Table 1.
Table 1: English HEPs’ Academic Staff Qualifications 2014/15-2017/18 (n=133)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Qualification held</th>
<th>Qualification not held</th>
<th>Unknown</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2014/15</td>
<td>47% (59,285)</td>
<td>26% (33,160)</td>
<td>26% (34,455)</td>
<td>100% (125,900)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015/16</td>
<td>51% (65,405)</td>
<td>29% (36,875)</td>
<td>20% (26,495)</td>
<td>100% (128,775)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016/17</td>
<td>54% (72,245)</td>
<td>28% (37,985)</td>
<td>17% (23,025)</td>
<td>100% (133,255)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017/18</td>
<td>56% (76,025)</td>
<td>29% (39,880)</td>
<td>14% (19,820)</td>
<td>100% (135,725)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall change</td>
<td>+28%</td>
<td>+20%</td>
<td>-42%</td>
<td>+8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average annual change</td>
<td>+7%</td>
<td>+5%</td>
<td>-11%</td>
<td>+2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Type and Amount of Training in Inclusive Teaching for Academics

The FOIR yielded further data about the ways academics at English HEPs gained their knowledge of inclusive teaching. New staff typically undertook a postgraduate qualification in HE teaching or gained entry to the HEA Fellowship scheme at its lowest level, Associate, via Continuing Professional Development (CPD) to progress from probationer to established staff, reflected in the 64% participating in in-house PG certificate courses, see Table 2. Conversely, existing staff seemed left to their own devices in acquiring the knowledge only via CPD. Disappointingly, the amount of training in inclusive teach was revealed as low, 34% courses offered 1-10 hours, 7% between 11-20
hours, 2% between 21-50 hours and 3% over 50 hours. Some 55% of respondents did not say suggesting a low figure. The authors, given the breadth of diversity which inclusive teaching needs to address, find these limited hours of instruction worryingly low.

Table 2: Source of Knowledge and Amount of Training in Inclusive Teaching for Academics at English HEPs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>New staff gain inclusive teaching knowledge by:</th>
<th>Percentage (number) of respondents (n=132)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Formal in-house PG certificates in HE</td>
<td>64% (85)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• CPD</td>
<td>24% (31)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• No training offered</td>
<td>9% (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• No information provided</td>
<td>3% (4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Existing staff gain inclusive teaching knowledge by:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• CPD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Either did not mention or did not train</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Amount of training offered in inclusive teaching:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-10 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-20 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-50 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 50 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not say</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Content Regarding Specific Learning Difficulties in Inclusive Teaching Training Modules

Four-year official data, 2014/15-2017/18, showed that students with Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLDs) were the largest group declaring a disability upon enrolment, eg 38.7% in 2017/18 (HESA, 2019). Hence, the FOIR enquired about the nature of the inclusive training relative to SpLDs, asking: “Does the training explicitly include teaching students with SpLDs? And if so, what are the learning objectives of the relevant modules?” The logic behind the question was that HEPs, in discharge of their Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) should at least anticipate the presence of this disability under their obligations under the Equality Act, S. 149 (2010). Table 3 shows that 36% stated their modules included LOs specific to SpLDs, but did not include them in their response, a further 17% not only possessed such LOs and included them in their response. However, on reading those LOs only just over half of them contained an actual reference to SpLDs, 9% of the total. Only 2% of total responses stated that the
LOs addressed teaching adaptations for SpLDs. Finally, the LOs which did contain an actual reference to SpLDs were assessed against a commonly used management tool for assessing the quality of objects, the SMART criteria - Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic Timebound (Chartered Institute of Management, 2011). Only 2% were judged as possessing at least four of the five SMART criteria.

The authors find it hard to see how the dearth of explicit reference to SpLDS in HEPs’ academic training through postgraduate qualification supports HEPs in delivering their anticipatory PSED.

Table 3: Learning Objectives (LOs) for Inclusive Teaching Modules Regarding Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLDs)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nature of Response About Learning Objectives (LOs)</th>
<th>Percentage (number) of respondents (n=132)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Yes, we have LOs specific to SpLDs” [but did not include the LOs]</td>
<td>36% (48)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Here are our LOs specific to SpLDs” [but did include the LOs]</td>
<td>17% (23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOs contained an actual reference to SpLDs</td>
<td>9% (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching adaptions mentioned in LOs</td>
<td>2% (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOs can be regarded as SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Timebound)</td>
<td>2% (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training does not include explicit content regarding SpLDs</td>
<td>33% (43)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Against this background of not being able to depend on academics being trained in HE teaching, nor that their training effectively addressed inclusive and even less effectively SpLDs, the largest group of those declaring a disability upon entry to HE, the authors wished to find an actual situation where academics sought support in teaching their students with SpLDs. An opportunity presented itself at an HEP where one of the authors operated and with a course which had seen an increasing demographic of autistic students.

3 “We need help with some of our students”

One of the authors (Herbert) was approached by the course leaders who recognised they had a discontinuance problem, particularly with their autistic students. The academics’ analysis suggested that the problem originated in project briefs being too unstructured, leading to problems for autistic students who often struggled in coming to terms with uncertainty. Their students lost motivation, their work quality fell, late or missing assignments occurred,
discontinuance resulted. The academics, focused on producing ‘industry ready’ graduates, argued that they could not make project briefs more specific as unstructured briefs were typical in the industry and that their students needed to be used to tackling them. However, was the problem as ‘simple’ as one of vague briefs? Working with the academics involved helping them understand the nature of autism as affecting how people see the world and interact with others, that autistic people see, hear and feel the world differently to others (National Autistic Society, n.d.). Additionally, the academics needed something more concrete to work with, for example they wanted to know autism’s both positive and challenging characteristics, see Table 4.

Table 4: Positive and Challenging Aspects of Autism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What aspects might be seen as positive</th>
<th>What aspects might be seen as challenging</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Ability to spend long periods alone</td>
<td>1. Processing – less flexible than others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Ability to focus for longer than many</td>
<td>2. Sensory perception – over or under sensitivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Logical approach to problems and situations</td>
<td>3. Social communication – difference in interpreting interpersonal communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Ability to follow clear instructions, abide by rules</td>
<td>4. Social interaction – difference in responding to social situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Is direct, open and honest</td>
<td>5. Executive function – difference in automatically making sense of things</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Excellent memory for detail where interested</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Excellent imitation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. High levels of attention to detail</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. High levels of vocabulary, precision in grammar</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To help the academics deliver adaptations in their teaching, the above aspects needed to be ‘translated’ into appropriate teaching adaptations. Hence, the disability team worked with them to identify those adaptations already in place and which also had the effect of supporting their autistic students, as shown in column 3 of summary Table 5, and the fuller version shown in Appendix 3. This identification activity had the added benefit of reassuring the academics that they were not being asked to overhaul their whole programme nor method of delivery but that the adaptations were given closer consideration and more strictly adhered to by the whole teaching team rather
than just some. Initially academics had suggested a disability team member would help the students as they encountered problems. However, the approach agreed was that the disability team would help academics better understand autism and together they would identify teaching adaptations for academics to implement accordingly. The disability team and academics worked together at the latter’s team meetings February-June 2019; the ideas were followed-up in the following academic year. Additionally, a timetabled session regarding Time Management was delivered to all first years.

A key challenge in implementing the advice was, and remained, academics’ time availability. They were being asked to interact more with their students, and on occasion provide more time to them to check knowledge and understanding; it was this request that staff spent extra time with students where most resistance was encountered and persuasive powers were most called-upon to reduce.

Table 5: Two aspects of Autism, Potential Academic Work Impacts, Potential Teaching Adaptations and Adaptations Already in Place on Course (Fuller version shown in Appendix 3)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Difference in</th>
<th>Academic work potential impacts</th>
<th>Potential teaching adaptations</th>
<th>Adaptations made by course leaders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>flexibility of</td>
<td>2. Difference in understanding</td>
<td>2. Projects have clear start,</td>
<td>2. Structured feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>thought</td>
<td>thoughts, feelings of others</td>
<td>middle, end</td>
<td>3. Model prior students’ work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>imaginative activity</td>
<td>repeat</td>
<td>5. Changes: verbal &amp; Blackboard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Perfectionist tendencies</td>
<td>5. Use clear language</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6. Materials in advance,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>recording allowed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7. Chunk work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8. Set expectation limits</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9. Exploit specialist interests</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>function –</td>
<td>2. Things ‘slip mind’</td>
<td>recording allowed</td>
<td>2. Tutorial support for workload</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>automatically</td>
<td>3. Deadlines missed, planning</td>
<td>2. Pose questions individually</td>
<td>difficulties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>making sense</td>
<td>poor</td>
<td>3. Provide delivery templates,</td>
<td>3. Term 1 Time Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of things</td>
<td>4. Dislikes concepts, strategies</td>
<td>structure</td>
<td>workshop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4. Chunk new concepts,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>strategies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5. Exploit special interests</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4 Ideas for the academics – Workshop Output

As with any solution, the adaptations described in Table 5 and its associated fuller version, Appendix 3, were dependent on an accurate initial problem analysis and the richness and practicability of a set of options from which actual actions could be selected. At the NADP Conference workshop, upon which this paper is based, the attendees, divided into four table-based discussion groups were asked to re-analyse the nature of the problem and to propose potential alternative actions, see Appendix 4 for their brief. The idea of reanalysing the assumed problem, as determined by the academics, was based on a well-established business approach known as Problem Analysis which enjoys success by ensuring that causes are not assumed but are identified by rational analysis (Kepner & Tregoe, 1981). Interestingly, each discussion group identified different aspects of the course’s problem, together providing a comprehensive ‘all-round’ analysis. They are highly illuminating.

The following are the ideas which the discussion groups identified after the 30-minute workshop based on the issue described above, of how autistic students might be helped in handling vague and ambiguous client briefs in order to avoid poor project outcomes and raised rates of discontinuance. The text below is based on a transcription of the session plus the worksheets which each group completed. Verbal permission was asked of attendees, and given, to record and use both transcript and worksheets. Thanks to all 24 who took part.

Group 1:

Problem analysis: The project briefs required the students to imagine, to pretend. Autistic individuals are not good at creative, unstructured imaginary play.

Approach idea:
1. Make the briefs more real. Possibly, get them to talk to a company about one of their actual projects or briefs and the business objective that it was aimed at achieving.
2. Break down the brief into chunks: Instead of the whole brief, break the project up into smaller, more tangible parts which students can relate to more easily. Put boundaries around the separate pieces.
3. Make the translation of brief to creative work more tangible: Give the students a framework for how to go from brief to the different elements of delivery.

Group 2:

Problem analysis: Students’ expectations might not match the course reality.

Approach idea:
1. Course team leaders:
a. Improve information available during transition: Provide a clearer module guide (fewer words, plain English, well laid out, short sentences and paragraphs).

b. Improve information available during course: Advance provision (and regular discussion – Monday preview?) week-by-week module breakdown linked to the brief/project steps and tools to help students with the briefs.

c. Be clear on what’s expected of the students: Describe [and discuss] the explicit actions/deliverables/things which will be assessed that are expected of each student each week to deliver each element of the brief [in plain English - ‘words of one syllable’].

2. Student services:
   a. As part of the course’s structured timetable run events to develop soft skills.
   b. Make the soft skills relevant to the academic work, eg soft skills relating to briefs.

Group 3
Problem analysis: Due to issues around course validations it might not be possible to change a project brief mid-academic year. Hence need a way to make the existing brief accessible.

Approach idea:
1. Investigate the time aspect of the problem. If student work had been ok but then dipped, work out what might link change to negative outcome. Respond by reducing/removing that cause.
2. Scaffold workshops which demonstrate and get students to practice unpacking ‘vague’ briefs, eg what questions do they need to ask and how do they process the responses.
3. Use peer assisted learning and mentorship from 2nd & 3rd years.
4. Use prior year’s students’ projects to demonstrate tangibly the processes those students successfully went through.
5. Ask students what they need in briefs to make them more accessible to them and what they could do themselves to create a process for handling them.
6. Ensure all interventions are targeted at whole group to avoid stigma, as the problem affects all students to a greater or lesser extent.

Group 4:
Problem analysis: Academics have given the stated assumption that ambiguous briefs are standard in the industry. That needs challenging. The
desired, and genuine competence standards which the students are expected to achieve also need stating explicitly.

**Approach idea:**
1. The competence standard must be defined in the context of the students’ progress through the course.
2. Skills development runs in parallel to the expected competence standard development.
3. Skill of how to ask questions around design parameters to be developed around each of the typical brief components.
4. All interventions are whole group targeted to avoid stigma, as the problem affects all students to a greater or lesser extent.
5. Peer checking between academics regarding the ambiguity of the clarity of assignment briefs.
6. Summary: be clear on appropriate competence standards, offer relevant skill development, and academic peer checking.

[Herbert: Previously we mentioned autistic people's perfectionist tendencies. Where matters become problematic is autistic students’ reluctance to submit something unfinished for feedback. A problem arises when they repetitively delay, so they can achieve perfection or avoid criticism, then hand it in very late – for example when the academic is not even on campus over a vacation.]

**Group 5**

**Problem analysis:**
1. Poor quality, ambiguous briefs are widespread and will always be present. We need to teach the skills of how to turn these into something more structured.
2. Student expectations and/or abilities at recruitment may be part of the problem.

**Approach idea:**
1. Bring in ideas from elsewhere in the university, eg engineers who have developed the skills with physical projects.
2. Review and amend marketing activities [materials and events such as open days, transition events] to reflect the real nature of the course.

[Caution from another group: Beware using words in marketing activities which might either intentionally or unintentionally discriminate by excluding, eg frequent use of the idea of sector ‘ambiguity’ might deter ASC and others who are challenged by ambiguity. Instead describe/emphasise how the course addresses the issue and gives the individual students the ability to master the skill, in this case of poor industry practice.]
3. Ensure that the university processes, eg the rigidity of a validation process, doesn’t destroy the flexibility course leaders have to respond to student situations, eg change a validated brief. Don’t wait for students to fail/discontinue to address this.

4. Be clear with word meaning, eg ‘field trip’ might be an ambiguous term which misleads. Students don’t know or use our jargon. [Test out / get feedback from actual students/applicants.]

**Conclusion**

The research based on the Freedom of Information Request demonstrated that disabilities teams cannot depend on academics knowing how to operationalise inclusive teaching, such knowledge will be the exception not the rule. Instead they will need to work with individual academics, or groups such as a course’s leaders, who recognise they have an inclusivity problem. By working together, the academics solve their immediate problems and disabilities teams achieve their aim of supporting students in overcoming their learning differences.

HEPs, however, as a body are not addressing their anticipatory Public Sector Equality Duty; it will take many such small steps of working together, as described in this paper, repeated and reinforced with over 130,000 academics employed in English HEPs (HESA, 2019) to anticipate their students’ needs and thereby deliver on their PSED.

**Appendix 1: Freedom of Information Request, 2018: Selection of Questions**

**Question**

1. What is the definition of “inclusive teaching” you use at your HEI?

2. Does your HEI offer a Post Graduate Certificate in Higher Education (or equivalent qualification) to train its academic staff in inclusive teaching?

   If **YES**, please go to Question 3. If **NO** [an equivalent set of alternative questions was asked]

3. How does your HEI define inclusive teaching?

4. Does your HEI offer training in inclusive teaching to its academic staff?

5. If **YES**:
   a. How is that training delivered? (eg PGCHE/ PG CAP, CPD)
   b. How much training in inclusive teaching is offered? (eg hours per course/year)
   c. What % of your HEI’s total academic staff has currently received this training?
   d. What percentage of your HEI’s total academic staff receives this training annually?
   e. How do you track this training for each academic?
f. Does the training explicitly include teaching students with SpLDs? And if so, what are the learning objectives of the relevant modules?

Appendix 2: Hockings Definition of Inclusive Teaching
Inclusive learning and teaching in higher education refers [sic] to the ways in which pedagogy, curricula and assessment are designed and delivered to engage students in learning that is meaningful, relevant and accessible to all. It embraces a view of the individual and individual difference as the source of diversity that can enrich the lives and learning of others (Hockings, 2010).
### Appendix 3: Inclusive Teaching for ASC Students.

**ASC differences, Effects on Academic work, Potential Teaching Adaptations, Adaptations Made by Course.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ASC difference in Processing (Flexibility of thought)</th>
<th>Potential effects on academic work</th>
<th>Potential teaching adaptations</th>
<th>Adaptations made by course leaders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Challenges with managing change, which might include activities on timetables or following formative feedback.</td>
<td>• Stick to structured programmes</td>
<td>• Some briefs are highly structured. Some are not, but this is a deliberate strategy to model the range of ways that briefs are provided within industry, so is a key aspect of learning to be a designer.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Difference in interpreting and understanding the thoughts, feelings and actions of others (staff or other students, including in group work situations)</td>
<td>• Working on projects with a clear beginning, middle and end – how does an educator make that happen – e.g. a template that shows the structure.</td>
<td>• Timetables are structured.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Difference in engagement with imaginative activity on a creative course.</td>
<td>• Creating rules or structure – can you create an agreement at the beginning?</td>
<td>• The assessment feedback sheets that are used for formative and summative assessment feedback are highly structured.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Wanting to stick to restrictive or routinized patterns of behaviour, for example wanting to use the same workstation or desk in a classroom.</td>
<td>• May not be comfortable with the idea of change but may be able to cope better if can prepare for changes in advance.</td>
<td>• Students have many opportunities to view the work of previous students so they can experience, for example, what a completed sketchbook consists of.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Perfectionist tendencies which may lead to reluctance</td>
<td>• Prior notification needed of any changes to timetable/rooms</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASC difference in</td>
<td>Potential effects on academic work</td>
<td>Potential teaching adaptations</td>
<td>Adaptations made by course leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
|                  | in submitting coursework if student believes it is not ‘good enough’. | • Use clear unambiguous language  
• All lecture slides to be provided in advance  
• Permission to record lectures  
• Be aware of issues with attention and concentration  
• Refer to the students’ special interest to reinforce concepts due to lack of motivation – can be useful in group work too  
• For those with perfectionist tendencies, make the limits and breadth of what you expect absolutely clear to avoid student thinking they have to do everything you suggest perfectly. Note, If student doesn’t know where to stop they might not be able to start. | • During the 1st year the Monday lecture is where a preview of the week is given. Changes are announced verbally and on Blackboard.  
• The issue of perfectionism is one common to students as a whole, and the teaching team firmly encourage experimentation. During the 1st year the focus is on the earlier stages of the design process rather than the final result, in order to support this focus. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ASC difference in</th>
<th>Potential effects on academic work</th>
<th>Potential teaching adaptations</th>
<th>Adaptations made by course leaders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Sensory processing | Under or over sensitivity to:     | • Checking online information (created by FDO) for individual requirements so that teaching staff engage in students’ individual support plans  
• Accommodate sensory needs if possible and avoid any unnecessary background noise  
• Identify and provide a quiet room  
• Provide opportunities to reinforce learning if it is missed, such as recording information for the VLE | • Quiet space in Building X has been requested by the course team but there is none available yet. However, The Breathing Space in Building Y is available, and the course team can make students aware of this space.  
• Students are allowed to make audio recordings of feedback sessions with tutors so that they can listen again to recap key points.  
• Whilst course leaders like to address students’ needs these are not always available to all parties due to information being stored in different IT systems. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ASC difference in</th>
<th>Potential effects on academic work</th>
<th>Potential teaching adaptations</th>
<th>Adaptations made by course leaders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Social communication | Difference when recognising or responding to:  
• Facial expressions  
• Tone of voice  
• Jokes and sarcasm  
• Vagueness or abstract concepts.  
Can lead to misinterpretation of information, confusion and avoidance of activities or coursework.  
Anxiety over participation in group-based coursework or activity. | • Communicate clearly and consistently  
• Use clear unambiguous language  
• Provide additional support and guidance for group-based project work  
• Provide electronic versions of slides and handouts in editable software.  
• Emphasis key terms at the beginning and end of lectures/sessions and also write the down where they are accessible to all students. | • The point about clear unambiguous language may need to be reiterated to some members of the team.  
• Group projects are often opt-in, as is the Peer Support learning group. Many group projects are related to things like competitions.  
• 1st year students are put into “teams” to support the process of getting to know course mates.  
• At the start of group work projects, the expectations around behaviour, communication etc. are stated clearly in a lecture and there are slides relating to that available on Blackboard to refer back to.  
• Key terms are explained during term 1 in the “Design Principles” lecture. The slides are made available on Blackboard. These slides will be printed out and
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ASC difference in Social Interaction</th>
<th>Potential effects on academic work</th>
<th>Potential teaching adaptations</th>
<th>Adaptations made by course leaders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual might: • Appear to be insensitive • Seek out time alone when overloaded by other people • Not seek support or comfort from others • Appear to behave ‘strangely’ or in a way thought to be socially inappropriate • Be challenged by forming friendships or working in groups • Want to form friendships and work in groups but is unsure about how to do this.</td>
<td>• Explain the social context of what is required from student • Create written rules on expected behaviour • Explain the perspective of others involved • Encourage students to join societies related to their particular interests – can meet people with similar interests, reduce feelings of loneliness/isolation • Be prepared for questions which might seem aggressively posed, but are not meant that way</td>
<td>• There is a student charter which sets out expectations around behaviour. • At the start of group work projects, the expectations around behaviour, communication etc. are stated clearly in a lecture and there are slides relating to that available on Blackboard to refer back to.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Executive function (automatically) | Impact on: • Working memory - ability to hold on to information in order to complete a task or | All lecture slides to be provided in advance in editable formats | Feedback is provided in a structured way using a common feedback form for all projects and |

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ASC difference in making sense of things</th>
<th>Potential effects on academic work</th>
<th>Potential teaching adaptations</th>
<th>Adaptations made by course leaders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>activity - things may “slip students mind”</td>
<td>Permission to record lectures or recorded lectures to be made available on the VLE</td>
<td>both formative and summative assessment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Organising – how information is stored and managed to use in future</td>
<td>● Be aware of issues with attention and concentration – pose each part of questions individually and repeat using identical words</td>
<td>● Tutorial support is provided for difficulties managing workloads.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Planning</td>
<td>● Refer to the students’ special interest to reinforce concepts due to lack of motivation – can be useful in group work too</td>
<td>● The course specific initiatives team provide a workshop on Time Management in term 1, open to all students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Understanding complex/abstract or new concepts</td>
<td>● Time management – meeting deadlines</td>
<td>● Prioritise reading and exercises</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Using new strategies not experienced before</td>
<td></td>
<td>● Give clear feedback on student progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Time management – meeting deadlines</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix 4: Brief to Workshop Attendees

Workshop: making change in the real world

Issue to be worked on: The course’s discontinuance problem.

Course team’s environment: The problem is immediate, wider organisational change on way, no time to learn to teach in a different way & preference for no change in teaching.

Course team’s preferred approach (but not disability support’s): A member of disability support works in class to support the students with issues as they arise.

Workshop (your) objective

1. Analyse the nature of students’ problem; critique the course team’s preferred approach,
2. Generate alternative approaches,
3. Complete the worksheet in small groups – 30 minutes,
4. Contribute your ideas in the plenary session – 15 minutes.

Bibliography


Scarffe, P. (2013). *Considering the needs of students with a mental health condition*. University Mental Health Advisers Network.


How do we work together to ‘make more possible’ for disabled students looking to improve their employment prospects? This was the subject of the MyPlus Students’ Club workshop at the NADP Anniversary Conference 2019 run by Helen Cooke, Founder and Director of MyPlus. Helen is passionate about ensuring that having a disability or a long-term health condition does not prevent anyone from having the career they want. To deliver this, she works with employers and HE Institutions to ensure they are confident and knowledgeable to support disabled students as they transition from work into employment. She also works with students to help them recognise the unique strengths and talents that they can, and do, bring to the workplace, and provides expert knowledge, training and support to help them navigate the increasingly competitive recruitment process.

14% of undergraduate students at UK Universities have a disability or health condition; this includes, but is not limited to, conditions such as poor mental health, dyslexia, Asperger’s Syndrome, hearing impairments, ADHD, speech impairments and physical impairments.

Why are disabled students less likely to find work than non-disabled counterparts?

The fact that disabled graduates at all qualification levels are less likely to have obtained full-time employment than non-disabled graduates* combined with research findings that 92% of disabled students sought careers advice from their disability adviser /co-ordinator compared to 22% seeking advice from their careers adviser ** firmly puts employability on the agenda of University Disability Services. A key contributor to this is that this group of students often lack the confidence to apply to employers, believing that their disability will rule them out of the running for graduate-level jobs. In addition, some disabled students have not immersed themselves in student life instead believing that academic achievement alone will make them employable.
How can we support them?

Employers look for much more than just good academics. They want rounded individuals; those who have immersed themselves in university life and taken positions of responsibility, developed leadership skills, shown initiative, etc. This will involve students joining clubs and societies, volunteering, gaining work experience and developing the skills required to successfully navigate and demonstrate employability skills during the recruitment processes. However, if you lack confidence, combined with the added challenge of managing a disability on top of the academic demands of a course, getting involved can seem impossible. The risk of dropping out of university then increases, compounding the problem. Disability should not be a barrier to having a successful career; the strengths and skills that have been developed to manage a disability on a day to day basis are readily transferable into the workplace; skills such as time management, resilience and problem solving. It will take advice, encouragement and practical guidance and support from stakeholders from across the university to work together to address this situation and ensure that disabled students can make the most out of their time at university and show them what is possible.

Key steps that you can take to enhance the employment prospects of your disabled students

Understand the challenges that disabled students face when they think about applying for a job or placement, and the emotions that they will be experiencing:

- Why would they choose me?
- Should I tell an employer about my disability?
- How should I tell them?
- Will I be judged negatively?
- How do I explain gaps in my CV?
- How can I get the adjustments that I need to compete on a level playing field?

For more information on ‘Challenges’ listen to Helen Cooke speaking at [https://myplusstudentsclub.com/for-universities/toolkit/](https://myplusstudentsclub.com/for-universities/toolkit/)

Support them at all stages of the student lifecycle:

- Challenge their assumption of what is possible
• Encourage them to participate in University life and pursue activities that interest them
• Prepare them for success by working with colleagues in Careers and Employability
• Value their strengths
• Connect them with relevant organisations such as MyPlus Students’ Club where they can get specialist advice on applying for a job with a disability
• Help them to build their network
• Develop your own understanding of the issues

“If not you, then who? If not now, then when?”

It is our collective responsibility to raise the aspirations of disabled students and build their confidence in order that they can maximise their chances of successful employment outcomes when they graduate. For more information about our work please visit our website www.myplusstudentsclub.com or contact Emma Knox our University Marketing Manager at emma@myplusconsulting.com

*AGCAS: What happens Next?
Disabled Student’s Allowances: What is awarded and what is the impact? Richard Fletcher & Ursula Bilson, De Montfort University.

Abstract
Recent changes to disabled students support in higher education are at the front of many contemporary debates, least of all in the pages of this journal. Disabled Students Allowances (DSA) have been a key focus for both governmental and Higher Education Provider led initiatives, with Assessment centres and DSA Assessors among those adapting rapidly. The DSA Assessment Centre based at De Montfort University (DMU-CAN) was established in 2015 and assesses around 600 students a year. We have analysed over 1500 of our records and we are able to examine the trends and patterns across the largest groups of students within defined disability codes. Despite rumours of the demise of DSAs, there remains a considerable depth and complexity of recommendations being made and approved by funding bodies. Products are updated and new products have emerged. The average total value of support being recommended is nearly £7000 across a typical 3-year course. This paper illustrates the diversity of support that is recommended, the level of ‘DSA coverage’ within an institution and the modelled potential impact. The impact of DSAs on continuation rates, good honours and student satisfaction are discussed, both at a sector and institutional level. While there has been much said about the benefits of inclusive practice and calls for a more integrated systems of disabled support; the policy trends towards greater HEP involvement and potentially reduced individual sovereignty are worthy of further debate.

Introduction
Official statistics confirm that more students are declaring disabilities. The table below compares earlier figures (National Audit Office, 2007) with those from a more contemporary source (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2019a). Over the nearly 20 year period covered, this shows a 265% increase in the numbers of students declaring disabilities, against a background increase of 20% in the total numbers of students.
Table 6 - Students declaring a disability, NAO: 2000-2006, HESA: 2013-18

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Students declaring a disability</th>
<th>Total students</th>
<th>% of Students declaring a disability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000/01</td>
<td>82,000</td>
<td>1,948,135</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005/06</td>
<td>138,000</td>
<td>2,281,780</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013/14</td>
<td>229,000</td>
<td>2,299,460</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017/18</td>
<td>300,000</td>
<td>2,343,095</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Two key subgroups within this have been students with a specific learning difficulty (SpLD) and those with a mental health condition, which together currently account for 62% of the total (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2019b).

Table 7 - Students declaring SpLD or Mental Health conditions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Students declaring a SpLD</th>
<th>Students declaring a mental health condition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2014/15</td>
<td>105,550</td>
<td>33,045</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017/18</td>
<td>109,395</td>
<td>66,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total (17/18)</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Growth from 14/15 to 17/18</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For further perspective, the number of students declaring an SpLD back in 2008/09 was 55,895 (Rodger, Wilson, Robers, Roulstone, & Campbell, 2015) or around a third of current levels. A similar comparison for mental health is given as 3,000 in 2006/7 (Thorley, 2017) or around one twentieth of current levels. The recent history of disabled student support by Wilson & Martin is a welcome reminder of the distance travelled so far, for example, that SpLDs and Mental Health were first approved for Disabled Student’s Allowances (DSA) support in 1995 (Disabled Student Support for England in 2017. How did we

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4 Excluding students with one of these conditions, who may instead be categorized as ‘Two or more conditions’
get here and where are we going? A brief history, commentary on current context and reflection on possible future directions., 2017, p. 10).

Few working in the sector would disagree that both overall growth and that within the subgroups, have had a significant influence on the way Higher Education Providers (HEP) have responded and the modernizations to DSAs (Willetts, 2014). The adoption of inclusive practice as a pedagogical, even philosophical view, has informed approaches that aim to benefit all students regardless of disclosure or disability. Lecture capture, for instance, may also be valuable for international students and those with English as a second language. Support for disabled students is increasingly expected to come from institutions, where DSAs: “...will be included as additional support for those who need a little more.” (Wilson & Martin, 2017, p. 18)

Both HESA and SLC publish figures on the total numbers of students receiving DSAs, although SLC also publish the total value and number of DSA awards made. The figures in the table below are for England-domiciled, full time students on approved courses at UK institutions (The Student Loans Company, 2018). Growth appears to have plateaued though the average value of DSA awards have likely reduced.

Table 8 - Total awards made and total value of DSAs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>DSAs (“awards for successful applicants”)</th>
<th>Total value of DSAs (£m)</th>
<th>Average value of DSAs (£)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2011/12</td>
<td>53000</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>2,358</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012/13</td>
<td>57000</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>2,228</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013/14</td>
<td>60000</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>2,233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014/15</td>
<td>60000</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>2,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015/16</td>
<td>59000</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>1,949</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016/17</td>
<td>57000</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>1,737</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017/18</td>
<td>55000</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5 There are further discrepancies between the figures produced by HESA and SLC, notably that the HESA figures appear to suggest many more students (83,000 in total) are receiving DSAs. Both were contacted for further clarification, though it was not possible fully investigate this specific issue further within the scope of the research. However, the trend for the past 3 years within each set of figures is fairly similar.
6 The addition of part time students would add around 5-10% to the overall figures, although we might also note that part time students can be less likely to access DSAs.
7 2017/18 figures are provisional at the time of writing and likely to have some upward revision as accounts and payments are finalized.
Despite recent changes, the overall numbers of DSA awards being made remains substantial. Other researchers have suggested that the recent plateau in numbers was already evident prior to announcement of DSA cuts (Lewthwaite, 2014). The British Assistive Technology Association state that the introduction of a £200 contribution has led to a 30% decline of students taking up the ‘specialist equipment’ element of support from 2015-17, despite a rise in the number of assessments (British Assistive Technology Association, 2018). The potential for further significant changes remains clearly on the horizon, following announcements that technology and training elements will be put out to tender (Student Finance England, 2019) likely to be followed by a similar process for assessment centres (Department for Education, 2019). NMH providers and practitioners are also voicing concern of the changes that may result as a result of their roles potentially being increasingly centralised in and mediated by HEPs.

A strategic approach to inclusive practice at De Montfort University (DMU) can be seen in the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) initiative. The UDL evaluation interim report examined a variety of sources of data to determine whether this initiative was meeting its numerous objectives (Maguire, Wells, & Hall, 2018). We will refer to some of these findings in our later discussion. It should be noted that the current ambition is that UDL becomes ‘business as usual’ by September 2020, so the data available to date may not reflect the full result of the project.

What perspective can a relatively new but rapidly growing assessment centre provide? As Brady & Flegg comment: “Disability services contain many of the features associated with ‘street level bureaucracies’” and can have considerable discretion as to how national policy is interpreted at a local level (Brady & Flegg, 2017). While DSAs have been increasingly restricted there is still a considerable breadth of support available, least of all due to an ever-expanding range of assistive software. Nevertheless, the majority of AT specialists in HEPs (not including DSA Assessors) feel that detailed knowledge is lacking in their departments and institutions (Holtam & McLaren, 2017). We also hope to unravel some of the impact accessing this type of support may potentially have. This will be contextualized alongside other key indicators for the HEP where we are based.
Institutional context: Receiving DSAs

In terms of qualifiers, De Montfort University is the 27th largest HEP in the country, but it has the 6th highest proportion of disabled qualifiers\(^8\), around 17% or 1 in 6 (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2019c). In absolute terms, this is comparable to The University of Birmingham or The University of Nottingham; except that DMU is around 60% of their overall size.

In terms of students, 11% of DMU students receive DSAs, compared to 6.4% of all UK students (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2019d). As a proportion, many smaller institutions have higher levels of students receiving DSAs, for example, the Conservatoire for Dance and Drama with 26.4% receiving DSA, of 505 total students.

In absolute terms, DMU has the largest number of students receiving DSAs of any HEP, shown in the table below alongside the next two largest by this measure.

---

\(^8\) Note that the difference between qualifiers and students suggests that individuals are more likely to have declared a disability by the time (and if) they complete their course.
DMU-CAN was set up as part of an institution-wide response, at least partly in relation to the changes to the DSA, though it does not solely target prospective and current DMU students. Firstly, current guidelines would prohibit an institution-only approach and secondly, there is a degree of income generation related to assessing students from other HEPs. Nevertheless, around 80% of the students assessed per year by DMU-CAN are DMU students, though clearly not every DMU student declaring a disability is assessed for DSAs:

Table 11 - Estimated DSA ‘coverage’ of DMU students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>De Montfort University qualifiers declaring a disability</td>
<td>1290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DMU-CAN assessments per year</td>
<td>600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessments per year of DMU students</td>
<td>480</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estimated number of DMU students, declaring a disability, who are assessed</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>elsewhere, in line with the UK average.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DSA ‘coverage’ % of DMU students declaring a disability</td>
<td>570 (44%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is likely, given what has been established so far, that DMU has a relatively high level of ‘coverage’ as far as DSA support goes. Any equivalent figures for other institutions with in house or similar close relations with assessment centres are unknown. There are still clearly a wide range of reasons why disabled students may not seek assessment for DSAs. International students (around 2,700 per year at DMU) may declare disabilities, but do not qualify for DSAs.

A recent report showed that declining awareness was a critical factor; students have become less likely to have heard of DSA’s prior to starting their courses (Johnson, Rossiter, Cartmell, Domingos, & Svanaes, 2019, p. 9). Alternatively, do DSA-eligible students increasingly feel that institutional support can meet their needs without the need for applying for DSAs? Either practically, or in perception only, this is largely unknown, though the same report states that students receiving DSAs also reported significantly greater awareness of the various types of institutional support, compared to those who did not receive DSA (Johnson, Rossiter, Cartmell, Domingos, & Svanaes, 2019, p. 60).
As we now turn to look at the detail of what is recommended through DSAs, it is worth bearing in mind that the two largest disability categories (SpLD and Mental health) from an assessors point of view, present a very broad scope for possible support that can be recommended and awarded under DSAs. In a DMU context, Autistic students are also worth noting, as the university has a specialist team in place which is likely to be relatively uncommon.  

**Our data: What is recommended?**  
Records of every assessment and review carried out by DMU-CAN were collated, from January 2016 to June 2019, which produced 1668 records. As part of the QA process, key information was recorded over time in a spreadsheet format for each year. These were combined into one dataset. This included: disability code, name and categories of software/hardware recommended, equipment quotes, hours, categories and suppliers of NMH support recommended and other allowances recommended.  
Some potential issues with the data are that a small number of assessments will have been missed although we can note this level of record keeping goes above and beyond any DSA-QAG mandated activity. As noted earlier, around 20% of students assessed are not prospective or current DMU students, but it is still fair to call it a predominately DMU focused sample and we do not anticipate that ‘external’ students would necessarily have significantly different needs. Consistent labelling of the data over time might also be an issue as would the introduction of new products, though often this was limited to different versions of the same product (Claroread Plus, Claroread Pro). The interpretation and assignment of standardized codes to disabilities could potentially a factor, though our further analysis will focus on the larger subgroups, where margins for error are lower. The table below shows the proportions of disability codes for DMU in total, DMU-CAN assessments and HESA totals (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2019e).  

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9 At a national level, students in the ‘Social communication/ASD’ category currently account for 4% of all students declaring a disability. This has grown by 61% from 2014/15 to 2017/18.
### Table 12 - Disability codes: HESA, DMU, DMU-CAN

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disability code</th>
<th>2017/18 HESA¹⁰ %</th>
<th>2019 Total DMU %</th>
<th>2016-19 DMU-CAN %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A specific learning difficulty</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blind or a serious visual impairment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deaf or a serious hearing impairment</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A physical impairment or mobility issues</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health condition</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social communication/Autistic spectrum disorder</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A long-standing illness or health condition</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or more conditions</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another disability, impairment or medical condition</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We can immediately see certain trends, students with SpLDs are the largest subgroup, while others can find the process of accessing DSAs more challenging, as reflected in the evaluation of DSAs report (Johnson, Rossiter, Cartmell, Domingos, & Svanaes, 2019, p. 32):

“...those with mental health conditions were more likely to find it hard to find evidence and wanted more guidance; while those with a long-term health condition were more likely to find it difficult to provide evidence...”

We can further note that DMU also currently pays for some SpLD and ASD diagnostics on behalf of students, on the basis of an agreement that this payment will be recouped from the student, if they do not subsequently use the diagnosis to go on to apply for DSAs, if applicable. Many Nursing courses at DMU with relatively large cohorts also implement a mandatory SpLD screening as a supportive measure.

The category of ‘Another disability, impairment or medical condition’ is a clear and important point of distinction between the two sets. An assessment centre is presumably more likely to categorize an individual for various administrative
purposes, whereas a student providing this information to an HEP will be more likely to choose a more open ended, ‘Other, please state’ type of category. Additionally, due to the length of the process, it is not entirely uncommon for an assessment to take place on the basis of one condition, while further evidence is being sought for additional conditions.

On the basis of the data available, the following categories were selected for further analysis, with the total count per category shown in the table below. Both visual and hearing impairments were excluded on the basis of small counts (31 in total) and those with Two or more conditions were excluded, as there was no way of disaggregating each condition, within the time constraints of the research.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disability code</th>
<th>2016-2019 DMU-CAN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A specific learning difficulty</td>
<td>1044</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health condition</td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social communication/ASD</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Mobility, unseen or medical”: A physical impairment or mobility issues OR A long-standing illness or health condition</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We have combined two categories here into “Mobility, unseen or medical”, as independently, they had too small a count to warrant further statistical investigation. This is evidently problematic, though hopefully with some justification. From a practical point of view, students in this category are more likely to be awarded the ergonomic and travel element, whilst also less likely to be awarded the most common NMH support (1:1 skills, Mentoring). Given the considerable volume of SpLDs, we feel it is important to try to highlight that DSAs go beyond this and that many technologies can have applications beyond their most apparent user base.

The table below summarizes the likelihood that a disabled student would be recommended any amount of equipment, 1:1 skills, mentoring, ergonomic equipment, general or travel allowances. Some clear distinctions can be seen:
Table 14 - Disability code vs Categories of support

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disability code</th>
<th>Equipment</th>
<th>1:1 Skills</th>
<th>General</th>
<th>Mentoring</th>
<th>Travel</th>
<th>Ergo.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A specific learning difficulty</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health condition</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social communication/ASD</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobility, unseen or medical</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (DMU-CAN, all conditions)</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some types of support, particularly Non-Medical Helper (NMH) are defined quite tightly in relation to certain disabilities (eg 1:1 Skills for SpLD/ASD and Mentoring for Mental Health/ASD). The overlay in the table above likely represents a little blurring of categories in the data. However, it is worth pointing out that it is possible to recommend these for any student; providing that this is sufficiently ‘supported by evidence’. For example, those with acquired brain injuries may have similar study-related difficulties to those with SpLDs, or those with ADHD (somewhat contentiously categorised as an SpLD in the guidance) may have goal-setting and motivational difficulties similar to those with mental health conditions. Therefore 1:1 Skills and Mentoring could be recommended respectively. While these cases often result in having to pursue a further ‘exceptional case process’, it shows that assessors are exploring every option.

The table below summarizes the average values of specialist equipment quotations and the number of NMH support hours being recommended. Note that with the exception of Social communication/ASD, it is relatively unlikely that both 1:1 Skills and Mentoring are recommended. Within this subgroup, the two are not always recommended together, or in the same amounts.
Table 15 - Disability code vs Equipment and NMH support

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disability code</th>
<th>Equipment (£)</th>
<th>1:1 Skills hours</th>
<th>Mentoring hours</th>
<th>AT training hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A specific learning difficulty</td>
<td>£956</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health condition</td>
<td>£865</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social communication/ASD</td>
<td>£994</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobility, unseen or medical</td>
<td>£838</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (DMU-CAN, all conditions)</td>
<td>£947</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Where equipment is recommended, three quotes are requested from relevant suppliers, so we have taken the average of these quotes. We can also take the current average hourly rates of the most commonly quoted NMH providers in our sample. Funding bodies will usually choose the lowest of these quotes; for simplicities sake we may be slightly overestimating in this respect. This allows us to come to an estimate of the total value of typical support awarded:

Table 16 - Disability code vs Total value of support

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disability code</th>
<th>Equipment (£)</th>
<th>1:1 Skills hours @ (£59.21)</th>
<th>Mentoring hours @ (£59.96)</th>
<th>AT training hours @ (£70.20)</th>
<th>General allowance 12</th>
<th>Total (£)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A specific learning difficulty</td>
<td>956</td>
<td>1954</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>491</td>
<td></td>
<td>3634</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health condition</td>
<td>865</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2039</td>
<td>421</td>
<td></td>
<td>3557</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social communication/ASD</td>
<td>994</td>
<td>1777</td>
<td>2398</td>
<td>421</td>
<td>Average for all: 232</td>
<td>5822</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobility, unseen or medical</td>
<td>838</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>491</td>
<td></td>
<td>1561</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (DMU-CAN, average any condition)</td>
<td>947</td>
<td>Average of both: 1598</td>
<td>421</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3495</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (DMU-CAN, average any condition, x3 years)</td>
<td>947</td>
<td>4794</td>
<td>421</td>
<td>696</td>
<td></td>
<td>6858</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We can note that these figures do not, at first, distinguish how many years of...

---

11 Note that this doesn’t deduct the £200 contribution that SFE supported students pay to AT providers.
12 Note that this doesn’t include the fee for the Assessment Centre itself, which is paid directly by SFE.
support would be in place. Equipment and AT training is primarily a ‘one-off’ award (unless the student is reassessed) while NMH support and the general allowance are typically ongoing for the full duration of the course. Across a typical 3 year course, the total average for any condition would potentially be nearly £7000, the majority of which would be NMH support.

The general allowance typically covers additional printing costs and it will also include some colorimetry testing and coloured overlays, though the latter has recently become ineligible for DSA support (in England, at least). The general allowance might also include an extended warranty for a student’s existing computer providing it meets various criteria.

Of those in Mobility, unseen or medical, 38% were referred for a further ergonomic assessment. The costs were harder to generalize for these factors, though a fully adjustable ergonomic chair and electronic height adjustable desk could easily add £1-2000 to the total. In this group, 37% also received travel-related allowances, as did 8% of those in the Mental health subgroup. Again, the costs are hard to generalize, but we can note that the split is roughly 50/50 between those where additional travel costs (primarily taxis) were expected to be ‘regular’ (generally 5 return trips per week for 30 weeks per year) and ‘occasional’ (generally up to 10 times a year). Regular use of taxis could add a further £1-2000, while occasional use would usually be between £1-200.

In 92% of cases, at least one assistive software package was recommended. The table below gives the likelihood that a certain category of software was recommended, among those who received at least one.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disability code</th>
<th>Text to speech</th>
<th>Mindmapping</th>
<th>Dictation</th>
<th>Notetaking/recording</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A specific learning difficulty</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health condition</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social communication/ASD</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobility, unseen or medical</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (DMU-CAN, all conditions)</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 17 - Disability code vs Assistive Software
Clearly not every type and version of software is possible to cover in this way. The SLC list of previously approved software includes 152 items\(^{13}\). Examining our records identified around 40 that were regularly recommended at DMU-CAN, though interpretations of ‘regular’ may vary. The table below gives further detail as to the range of the most popular software being recommended within each category. While there are some leading packages in certain segments, there is still competition and diversity. Dictation has been excluded as this is currently entirely dominated by one provider: Dragon.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text to speech</th>
<th>Mind mapping</th>
<th>Notetaking/recording</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Claroread</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>Inspiration 55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sonocent 39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read &amp; Write</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>Mindview 43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Notetaker 39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Others 2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Livescribe 2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Olympus DVR 20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialist spellcheckers</td>
<td>Training portals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global Autocorrect</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>Learning labs 77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal or Medical</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>Find my flow 16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As above + Dragon</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>I-view 7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some other notable mentions that have grown in popularity, are relatively new and do not have easy comparisons are Brain in Hand and Present Pal\(^{14}\). Some other less frequent recommendations are summarized below:

- Zoomtext/Supernova magnifiers and screenreader software for visual impairments
- Lightweight laptops or rolling cases where weight is a consideration
- Portable hearing loop/lapel mic/Roger pen for hearing impairments
- C-Pen or IRISscan Mice for portable OCR and text-to-speech
- Maths, science and engineering specific software for text-to-speech and dictation
- Ergonomic keyboards, mice, document holders, arm and foot rests

\(^{13}\) SLC Product list, software, last updated: 24/07/2019

\(^{14}\) The mobile apps related to these products were first released on the iOS app store in 2013 and 2017 respectively.
Portable electronic spellchecker (with medical dictionary)

Around 6% of our sample were recommended software to use on their existing computer, rather than being recommended a new one, a proportion which may be increasing over time. In order to be able to take a holistic view of students, assessors must be familiar with some fairly fundamental differences between students own existing devices of various form factors and operating systems. It is arguably also necessary to have at least a passing familiarity with the functions and requirements of several relatively common course-specific software packages. While it is in some ways understandable that course-specific requirements go beyond the scope of DSAs, it is unlikely that the student sees their lived reality and working environment as neatly separated as this. Finally, in terms of NMH support, while the number of DSA funded roles has reduced, the process of agreeing types, formats, suppliers and amounts recommended can still be complex; with Remote Working Tools (Skype etc) adding a further point for consideration (Newman & Conway, 2017).

Even if we only consider the five top-level categories of software in the table above from this still represents a bare minimum of 31 fairly common permutations that assessors can consider when making recommendations. If we just added a few other common recommendations (Printing, Dictation and NMH) to this, making 8 categories, there are now 255 permutations to navigate. Having illustrated the volume and complexity of the task facing an assessment centre, we will now examine the evidence around the potential impact of DSAs.

**Impact on continuation, satisfaction and good honours**

Students may discontinue or ‘drop out’ for a variety of reasons, some of which may be expected or even beyond the nature of any HEP to prevent. Nevertheless, it is a useful indicator and worth bearing in mind that it is likely to be a substantial decision on the part of the student. Projected outcomes suggest that 15% of all entrants will not be awarded with a degree (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2019f). For De Montfort University, the discontinuation rate was 7.6% in 2016/17 compared to a sector average of

---

15 For example: Adobe suite, SPSS, AutoCAD, Pro Tools, MATLAB, ArcGIS, Audacity, Tableau, NVivo.
16 Roughly 4% receive an award other than a degree, 5% transfer to other HEPs and around 10% neither transfer or obtain another award. Only the latter group are counted as discontinued.
6.3% (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2019g). 37% students that received DSAs thought that they would not have completed their course without DSAs (Wilson & Martin, 2017, p. 12).

The 2007 NAO report referred to at the outset of this paper found that students with a disability who were in receipt of DSA had better continuation rates compared to both students with a disability who did not receive DSAs and to students that did not declare a disability. 93% of students receiving DSAs continue compared to 87% of disabled students not receiving DSAs. To examine the difference, it may be more clearly expressed as 7% versus 13% discontinuation: those who receive DSAs are half as likely to discontinue. There do not appear to be any equivalent up to date figures.

Taking what we know about DSA coverage at DMU allows us to model continuation rates for below across three scenarios. A: No Disabled students receiving DSA, B: Estimated DSA coverage at DMU, C: All disabled students receiving DSA.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>% Discontinued</th>
<th>#</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scenario A: 0% receiving DSA</td>
<td>1290</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenario B: DSA coverage at DMU (combines the below)</td>
<td>1290</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Disabled DMU students (not receiving DSA)</td>
<td>720</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- DMU students in receipt of DSA</td>
<td>570</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenario C: 100% receiving DSA</td>
<td>1290</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If no disabled students at DMU received DSA support, 168 would discontinue, per year (Scenario A). This would suggest that there are currently around 34 students, per year, who would have otherwise discontinued without DSA support (Scenario A – B). Comparing this (34) to the total number of DMU-CAN assessments per year (480) suggests that 7% of the DMU students we see for assessments might otherwise discontinue; about one in twelve, or one or two per week. If it was hypothetically possible to achieve 100% coverage, the difference could be another 44 students per year, on top of where we are now (Scenario B – C).
Looking to the UDL evaluation report\(^{17}\) we can see that over time, continuation rates for DMU students have changed slightly, with SpLDs decreasing (-2%), other disabilities increasing (+1%) and students with no known disability decreasing (-2%). This is, perhaps, roughly in line with overall trends, bearing in mind students not declaring a disability at DMU are also 2% more likely to discontinue (Advance HE, 2018). Students with SpLDs at DMU are currently no more likely to discontinue than those with no declared disability, while the same cannot be said for those with other disabilities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SpLD</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No known disability</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other disability</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Student satisfaction (as measured by the National Student Survey) is higher for DMU students with SpLDs (+4%) and No known disability (+6%), compared to the sector average. However, DMU students with other disabilities report lower satisfaction (-4%) than the sector average.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>National Student Survey “Overall satisfaction”</th>
<th>2018 DMU</th>
<th>Sector</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SpLD</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No known disability</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other disability</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Good honours rates (awarded a 2.1 or First) for DMU students have also changed. For SpLD, there appears to have been a sudden drop (-5% between 2014/15) which has recovered by 2017/18. However, the gap of around 10% between SpLD and No known disability remains. For other disabilities, there

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\(^{17}\) This has also been updated with more recent data from the university Strategic Planning Service.
has been a notable increase of +7% from 2012/13 to 2017/18 which is ahead of the sector by about 2%.

Table 22 - Disability and Good honours - DMU & ECU

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DMU %</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good honours</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SpLD</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No known disability</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other disability</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Equality Challenge Unit data has a further breakdown, illustrating the potential impact of DSAs on good honours at a sector level. Students with any disability who receive DSAs are 1.4% more likely to get a good honours than those with disabilities who do not receive DSA. This also breaks down by condition, some of which is shown below.

Table 23 - Disability and Good honours - ECU

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Equality Challenge Unit sector stats</th>
<th>2016/17: Receiving a good honours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No known disability</td>
<td>75.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any disability (Receiving DSA)</td>
<td>73.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any disability (Not receiving DSA)</td>
<td>72.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or more conditions</td>
<td>67.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social/communication or ASD</td>
<td>72.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific learning difficulty</td>
<td>72.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health condition</td>
<td>75.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In summary, DSAs seem to be linked to better continuation rates and in a smaller way to good honours. The evaluation of UDL is an interim report and there have been many other changes to HE over this time that are hard to account for\(^{18}\). Disabled students at DMU and sector-wide still lag behind their peers on these important measures.

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\(^{18}\) For example, issues around unconditional offers, tariff points, EU and international students.
Conclusions
Will further changes to DSA and HEP provisions shrink or widen this gap? Despite the recent changes, it seems fair to say that DSAs can still contribute to retention and student satisfaction, even if the full process of getting assessed and of accessing support post-award can be complex. The DSA evaluation report also identifies that satisfaction has significantly fallen between 2015/16 and 2016/17\(^\text{19}\), which is surely more likely due to recent short-term changes than a sudden revolution in inclusive practices:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2015/16</th>
<th>2016/17</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DSAs met all of my needs</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DSAs enabled more full</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>participation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfied with DSA funding</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>entitlement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What can we do, today, to make the most of DSAs? DMU has done considerable work in ensuring disclosure, diagnosis, assessment and support are highly visible for students. Carrying out 600 assessments per year would make DMU-CAN one of the largest assessment centres in the country, excluding commercial operators and those with many outreach centres. An institution-wide push towards inclusive practice has greatly expanded engagement with DSAs but there is always room for improvement. The DSA evaluation report states that 61% of students surveyed had used “all” of the support offered to them (p11). Whether ‘all’ means 100% of all NMH hours, every piece of specialist equipment, all travel and general allowances is uncertain. SFE have also issued analysis of ‘excessive’ recommendations in relation to NMH roles (Student Finance England, 2017).

\(^{19}\) Special thanks to Graham Coileys presentation at the Association of NMH providers AGM 2019 for highlighting this, given that the original report did not particularly emphasise this finding.
The average number of hours used per student across 29,000 records was as follows:

Table 25 - Average hours of NMH support used - SFE SSIN 03/17

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Average hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1:1 Skills</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AT Training</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This is clearly significantly different to the types of recommendations being made by DMU-CAN and no doubt other assessment centres too. However, it fails to take account the practical reality facing assessors and students when making decisions that will always have a degree of speculation to them. It is fair to say that some students may think things are useful or appealing in an assessment environment, but do not find these easy to integrate into their day to day studies. Both assessors and students are likely to err on the side of safety and ultimately, there are other processes in place which ensure that neither funding bodies or taxpayers pay out for support that goes unused. The line between encouraging and forcing support onto students can be difficult to navigate, further reiterating the need for an comprehensive and individualised process (Scarffe, 2013).

Conversely, we could argue that some assessment centres may be incentivised to stick with relatively ‘safe’ recommendations and do not fully explore the nature of a students condition in relation to the broad range of software available, not to mention the specifics of their course and institutional support. Even the most ubiquitous software (Text to speech software) is used in a variety of ways. AT trainers, assessors and software developers would readily share experiences in which software gets used in unexpected ways, or where a seemingly niche feature becomes incredibly valuable to a subset of users. As seen by the likes of Brain in Hand and Present Pal, assistive software with completely new feature sets have emerged and will continue to do so. Despite major companies like Apple, Google and Microsoft expanding into features like text to speech and voice control; there are some shortcomings that, for now, hold them back from the kind of consistent, long-term and
customizable usage that specialist software offers. BATA, for one, state: “...in general, these tools are very basic, and not suitable to support students that in many cases have complicated needs.” (British Assistive Technology Association, 2018, p. 12). We agree that text-to-speech and voice control/dictation technology is gradually becoming more mainstream; although in our experience, the relatively small number of students that do have prior knowledge tend to respond even more positively to more advanced software, compared to their previous approaches which tend to be more ad-hoc.

This would all further add to criticisms of the £200 contribution for equipment and while many HEPs (including DMU) have hardship funds for potentially meeting this shortfall, it is another step in an already complex process. One HEP known to have streamlined this is the University of Brighton (Layer, 2017). BATA further highlight that in devolved territories where the £200 contribution is not required, there has been no similar drop off of students accessing DSAs. The direct cost saving to the Higher Education budget is estimated at less than £5 million out of a total budget of £33 billion.

Even if we agreed with the rationale; that a ‘basic’ computer is a mainstream participation cost for all students, once the impact on continuation and good honours is considered, the policy could be self-defeating from a purely economic perspective. Universities UK have stated that university graduates see additional earnings of 20-25% over their life time, compared to those with 2 or more A levels, though this does vary greatly by subject (Universities UK, 2007). The specific impact of a ‘good’ honours has also been estimated at around 33% higher earnings than the 2+ A level group (Walker & Zhu, 2013). As there are now around 300,000 students (13%) declaring disabilities per year, there is a considerable proportion of the future workforce whose earnings and resulting tax revenues are at risk.

At an institutional level, DMU students pay tuition fees at £9,250 per year, so if, in our earlier mode, 34 additional students are retained per year, this would be worth £314,500. While teaching grants have been greatly reduced, some of these students may also be on Price group B (Midwifery) and C1 (Nursing) courses with a further £1500 and £250 in central government funding attached respectively. The Office for Students also provides targeted funding in the form

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20 For reference, if DMU had a streamlined process for ‘claiming back’ this £200 contribution, for approximately 432 DMU students assessed per year, it would cost £86,400.
of Disabled Students Premiums, and while this is not equivalent to DSAs, it is perhaps a relevant touchpoint for comparisons between current systems of individualised and centralised funding. For 2018/19, DMU received £692,748, which would be £537 per student declaring a disability. We know that 1800 DMU students receive DSAs with an average value of £3495, or a total of £6.29m.

Will universities absorb this responsibility and funding in the future? What will the impact on students be? From a market perspective, if students are happy to pay fees and stay on their courses, does pedagogical impact even matter? The discussion becomes one primarily around cost-effectiveness rather than individual needs. There are some parallels to be found with a compelling critique of Lecture Capture (LC) for USSBriefs. Huyssen argues that little of the literature around this particular intervention stands up to serious scrutiny, other than the impact on student satisfaction: (Huyssen, 2018, Lecturer captured, para. 2.)

“With business interests, government, university administrators and students lined up behind LC for non-pedagogical reasons...the technology’s adoption is well beyond questions of intellectual justification. It is now a question of power.”

How will DSA assessments be funded and carried out in the future? The primary benefits in reforming the existing system would be in speeding up and simplifying the process at various stages; perhaps even in keeping with the social model, reducing the need for evidence to be produced in the first place. There is also a further case for a more in-depth assessment process; for example, by pro-actively following up with students to monitor and potentially adjust recommendations. However, the clearest trends are towards greater HEP control and reduced individual sovereignty. A common comparison is drawn to ‘pupil premiums’ and this could be seen to be both a compliment and a critique. It is already likely that many disabled students are steered towards certain modes of study, institutions or courses by influences other than their own interests and capacities. Without care, a more devolved system could reinforce these disparities.
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Nothing about us without us! Utilising experiences of disability in higher education; Jonathan Harvey: Marjon University

Abstract
Inspired by the famous slogan ‘nothing about us without us’, this paper draws upon the experience of the author to explore the issue of how to navigate a disability studies curriculum in the contemporary University. Experience of university both as a student and as a lecturer has informed the writing of this article. The article begins by exploring the use of autoethnographic/auto/biographical accounts, before exploring some of the important elements of planning and assessing disability-focused courses in higher education in the UK and concludes by offering some suggestions as to the value of theoretically generated personal observations in higher education provision.

Introduction
I employ the technique of auto/biography/autoethnography to discuss some important parts of my pedagogical approach to lecturing in higher education. I suggest that my analyses of these pedagogical approaches are relevant to higher education staff engaged in supporting disabled people as my pedagogical approach is heavily informed by my experiences of being a disabled person. Within my pedagogical practice as a special educational needs and disability studies programme leader, I feel that I draw on my past experiences of being a disabled person. Therefore, I offer this article so that others may be able to celebrate their own experiences within their pedagogical practice.

Why an auto/biographical/autoethnographic approach?
My approach to academia is one which suggests that personal experiences play a vital role in shaping experiences in higher education, whether in teaching, research, being a student and so on. This approach draws heavily upon the writings of C.Wright-Mills (1959/2000) and reaffirms the importance of personal experience and suggests that personal experiences can be an excellent tool in highlighting wider social concepts. Furthermore, I also wish to draw on the work of Gayle Letherby (2002, 2003) and her contribution to an edited text on the role of subjectivity and objectivity in research (Letherby, Williams and Scott 2013) where it is suggested that in higher education research, our experiences heavily influence the research that we engage with. This has been termed ‘theorised subjectivity’ and argues that in some way all research may starts from the subjective position of the life experiences of the researcher. Given the way that teaching in higher education is so tightly bound with research, I deem it sensible to suggest that as educators, the primacy of
subjectivity still applies. Therefore, within this paper I seek to demonstrate how my life experiences (especially concerning disability), have dictated the way that I approach my pedagogical practice in being a lecturer and programme leader in special educational needs and disability studies. I have previously noted my experiences of higher education as disabled undergraduate student within this journal (Harvey 2011), and these experiences heavily inform my teaching.

There are those that critique the use of personal experiences in academic research, stating that such experiences may be seen as self-indulgent (Delamont 2007) (this was a deliberately provocative paper). Meanwhile, Chang (2008) states that the use of personal narratives in academic work need to have a link to wider culture if they are to be seen as more than descriptive autobiography or memoir. Research by Loh (2013) discusses the concepts of plausibility and utility in autoethnographic work noting that narratives must resonate with others and contribute to their capacity to solve problems. Le Roux (2017) conducted a survey of the perceptions of autoethnographers’ as to the legitimacy of the method. The findings unanimously indicated that rigour was vital, but there was less agreement as to what would constitute rigorous research. This paper then, in its’ autobiographical/autoethnographic approach to maximising the efficacy of higher education lecturing is highly entangled in the ongoing debate that examines the use of auto/biography/autoethnography as a legitimate and useful research method. Nonetheless, I have endeavoured to produce an account which links personal experiences with experiences concerning higher education lecturing, with the aim of my account being of some assistance to other educators.

The design and planning of my teaching

In this section I will outline how I seek to apply both the theory and practical elements of learning, teaching and assessment in higher education and reflect upon how I can ensure that this remains relevant in line with contemporary research and scholarly activity. I will also offer insight into how contemporary research and scholarly activity informs my approach to implementation of student learning. I discuss various pedagogical tools such as the use of humour and how that helps me to engage students in the subject content. Recently, there has been much debate around the marketisation of higher education and I situate my teaching practice within this debate. I clearly recognise the marketisation of higher education (Taylor 2017) and in opposition to this notion, I explore the pedagogical term “bildung” and discuss the strategies I used to ensure that my teaching is as far as possible co-produced with students as fellow learners rather than passive recipients of knowledge (Taylor 2017).
conclude this section by stating the way that I feel that although the planning of a session is important, there has to be a certain amount of flexibility around this. I draw on social theoretical literature which emphasises the fluid nature of life to reinforce this. When beginning the planning of my teaching sessions, I am very aware of the wider context of the activity. I am extremely cognisant of the way that my teaching on individual modules is part of a Special educational needs and disability studies course and as a result many of the students have a raft of experience working with people with special educational needs or a disability. It has been stated that an awareness of the context that the educational activity is located within is of paramount importance is the planning and design stage (O’Neil 2015). Furthermore, it has been noted that higher education is frequently guilty of creating a huge divide between its key concepts. For example, theory is often viewed in opposition to practice; research is viewed in opposition to teaching; and education is viewed in opposition to training (Khan and Gabriel 2018).

I remain particularly keen to attempt to step away yet further from the one-way, linear conceptualisation of higher education, whereby knowledge is simply imparted onto the ‘passive’ student by the ‘all-knowing’, ‘expert’ lecturer. Crucially, it has been stated that within a society, whereby product is considered above process, higher education has seen to become a transaction that can be acquired rather than an introduction to independent and lifelong learning. Furthermore, it has been suggested (Taylor 2017), that the concept of Bildung could possibly be used to contest the marketised nature of higher education. Meanwhile, it has also been noted that Bildung is an ambiguous term (Biesta 2002), but for the purposes of this discussion Bildung refers to the cultivation of knowledgeable and ultimately well-rounded people whose success in life is made up from far more than what classification of degree they receive (Horlacher 2004; Taylor 2017). Furthermore, Taylor states that: ‘(T)he notion of Bildung may offer conceptual sustenance to those who wish to develop educative practices to supplement or contest the prevalence and privileging of market and economic imperatives in higher education, which configure teaching and learning as an object available to measurement.’ (Taylor 2017: 419).

Throughout my teaching practice I remain particularly cognisant of the concept of Bildung and how I can incorporate its principles into each session. Indeed, the diverse profile of student who are attracted to this course, constantly remind of the multiple, and at times, dialogic nature of people's lives (Hughes, Goodley, & Davis, 2012). Consequently, I feel it is important to make students feel valued by being aware of the way higher education should not be viewed
as simply being a being part of their lives, rather than being the only thing in their lives.

In keeping with my approach which aims to dislocate the notion of the economic purchase of a higher education degree, I am keen to find ways to further involve students in their learning as much as possible. I felt that it was vital to consult the students regarding the content of the session. I am determined to embrace the idea of students being co-constructors of their own learning (Wegner & Nickles 2015). I build time into each session where I can be flexible with the content and ask the students the topics they would like to cover. I try to draw heavily on the students’ own experience of working with disabled people which I thought would serve to further disrupt the idea of the students learning in a passive way from an all-knowing ‘expert’ lecturer. I am extremely aware to recognise the way that each session is unique and that the learning of the students will happen in a fluid and unexpected way. Indeed, the topic of a key module of the programme draws on social theory to celebrate the way that life itself is a fluid concept (Deleuze and Guattari 1987) and that therefore disability and disabled people's lives should not be conceptualised in a static way. In acceptance of this notion, it makes sense that I recognise that each learning encounter is unique. It has been stated (Roy 2017) that this uncertainty can cause trepidation at first, but an effective educator is able to use this uncertainty to their advantage, as the unique experiences of the cohort can be utilised. Indeed, it has been noted that a recipe-type approach which dictates exactly how learning should take place can limit possibility for unexpected growth. In viewing the students as co-constructors of their own learning (Wegner & Nickles 2015), as well encouraging healthy debate of the topic, I endeavour to allow for this fluidity of learning within my practice.

As stated above, the Special educational needs and disability studies course at my institution tends to attract students who have experience working in the sector and wish to increase their theoretical knowledge of disability. With the practical nature of the experiences of the students in mind, the first task is to ensure that the learning objectives for each session are commensurate with the module learning outcomes and ultimately with the programme learning outcomes. It has been stated (Kimball, Schnee, & Schwabe, 2015) that learning outcomes are pivotal to the planning of the curriculum, whether this is at the session, programme and or even university level. Learning outcomes are designed to ‘articulate clear objectives around which planning and teaching should revolve’ (Kimball, Schnee, & Schwabe 2015: 113). Having said this, the use of learning outcomes in education is not without criticism. For example, there is much debate surrounding the strict and rigid use of learning outcomes where learning outcomes are akin to a recipe for success in higher education.
It has been noted that: ‘all learning, apart from simple behavioral responses like chanting a times table or threading a sewing machine needle, is part of a continuum. Even chanting tables can be done well or badly. There are degrees of knowing, understanding, being capable, having an attitude and so on, and exactly where one learning event ends and another begins is largely arbitrary’ (Hussey and Smith 2008: 109).

Furthermore, the importance of creating well-rounded, critical thinkers is highlighted by Kimball, Schnee, and Schwabe (2015: 129), when they argue that higher education should be more concerned with encouraging: ‘students [to] begin to recognize and articulate their connections to the world around them, and to work towards goals supported in all the higher education rubrics such as critical thinking and engaged citizenship’ (Kimball, Schnee, and Schwabe 2015: 129).

Therefore, in consideration of this debate, I try to incorporate learning objectives and outcomes into my teaching practice, but through my encouragement of engaging with wider literature, I always seek to encourage critical thinking as well as an understanding of the topic which are both of great importance within higher education (Kimball, Schnee, and Schwabe 2015; Hussey and Smith 2008).

An aspect of my pedagogy which I find very important is the use of humour and therefore I use this frequently in order to create a fertile learning environment. It has been stated that the use of humour is very appropriate and effective pedagogical tool (Kararo & McCartney 2019; Torock, McMorris & Lin 2004). In my experience of being a student present at various lectures, I have found that humour is most effective when it is used not in the predetermined way but engages with individual learners is vital given the ‘massification and diversification’ (Reddy, Searle, Shawa & Tefera 2016: 1820) of higher education. This is an especially important notion to embrace when the context of the session is considered. Indeed, literature on the use of humour in higher education learning and teaching suggests that it can be an important way of increasing the emotional engagement of students and ultimately an effective way of creating wholesome learning environments (Hoad, Deed & Lugg 2013). I would therefore suggest that the use of humour may be an effective tool to use when engaging with a large number of students from non-traditional backgrounds (such as disabled students). Having said this, the use of humour is not without its complexities. It has been stated that in order for humour to be used as a way of increasing student engagement, the topic has to be appropriate and of interest to the students (Machlev and Karlin 2017). Moreover, the way humour is delivered is also important and it has to be used in an age-and context appropriate way (Ivy 2013).
Assessment and feedback in learning and teaching

In this section I will highlight the importance of assessment and the provision of feedback in higher education. Throughout this discussion I will explore some of the methods and complexities of the assessment of my own practice as educator. Much of my teaching emphasises the notion of creating reciprocal relationships with disabled people. Therefore, it seems sensible to suggest that I should regard assessment as a way of assessing my own performance as educator as well and that of the students.

The assessment of student learning is important within any higher education context. It has been noted that the assessment should (as far as possible) seek to recognise that students are active participants in their learning (Rawlusyk, 2018). Furthermore, and rather crucially, it has also been observed that the outcome of student assessment can also be used as a prism through which to reflect on the professional practice of the educator (Robinson, Pope & Hollyoak, 2013). Such reflection is crucial in contemporary higher education institutions given the advent of student feedback forums such as the National Student Survey (Andrews, Brown & Mesher, 2018). Meanwhile, the Higher Education Academy recognises the importance of assessment and as such have developed a framework for transforming assessment in higher education (The Higher Education Academy, 2016). In this document, assessment is broken down into two main types. These are assessment of learning, and assessment for learning. I will now summarise the main differences between these two types of assessment in higher education.

Assessment of learning in essence is the way that students demonstrate the extent to which they have accrued knowledge (Carless, 2015; Norton, Norton, & Shannon, 2013; Rawlusyk 2018) and is therefore used to provide clear evidence of student achievement. This is often also referred to as summative assessment which is most often carried out at the end of a period of instruction (Gronlund, 2006) and is mainly used to determine grades.

Meanwhile, assessment for learning moves away from the idea that students need to demonstrate the extent of their knowledge acquisition, and instead focuses on the learning process itself, and is often concerned with indicating areas in which students can enhance their knowledge (McDowell et al., 2011; Rawlusyk, 2018; Sambell et al., 2013). Assessment for learning is often referred to as formative assessment. It has been noted that a crucial element of this type of assessment has to be some sort of interaction between the student and the lecturer (McDowell et al. 2011). Rather crucially for this discussion, assessment for learning which involves formative assessment has been cited as the type of assessment that is most likely to promote independent learning.
The creation of independent and lifelong learners, that is those who move away from the model of learning which is educator led and characterises much of the education system, and requires that students take responsibility for their own learning, is something that I feel is crucial to emphasise during University education. Furthermore, Carless et al. (2011) indicate that just because an assessment mode is summative, there is no reason why it cannot be a source of learning to students, and the key to this is the provision of high-quality feedback. Notably then, there appears to be a way of combining elements of assessment of learning and assessment for learning, which I feel is the type of assessment that should be provided in higher education as the purpose of such institutions is to support the on-going learning of students. In response to this observation, I seek to use examples of both summative and formative assessment tasks and during summative assessment, I ensure the students are learning during the process. Being programme lead for the BA (Hons) Special Educational Needs and Disability Studies, and leading modules in all three years of the course, means that I am able to oversee the way the students develop throughout the course. Having this oversight has contributed to the way I structure assessments. Firstly, and in terms of formative and summative assessment tasks, I build in informal and formative tasks early on in the module and these lead to summative assessment tasks which are used to assess the learning of students at the end of the module.

I ensure that I give particularly detailed feedback on early tasks as there is evidence that feedback that is overly negative, can result in students having a severely negative emotional response to this feedback (Robinson et al., 2013). I am aware of the context of the situation and provide feedback accordingly. Particularly, in the early stages of a module, I am aware that feedback I give may be the first piece of feedback the students would have received and therefore I feel it is of paramount importance to make this feedback positive. The way I do this is not to provide feedback that is positive regardless of the standard of the work, but rather to emphasise the way that this is the first piece of work that students have submitted in their journey at University. Ensuring that the feedback is framed in a positive manner, ensures that the assessment process has contributed to the students’ learning and provides an important glance into the future to increase the quality of future submissions. Highlighting ways that future work can be improved is considered a crucial part of the feedback process (Carless 2009; Sambell et al. 2013). The way that feedback is future-orientated, dictates that ‘feedforward’ may be a more appropriate term to use (Carless 2009). I ensure that this feedback is provided...
in a timely manner, which is considered an extremely important factor in the provision of feedback (Robinson et al. 2013). In keeping with the notion that feedback should be future orientated, I believe that it is also crucial that the assessment tasks throughout the programme should also embrace the notion of progression. I use my position as programme leader to ensure that the assessment tasks enable students to demonstrate a degree of progression throughout the three years of their programme of study. In terms of the provision of feedback to students, the general aim of such a process is to provide the best possible learning environment (Pereira et al., 2016; Evans 2013; Price, Handley, Milar & O’Donovan, 2010). To ensure that this feedback is as effective as possible, it has been stated that it should be timely and relevant (Pereira et al., 2016; Ramsden, 2013). Furthermore, it has also been highlighted that the provision of feedback should be suitable to the context of both the task and the overall programme of learning (Pereira et al., 2016; Knight & Yorke, 2003).

In addition to prioritising the provision of timely written feedback on student work that is submitted for summative purposes, I try to integrate regular informal feedback within sessions. For example, before I finish the session I try and set a brief, informal task for students to complete that is related to the content within that session. Additionally, for the first 15 minutes of the following session, I briefly re-state the content of the previous session and request that students to orally demonstrate their understanding of the previous weeks’ topic to me. I then provide verbal feedback on the content of their understanding. Sometimes I am guilty of dedicating too much time and thought to this task, but I feel this is important. In encouraging students to learn this way, I am encouraging the students to become active participants within their programme of learning, rather than passive recipients of knowledge (King, Scrod & Weisal 2009; Myers & Myers 2014). Furthermore, I interpret the need for feedback to be relevant and suitable to the context of learning to mean that the feedback provided should be in some way directed to working with disabled people, since this is the vocation that the course is providing for. There is a need for the assessment task to reflect the content of the sessions provided. Therefore, I try and encourage students to think how the topic of the session would relate to practice in their future careers. This will allow students to be able to situate the content of the modules I teach within their overall programme of learning and career plans. I achieve this by trying where possible to draw on the experiences of the students to demonstrate the relevance of the subject we are investigating. This task is made easier by the way that many students completing the course have extensive work experience with disabled people.
Indeed, the literature suggests (Segers & Dochy 2001: Poulos & Mahony 2008: Perreira et al., 2016) that students should always be involved in the process of feedback. It seems sensible to suggest that if assessment should seek to involve students in a way that encourages co-constructed learning, opinions on the provision of feedback should be highlighted from different perspectives, including that of the educator and that of the student. Considering the perspective of the student, I think it is important to acknowledge the huge power difference that exists between student and educator (Green 2019). In situations that acknowledge this, students are encouraged to ‘seek out and negotiate feedback rather than passively receive it’ (Green 2019: 83). The encouragement of the negotiation and seeking out of feedback (Carless et al. 2011; Sadler 2013; Green 2019) highlights the active involvement of students where the student is seen as an active agent rather than a passive recipient. This has been said to ‘enable students to draw on a range of affordances within their learning context to make sense of and to appropriate feedback for their own purposes’ (Green 2019: 84). In terms of my own practice, as I have noted above, I am still relatively early in my career and thus am still reflecting on the most effective way to maximise student involvement in the feedback process. However, as a first step in this process, at all times I ensure that my practice seeks to both recognise and dismantle (as far as possible) the power differences that exist between me and my students. Furthermore, the entire notion of providing feedback has been questioned by authors who cite the way that feedback is not always used by students (Li and De Luca 2014). I am still reflecting on the best way I can provide feedback that engages learners and stimulates them to improve their future submissions. Despite the potential of this view to challenge the provision of feedback, I prefer to acknowledge this observation and ensure that by providing high quality, timely and relevant feedback, the students will be more likely to engage with it if it clearly raises their chances of being successful both at University and in their future careers. As noted above, much of my lecturing refers to the notion of reciprocity and breaking down barriers between people as I believe this is vital when working with people especially those with special educational needs/disabled people (Harvey 2018). Considering this then, it makes sense to discuss some of the ways that my own performance as the lecturer can be critiqued by my fellow learners (students). It has been stated that feedback from students is used in different ways. It is used to appraise teaching (and therefore can signal future changes in teaching methods) (Hoon, Newton, Oliver & Szpakowska, 2015) There are different methods of gaining student feedback. I feel that the particular method itself is far less important than the way that students are informed that their opinion and their feedback is both listened to on acted
upon. In a similar way to the provision of services to disabled people, it is vital that we seek to empower students and reduce the power differential between students and lecturers as far as is possible. There are those that believe that focusing on the personal relationship between the student and lecturer may well be a fruitful way forward (Hagenauer & Volet, 2014). Hagenauer & Volet (2014), argue that higher education in general needs to understand the concept of building teacher-student relationships, and also better understand the way that these can impact upon quality assurance measures. The current context of higher education that is characterised by increasing fees (which is arguably transforming higher education into a commodity that can be bought) (Bunce, Baird & Jones, 2017). This only serves to reinforce the importance of building relationships between students and lecturers. In a recent study carried out by Bunce, Baird & Jones (2017), it was found that following analysis of learner identities, students who viewed higher education as more of a commodity, were less successful in achieving higher grades than those who thoroughly engaged with all aspects of University life.

I feel that engaging with this observation, demands those working in higher education institutions to consider different ways in which the provision of good quality education can be maintained and continued. It seemed sensible to suggest that focusing on concepts such as improving relationships between students and their educators is an important component, especially considering the positive link between good relationships and increased motivation, social competence and well-being.

Improving student–educator relationships seems to me to be a sensible concept for further research. I believe this to be a particularly interesting avenue for research with disabled students, considering the observation that government policy needs to ensure better educational outcomes for disabled people (TUC 2018).

Conclusion: the role of reflection in higher education
The process of reflecting on teaching practice in a critical and reflexive manner is attracting growing interest across a range of academic disciplines (Van Beveren, Roets, Buysse, & Rutten, 2018). Indeed, reflection is considered a necessary practice within both higher education training as well as playing a prominent role in a multitude of professional accreditation standards (Norrie, Hammond, D’Avray, Collington, & Fook, 2012; Ryan & Ryan, 2013). In a recent systematic review which explores the purpose of reflection in higher education (Van Beveren et al. 2018), reflection was considered an important constituent of practice at the personal (Meizrow, 1998; Morley & Dunstan, 2013), interpersonal (Duquette & Dabrowski, 2016; Badwall, 2016) and socio-
structural (Dyson & Smith Brice, 2016; Carrington & Selva, 2010) levels. As a result, it can be concluded that the process of reflection is a key constituent of the work of educators within higher education institutions. I feel that this along with my positioning as a disabled person provide a sound justification for the theoretically generated personal observations in this paper. I hope that my auto/biographical/autoethnographic reflections may be of use to others whose work in higher education concerns disabled people.

References


What Barriers do Deaf Undergraduates face in acquiring Employability Skills in Higher Education? : Dr Lynne Barnes, University of Central Lancashire

Abstract
This article explores the lived experiences of deaf undergraduates’ acquisition of employability skills whilst at university, as reported through a series of semi-structured one to one interviews. In particular, this report focuses on the specific themes of generic skills, emotional intelligence, communication skills, career development learning and work experience. Data provided by the interviewees shows that whilst some of the generic skills were easily attainable, other significant career development learning and job-seeking skills are more difficult for deaf students to acquire. It is evident that the acquisition of these skills is also hampered by a lack of tutor and/or peer awareness and support. This study also discusses the importance of work placement opportunities for gaining employment, and how various barriers preclude many deaf students from gaining this experience. Not least of these is the lack of funding – either from Access to Work (ATW) or Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) – which would facilitate the employment of interpreters in the voluntary work sector. In light of the increasing number of disabled students failing to find employment upon graduation (AGCAS, 2018) it is imperative that measures are taken to break down the barriers which prevent deaf students from gaining the skills and experiences which would enable them to more readily secure employment. Unless and until this is done, deaf university students will still not be able to gain the maximum benefit from the increased opportunities available to them from undergraduate study.

Introduction
This article presents an exploration of the lived experiences of deaf undergraduates regarding their acquisition of employability skills whilst at university. Research has shown that, historically, disabled people have largely been unemployed or underemployed compared to the non-disabled population (Department for Work and Pensions, 2014; Mcloughlin et al., 1987; Chabot, 2013). Whilst there is a growing body of literature which investigates the employment of disabled people in general, there is scant qualitative data on the development of employability skills amongst disabled graduates in HE. It is known that disabled graduates have lower rates of employment in comparison with their non-disabled graduate peers (AGCAS, 2015; AGCAS, 2018), but not the reasons behind this. Similarly, research illustrates that deaf
and hard of hearing people generally experience more unemployment, are often underemployed and have lower incomes than the hearing population (MacLeod-Gallinger, 1992; RNID, 2006; Winn, 2007; The Papworth Trust, 2018) but very little has been written about the experiences of deaf graduates. The Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS) reports and Destination of Leavers of Higher Education (DLHE) surveys provide year-on-year statistics regarding UK graduates. It is possible to extract information about deaf graduates from these sources. However, this information can be scant, and, as with most of the literature regarding deaf people (see Harris & Thornton, 2005), it does not differentiate between those with mild hearing losses and BSL users.

This is a critical point to note, as it skews the figures if one wants to explore the employment of profoundly deaf BSL users, for whom English is not a first language. Their level of employment and career opportunities may be quite different to those who only have a mild hearing loss; however, it is impossible to distinguish this fact. Nevertheless, these reports do provide a snapshot. For example, data regarding the first destination of deaf graduates in 2008/9 showed an increase in unemployment levels of over 100% in just two years - a rise from 6.4% in 2007 to 13.8% in 2009. By the following year, 2009/10, the picture had improved a little, with only 10.0% of graduates with hearing difficulties believed to be unemployed (AGCAS, 2015). The most recent AGCAS report on the destinations of the 2016 graduates (AGCAS 2018) again shows more positive outcomes, with 6.8% of graduates with a hearing loss being unemployed, compared with 5.4% of non-disabled graduates. However, whilst this is the second lowest unemployment total of any specific group of disabled graduates, it still remains significantly higher than the non-deaf graduate workforce.

This lack of research into deaf graduates has to be seen within the context of a sustained government drive designed to encourage HEIs to enhance the employability of their graduates by developing competencies and employability skills beyond those core to their degree discipline (Willets, 2013; Tariq et al., 2012). In order to assess how successful these initiatives have been amongst deaf graduates who are sign language users, a small-scale research project was undertaken. Eight recent deaf graduates from an English university were interviewed on their experiences, together with a specialist careers adviser for deaf students and the data collected forms the basis for this article. All interviewees have been anonymised.
Context
According to Confederation of British Industry surveys (CBI, 2009a; 2009b), 78% of organisations reported that they recruit graduates on the basis of personal attributes and skills and 82% of the organisations wanted universities to do more to foster these skills. It has been argued that graduates need to be able to show they possess the skills valued by employers and must be able to demonstrate how their experience of the undergraduate curriculum developed these skills (Washer, 2007). It is also clear that students themselves are aware of the difficulties they face when entering the graduate labour market and know that they need to develop employability skills so that they stand apart from graduates with similar academic achievements (Tomlinson, 2007; 2008). All students are expected to develop a range of generic and specific employability skills. These include communication skills, emotional intelligence and career development learning. Certain of these pose particular challenges to universities to meet the specific learning needs of deaf students, whilst others place additional burdens on students to make the most of the opportunities offered by university level study in terms of developing their employability skills.

Generic Skills
The acquisition of generic skills, also known as transferable, core and key skills, is at the forefront of current university policy. It is now widely accepted that HEIs need to provide students with more than just the content of their academic discipline (Green, Hammer & Star, 2009). However, the term ‘employability skills’ was not one that the deaf students interviewed for this project were familiar with. Whilst this may have been a communication issue (the students may not have been explicitly introduced to the concept in class), this does reflect a lack of explicit sign-posting on behalf of the teaching staff. However, this lack of awareness of the term ‘employability skills’ did not indicate a lack of such skills or an unawareness of the importance of these attributes for their longer-term career ambitions. When asked about the skills they needed to acquire to help them to find employment, the responses were very similar to those discussed in the literature:

‘... general things like time-keeping and organisation, communication, team work and networking. General skills, really, nothing specific.’ (Sian).

Furthermore, students were aware of the skills employers were seeking from them:
‘Theory and academic knowledge, weaknesses and strengths, organisational skill, assimilating new information, problem-solving ... ’ (Will).

Raising self-confidence was an important result of acquiring these skills for deaf students, who regularly comment on the lack of engagement with their hearing peers (Nikolaraizi & Hadjikakou, 2006). Although initially uncertain in such situations, the visual aspects of university work, such as delivering presentations, allowed deaf students to gain confidence that could then be used to underpin other aspects of their studies and careers. Another, perhaps unexpected, by-product of delivering presentations was the acquisition of skills relating to working with sign language interpreters. Deaf children are not taught how to work with interpreters as they generally do not have such support in schools. When deaf students arrive at university, they are suddenly expected to know how to work with fully-qualified interpreters. What ensues is a steep learning curve, and this can result in the acquisition of a number of additional - but hidden - employability skills, beyond those acquired by non-deaf students:

‘I had to make sure that the interpreter was prepared, so that they could relay the [presentation] information accurately to the audience. I also learned about time management, because [...] the interpreters had rules about punctuality. If I was more than, say, 10 minutes late, the interpreter would leave. So, knowing that there were consequences for arriving late helped me with time management skills’ (Jack).

**Emotional Intelligence**

Dacre Pool & Sewell (2007) explicitly highlight emotional intelligence (EI) as an important, yet often unrecognised or understated factor in relation to employability. Following Goleman (1998), they discuss the importance of emotional intelligence as a means to develop the prime qualities which enhance and maintain employability. According to Matthews et al. (2002:58):

“Emotional intelligence refers to the ability to identify, express and understand emotions; to incorporate emotions into thought; and to normalise both positive and negative emotions”.

As emotional intelligence is about human interaction, interpersonal skills and recognising the emotions of others, it is interesting to consider how this might manifest itself in deaf people who use a visual-gestural language and consequently face communication barriers. This gives rise to the question of
how easy it is to develop emotional intelligence when one cannot hear how spoken language is employed or easily interact in a myriad of ways with the majority hearing culture. Despite being of intrinsic importance in itself, and despite the important connection between EI and employability, there is virtually nothing in the literature specifically relating to EI and deaf people. The term ‘emotional intelligence’ (EI) comprises (amongst other traits) basic social skills, self-motivation, a positive attitude to work, interpersonal skills, empathy and team-working ability. Whilst EI was not explicitly mentioned by the graduates as being a useful employability trait (during the interviews it became apparent that they did not know what the term EI meant), it was evident from their narratives that they did have an abundant capacity for this form of intelligence. Interestingly, much of this related to deaf/hearing relationships.

Of particular importance was the emphasis the interviewees placed on team-working solutions in deaf-hearing situations; a critical skill for them in the workplace. Many of the interviewees felt it was important for both deaf and hearing people to understand that they each perceive the world and its contexts in different – sometimes radically dissimilar – ways. This is arguably the embodiment of deaf epistemology; the deaf way of knowing (Paul & Moores, 2010). Having been brought up in hearing families and educated in mainstream classrooms, these interviewees were acutely aware of the different world views of deaf and hearing people. They also realised that these understandings may be communicated differently so there might be a need to actively seek common ground in order for all parties to work effectively together; a clear example of emotional intelligence:

‘In class I might sense that others might not understand something so I would look to work with them so that we could support one another, but sometimes we would understand things differently’ (Will).

Maybe through a lifetime of watching hearing people struggle to communicate with them, they were attuned to body language and facial expression which denoted, for example, a reticence to communicate. What was interesting, was their understanding of this phenomenon:

‘Some of [my hearing colleagues] weren’t deaf aware and didn’t know how to communicate, so they felt awkward and uncomfortable engaging with me - which I accept and understand’ (Tariq).
This awareness of the attitudes of hearing people towards deaf people was epitomised by the concept of ‘the hearing world’, a term used by several interviewees and encapsulated in the following quotations:

‘Society just doesn’t understand what it is like to be deaf [...] Hearing people do not understand the difficulties deaf people face’ (Pradeep).

‘Some hearing people think deaf people are stupid, ‘deaf and dumb’. They don’t think we are equal or the same as hearing people’ (Jack).

Another EI trait is being aware of others’ needs and acting upon this, a key factor in the workplace. The interviewees all discussed being deaf in a hearing world and the implications of this. In each case, it is evident that they were aware of their own responsibility in making things work:

‘I was invited to be a society rep, and it was an incredibly difficult task making sure that the society suited everyone’s needs, both deaf and hearing members. This was a balancing act, and a huge responsibility’ (Will).

‘I am confident about meeting new [hearing] people. I can empathise well, and adapt to their communications needs’ (Sian).

Some of the interviewees also discussed their own role in educating others about deafness and what deaf people can do. Terry, for example, recognised the distress many hearing parents feel when they have a deaf child, and he considered it his role to educate these parents about the positive aspects of having a deaf child:

‘A lot of the families with deaf children are hearing, but they don’t know what it means to be deaf. I can let them know that I have been through the same things, and I can talk to them about how they can break down the barriers, and how their children can do the same things as hearing people’ (Terry).

‘When I meet families, of course, they are all different. I explain that as my family are hearing, they have given me an insight into how they felt when they found out I was deaf. This has given me understanding that I can share with new families ‘(Sian).

In summary, the interviewees showed that they had acquired interpersonal skills, the ability to identify, express and understand emotions, self- and social
awareness and a host of other skills that comprise emotional intelligence. Whilst it is not possible to quantify how much of this skill they had acquired whilst at university and how much they had brought with them, it was clear that being deaf in a hearing majority environment had certainly played its part in developing this trait. However, despite having greater opportunities to develop emotional intelligence, this in itself does not overcome many of the other barriers deaf graduates face in gaining other employability skills. This in turn means that employers are missing out on potential staff with a highly prized employability attribute.

Communication
Oral and written communication skills are also regarded as important skills for employability (e.g. Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007; Greatbatch & Lewis, 2007; UKCES, 2009) and these present particular and potentially significant challenges for deaf students whose primary form of communication is British Sign Language. ‘Communication’ (including both oral and written forms) was highlighted as one of four key skills by Dearing (1997), whilst Morley et al. (2006) found that employers ranked communication skills second in importance after interpersonal/team-working skills. Employers regard writing as a ‘threshold’ skill, with graduates not being appointed or promoted without the ability to write well (Tariq et al., 2012). Deaf students are aware of the importance of good written communication skills and whilst these are both a requirement and an expectation of degree-level study, there is very little practical training for students to develop these skills independently. It is worth noting the literacy delay which deaf students face. Whilst changes in education policy and practice have led to increased numbers of deaf students entering Higher Education (HESA, 2015/16), many still enter universities under-prepared in terms of their ability to access and produce written English at HE level (c.f. Appendix 3 in Barnes and Wight, 2002). In short, they face a substantial language barrier and so struggle to understand textual material and complete written course assignments. This is not a reflection on their intellectual ability so much as an acknowledgement that they are expected to function at a high level in a language which is not only a second language to them, but one which they do not have the natural ability to acquire (Barnes, 2006).

For these reasons, deaf students are often supported individually by a Language Tutor (LT). Tutors undertake a variety of tasks, including helping students prepare for assignments, assisting with the planning and organisation of projects, advising on essay structure and presentation of work, modifying the language of course materials, examinations and assignment briefs. Whilst
general written communication skills are not taught at university, all of the respondents remarked on the value of working with Language Tutors to improve their English:

‘When I came to university, my Language Tutor really helped me to improve my written work and improve my grammar’ (Jack).

‘My Language Tutor helped me a great deal. It was fabulous! I was very happy with her. My tutor had an English degree. She was excellent. She taught me vocabulary and grammar. She taught me a lot about English. I really developed and improved my English skills’ (Pradeep).

As mentioned earlier, oral communication skills are also highly regarded by prospective employers. This is clearly problematic for deaf students. The majority of sign language users never develop these skills and so this presents an insurmountable obstacle for deaf graduates unless an employer is willing to provide interpreter support in the workplace. However, it is clear from the interview data, that the university has enabled some deaf students to develop effective and alternative non-oral communication skills that are not necessarily recognised and utilised by employers. This is to say that many of the respondents felt that their fluency in British Sign Language had been greatly enhanced during their time at university. Will and Pradeep had both studied British Sign Language (BSL) at university and they both felt that improving their BSL communication skills would enhance their employment opportunities. This illustrates the development of self-reflection on the part of these graduates, which comes as an unintended but beneficial consequence of their broader studies. This also demonstrates an awareness that for them good communication necessarily includes honed skills in their first language. Deaf students at all levels of compulsory education are rarely taught sign language and their language fluency is never assessed against nationally recognised standards. This compares unfavourably with the situation of hearing students, who are taught and assessed in their written and oral language skills throughout their school life. Those deaf students who do learn to sign often do so through informal learning picked up from other students, without ever being checked whether or not they are signing correctly.

**Career Development Learning.**
Career development might be defined as a series of ongoing activities and processes aimed at developing an individual’s career. This might involve acquiring new skills, taking on more job responsibilities or promotion, making a
career change or setting up in business. Career development is directly linked to the goals and objectives of the individual and begins with an assessment of that person’s interests and capabilities. The individual then needs to find ways to acquire the skills needed for their chosen career path. Once the required level of competency has been achieved, the individual then needs to apply these skills and competencies within the workplace.

It is now a standard expectation that HEIs will embed career development learning within the teaching curriculum. However, the experiences of the interviewees in this study suggest this is not always the case. Sian, Niall and Tariq recall that their course tutors did not provide any support, or even information about finding employment.

‘I didn’t even know what having a job meant. No-one sat me down and explained it to me’ (Tariq).

In fact, Niall felt that careers advice was only given to certain students:

‘But there was nothing offered from here, maybe there were some opportunities offered to the teacher’s pets, you know the favourites in the group, but for me, nothing ... there was that kind of attitude’ (Niall).

It is not clear if this is a reflection of the isolation Niall felt as the only deaf student on the course but this lack of tutor engagement was reiterated by Jack. He felt that his deafness was a contributory factor to his tutors failing to support his career development:

‘It wasn’t always easy to engage with the lecturers about work, as I think they were a bit uncomfortable and thought that deaf people would struggle to find jobs’ (Jack).

Furthermore, Jack felt that the main way in which information about employment was disseminated was by ‘word of mouth’ and not presented in any visual or formal format. He believed that this represented an additional barrier for deaf students seeking work.

This lack of job-seeking skills or careers guidance was also reported by several other interviewees:
'I wish they had told me more about jobs and employment. I wish they had prepared me for the real world so it wasn’t a shock’ (Pradeep).

‘Looking back, the tutors could have done more to help us find work. They could have brought people in, who had been on the course and who had found employment. The tutors should have encouraged us to look for jobs related to our subjects’ (Deana).

However, it must be accepted that some of this failure to seek careers advice might be due to a lack of awareness on the part of the respondents that it was partly their responsibility to seek work. This might arise from their previous experiences within an overprotective deaf education system. In many respects, deaf pupils are not provided with the opportunity to develop the necessary skills for self-determination and, arguably, this continues to impact on their ability to take control of many areas of life (See Skelton & Valentine, 2003). At least one respondent seemed to expect the university to find employment on behalf of its deaf graduates:

‘No-one has given me a job [...] I am really disappointed with the university. It’s their responsibility to teach us how to get a job’ (Pradeep).

In addition, this passivity amongst deaf students in terms of taking responsibility for their career and employment options is reflected by Tariq:

‘They sent information out about events that were happening, but they didn’t promote it any further or encourage us to go. Perhaps if they had told me to go, I would have done, or if they had organised for us to go to an event. [...] They left it up to us to take the lead and please ourselves if we went’ (Tariq).

It should be added that whilst these findings relate solely to the deaf participants in this study, if employability skills are not embedded in the curriculum, then all students will be adversely affected. Nonetheless, the overall picture of deaf students’ experiences regarding career development in Higher Education might appear less than ideal.

**Work Experience**

One aspect of the opportunities offered by university that has proved to be successful in terms of securing employment has been undertaking formal work placements or other forms of work experience, such as volunteering or part-time work. Numerous research studies have shown that work experience
amongst graduates is highly valued amongst employers (Dearing, 1997; Holmes, 2001; Lees, 2002; Harvey, 2003; Knight & Yorke, 2004; Paisley & Paisley, 2010; Higher Education Careers Service Unit, 2018). The three interviewees who found employment after leaving university had all undertaken formal work placements or voluntary work which they felt was a crucial factor in securing a job:

‘I did three voluntary jobs [...] and all of this voluntary work helped me to get the job I have now, because the jobs are clearly linked [to my current work]’ (Sian).

Whether the value of such opportunities is being passed on to all deaf students is less clear:
‘When I look back, my friends had work placements offered to them but I missed out. When they were going off for a year, travelling and getting work experience, I was at university concentrating on my modules. I hadn’t been taught about work and I never thought about doing a work placement’ (Tariq).

Despite the clear value of work placements, only two of the interviewees were required to undertake formal placements as part of their course:

‘I think studying and working at the same time helped to develop me. If I had just concentrated on my studies and not done any voluntary work or work experience, I think it would have been harder to develop my skills’ (Terry).

Terry’s comment reflects research undertaken elsewhere. An investigation into the longitudinal benefits of work experience for graduates’ skills development was undertaken by Harvey et al. (1997). This study found that respondents overwhelmingly endorsed work-based placements as a means of helping students develop attributes that would help them to be successful in the workplace. These findings were replicated by a European-wide Flash Eurobarometer survey in 2010 which covered companies in all 27 EU Member States, Norway, Iceland, Croatia and Turkey (Flash Eurobarometer, 2010).

Jack also took a compulsory work experience module, which he completed over the summer. He especially valued this opportunity, because he realised finding paid work experience as a deaf student was difficult:
‘The work experience module worked best for me […] Finding part-time work when you are deaf is hard because of the communication side of things, so this work experience was great for me’ (Jack).

All of the other interviewees stated their disappointment that work placements were not offered as part of their course, and furthermore, that work placement opportunities either within or outside their institution were never mentioned:

‘I just wish that the university had advised me more about doing some voluntary work or work placement but they didn’t and I never thought about it’ (Tariq).

Pradeep also felt strongly that the university could do much more in the way of providing work placement opportunities. He put this into the wider context of disability employment and the need for a proactive approach to supporting disabled students into the workplace:

‘I think the university should offer more work placements. There should be work placements, advice about filling in application forms, how to provide evidence to put onto C.V.s, because it is a huge challenge. I think for disabled people it is even more difficult. They should offer disabled people more training. It would make it fairer if this was to happen’ (Pradeep).

Within this context, Pradeep also illustrated not only an awareness of inequality in the search for employment but also a lack of training and preparation for disabled people, which needs to be addressed:

‘We don’t want people to be frightened of employing disabled people. And disabled people need preparing for the workplace’ (Pradeep).

Work experience was seen to encompass more than simply a work placement, with a need to more explicitly connect theoretical knowledge to its practical application and students’ experiences:

‘I think there should be a better balance between theory and actual employability training within the modules. We are taught the theory but not how to apply this to the workplace’ (Pradeep).
This criticism of the lack of explicit links between the curriculum and its practical application to the workplace is prevalent within the literature (Harvey et al., 1997; Crebert et al., 2004) and suggests that this is a failing across the university sector which employers are also beginning to recognise (Bridges, 2000; Hinchliffe & Jolly, 2011; Jackson & Wilton, 2016).

It is evident throughout this research study that students found work placements to be a critical component in their quest for employment and whether or not they were offered or supported in finding a placement, they fully understood their value for job seeking strategies and for inclusion on their CVs:

‘If I had some kind of work experience, no matter what it was, it would look better on my CV. I don’t want prospective employers to think I am lazy or have been to prison because I don’t have employment experience on my CV’ (Deana).

The careers adviser also recognised the difficulties deaf students faced in getting some kind of work experience that impeded their chance of gaining employment in the workplace:

‘I think particularly for deaf students, the lack of work experience is a real barrier to them gaining employment. For deaf students in particular, getting some kind of work placement is more than key, it is crucial. Without experience, they have nothing to put on the application form and nothing to sell in the interview’ (Careers Adviser).

She also pointed to the obvious merits in informing the students’ decision-making process, and to their confidence building. She told of a deaf graduate who had not managed to get any form of work experience, which had left him doubting his degree choice and his future direction:

‘We keep going around in circles; he is asking about doing another degree; he is asking what benefit he could get if he continued to study and so on. I want him to pick a starting point and he is not. Lack of real work experience has left him unable to move forward with career decision-making’ (Careers Adviser).

In recognising the barriers deaf students and graduates faced in securing work placements, the careers adviser suggested that one of the easiest places for a deaf graduate to turn was the deaf community ‘because it is accessible’. However, this is not always the panacea. Whilst seeking employment after
graduation, Tariq had taken a number of work placement opportunities within the deaf community, but these had been outside his subject area. As a consequence, he felt that rather than enhance his employability, this work experience had diluted his chances of gaining work in his chosen career:

‘When I was looking for work in my field, I found it difficult to get a job, because I didn’t have the experience that they wanted. I had experience, but only of working within the deaf community and not working in the Games industry itself. I didn’t have anything relevant to put on my C.V.’ (Tariq).

In summary, all of the interviewees in this research study were aware of the need for work experience, even if this awareness only became apparent after graduation, whilst they were actively seeking employment. However, even if they had such awareness, interview data and personal experience suggest that it is harder for deaf students to find adequate and appropriate placement opportunities. The ‘communication side of things’ as mentioned earlier by Jack, is a critical factor. For example, interpreter support, funded by Disabled Students Allowance, is not available for informal work placements and Access to Work funding is not applicable for voluntary student placements. So despite policy statements and the value employers place on workplace experience, this important employability skills development opportunity is not readily available to deaf students.

This issue was also highlighted by the specialist careers adviser, who mentioned a student who had wanted to secure a work placement in the sector he had studied and wanted to work in. Whilst the company was willing to offer the placement, they could not fund the interpreter support. Access to Work would not fund it either, because it was not paid employment, and therefore, in the end, the student could not take up the placement offer. The consequences of this are far-reaching in terms of future employability:

‘Because he [the deaf student] couldn’t get the placement - that makes the area he wants to work in that less accessible because he hasn’t got experience in the sector’ (Careers Adviser).

This is a major barrier facing deaf students in seeking work placement opportunities; the lack of interpreter support to gain the experience that would enable them to enter the job market. Ironically, Access to Work funding would be available for this student if he got paid work, but without Access to Work support for the placement, he couldn’t get the experience that would enable him to get this paid employment.
Another graduate had some voluntary work in a charity shop, and whilst the staff tried to help him, there was no interpreter support:

‘It is whether the student can survive in that kind of environment without support, and how worthwhile that experience therefore is, without support and access’ (Careers Adviser).

This is an interesting point; a project by Bennett et al. (2000) showed that the most important sources of employee learning (and by extension, work placement learning) comes from the work itself and from interactions with others in the workplace. For example, graduate employees identified that the major skill to be learned was to ‘fit in’. This meant, amongst other things, adapting to cultural expectations and organisational pressures, and learning the ‘language of the job’. One can question whether or not a deaf student or graduate on placement can ‘fit in’ if there is no interpreter support. How is the deaf student on placement expected to learn enough about the working environment so that they quickly become a valuable asset, and someone the host employer might want to keep? It can be argued, for example, that hearing students on placement learn a great deal about the job, the work-base culture and the working environment through listening to others and through ‘incidental learning’ (see Hopper, 2015). They may use this information to make themselves useful; to get ahead in the workplace. Arguably, even with interpreter support, there is no guarantee that the deaf student will easily ‘fit in’; a third-party-mediator is undoubtedly going to change the work colleague dynamics and in the absence of a common language, potentially lead to an ‘us and them’ situation in the work place.

**Conclusion**

It has been shown that deaf undergraduates face a variety of barriers in acquiring employability skills as an outcome of their studies. This is not to say that all deaf students fail to acquire such skills; this research has shown that deaf students are able to acquire a number of generic or transferable employability skills whilst at university. Generic skills include organisational ability, time and workload management, presentation skills and raising self-confidence, which is an important factor for deaf students working in a hearing environment.

The importance of acquiring good communication skills is recognised by deaf students but there are clear challenges to doing so. Both oral and written communication are problematic, given that English is effectively a second language for BSL users who often do not have the means to adequately
develop either aspect of language with obvious consequences for future employability. However, students who studied British Sign Language (BSL) at university felt that improving their BSL communication skills would enhance their employment opportunities. This also demonstrates an awareness that for them good communication necessarily includes honed skills in their first language. High level fluency in BSL is necessary in order to work amongst other sign language users within the deaf community or to make best use of interpreters within the workplace. For those deaf students who do not have the option to develop BSL fluency whilst at university, there is no obvious alternative to develop enhanced communication strategies.

The concept of emotional intelligence and its relevance to the workplace for deaf was discussed, in the context of deaf-hearing relationships. Although emotional intelligence is not explicitly taught at university, the deaf students in this study did demonstrate high levels of emotional intelligence. This might be a result of deaf people having to negotiate communication with hearing people, utilising body language, facial expression and all non-verbal aspects of human interaction.

Graduates who participated in this study highlighted career development planning as a particular area of concern. In some instances, students were not even aware of what seeking and obtaining a job entailed and there is a clear lack of incidental learning from peers as a result of the communication barrier that exists between deaf and hearing students. This lack of information can extend to academic staff, who may be unaware of the career opportunities open to deaf people or of the need to signpost deaf students to suitable placement and volunteering opportunities. This requires a greater understanding on the part of hearing university staff on the way in which deaf students can lack access to information that may be more readily available to their hearing peers.

The importance to take part in work placements and volunteering was highlighted as a key factor in gaining employment. This study has shown this is particularly problematic for deaf students who do not have easy access to peer to peer information, academic support or practical communication support. This last element is a consequence of the absence of finance to pay for interpreters within informal or voluntary settings. Once again, this absence of opportunity has a detrimental effect on employability prospects for deaf graduates.

Until a broad range of solutions are introduced to remove or ameliorate these barriers, the employability prospects for deaf graduates will remain even more challenging than those faced by their hearing peers. Resolutions could include compulsory work placements within the curriculum, which would allow
Disabled Student Allowance to be used to fund interpreter support for such placements. Deaf awareness training should be compulsory for tutors and university careers staff, which incorporates advice on career planning pertinent to the specific context of deaf students. Staff should emphasise the benefits and opportunities afforded by placements and volunteering. Bespoke employability skills for deaf students supporting CV writing, completing application forms, seeking employment, interview skills and interpreting job adverts are all key issues identified by deaf graduates and so suitable training is needed. These barriers are not insurmountable and with the introduction of appropriate measures such as those outlined above, the employment prospects of deaf students can be greatly enhanced.

References


NB A version of this review was circulated among Association of Dyslexia Specialists in HE (ADSHE) on 4th September 2019

“Widening access matters, widening participation more so, but the learning journey and student success matters most of all... (the) wealth of understanding, evidence of effective practice and case study material present here should place Karisa Krčmář’s edited collection on... desks... across the United Kingdom and beyond.’

Dr. John Carter, Vice Chancellor, Edge Hill University.

The book starts by identifying three ‘gaps’ in inclusive learning and teaching: “. . . the gap between the assumptions of background preparedness for learning that students possess and those they actually do – the gap between teaching in a traditional way and learning in a different way – the gap between how traditional assessments are perceived to objectively measure knowledge and attainment and the reality of how differently individuals are able to express and prove their knowledge.”

Křčmář, K. Editorial Introduction p.20

This is an edited compilation organised into an Introduction and three parts: Part 1 The Student Population presents a range of ‘non- traditional’ students; Part 2 Inclusive Practice for HEPs looks at the consequences of a more diverse student population; and Part 3 Examples of Good Practice leaves the theory and the frameworks to return to examples of good practice. Altogether, in addition to the editor, there are thirty-eight contributors. This book on Inclusivity is nothing if not inclusive.

The real strength of The Inclusivity Gap lies in the editorial approach. Not only is the book comprehensive but also coherent. For Křčmář the focus is always on why an inclusive approach is needed. She critiques the present ‘medical model’ for identified “disabilities” which, she claims, directly promotes a deficit approach and what she calls ‘the exclusive model of teaching and learning’
(p.39). She also asks what is one of the crucial questions in the book: **What is the academic world’s responsibility for its students?**

This book will not satisfy everyone. Conventionally, as your reviewer, given more space I could come up with all sorts of quibbles. But then The Inclusivity Gap is not a textbook but a library full of possibilities for practitioners and managers. The editor sees it “as the beginning of a dialogue... that... will stimulate further scholarship, debate, developments... just the first in a series... where we can share good practice in inclusivity“ (Křčmář, p. 34).

Buy it, Read it, Use it. Add to it.
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**Reviewer’s details**: Christina Healey c.healey@sheffield.ac.uk (NADP NM-R/1013 & ADSHE QA87) is an independent practitioner, writer and researcher in academic language and learning across Further & Higher Education. She has three degrees in English and is a practising dyslexic.
Journal of Inclusive Practice in Further and Higher Education (JIPFHE): Editorial Guidelines

- JIPFHE is the open access, refereed journal of the National Association of Disability Practitioners (NADP). All JIPFHE academic papers are peer-reviewed and share the common aim of furthering best practice to promote disability equality in post-compulsory education.

- Papers which focus on any part of the student journey from pre-entry to post-exit are in keeping with this overarching theme, as are those which consider issues relevant to staff in Further and Higher Education.

- The main audience for JIPFHE is staff who work with disabled people in FE and HE and the journal should be of practical use to this constituency. It should enable readers to gain a deeper theoretical underpinning in critical disability studies upon which to develop their day-to-day professional work.

- Based on the principle of ‘nothing about us without us’, contributions directly from disabled students and staff are encouraged.

- A general edition will be published each year with consideration given to a themed edition if resources are available.

- Sufficiently robust research papers, as defined in these guidelines, may be submitted for the general or themed editions. Narrative pieces reflecting the personal experiences of disabled people or staff will also be considered for publication. Work submitted for NADP Accreditation can be considered for the journal, including short articles.

- All submissions for JIPFHE need to fulfil the guidelines set out here. Articles of interest to the NADP membership which do not meet the criteria set out for JIPFHE may be considered for the NADP website.

- Articles for the JIPFHE general or themed editions should be a maximum of 6,500 words.

- Communication on your submission will be via the NADP office admin@nadp-uk.org
• Two referees will be nominated by the edition editor, who will be a member of the editorial board.

• An abstract, maximum 300 words, is required for academic articles.

• Harvard referencing is compulsory and authors need to ensure references are as up to date as possible.

• Contributions should reflect ethical participatory/emancipatory research, which involves disabled/neurodiverse participants and results in interventions which improve services for disabled/neurodiverse people in the education and training sector.

• Ethical guidelines prescribe that research participants should not be identifiable and confidentiality must be respected.

• A clear ethics statement is required for academic articles.

• Language reflecting the social model of disability is expected.

• Articles must be original and should not be being considered by another journal when presented.

• Formats must be accessible to screen reading software
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