



# **Grasping disabled and non-disabled student voices to enhance inclusivity**

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# Outline of session

- Purpose of the research
- Methods
- Quantitative Findings:
  - Part 1 – academic attainment
  - Part 2 – the questionnaire
- Conclusions and recommendations
- Questions / discussion



# Purpose of the research:

- To investigate the learning, teaching and assessment experiences of disabled and non-disabled students.
- To investigate the end-of-year attainment levels of disabled and non-disabled students.
- To investigate whether there was a correlation between student experience and attainment.
- To use the findings as an evidence base to inform the development of inclusive practice.



# Methodology:

## The research sample

Randomly selected 50% of disabled students.

Each one matched by:

- age group (under 21, 21-30, 31+),
- ethnic group (White, BME),
- year of study (first year, continuing),
- and gender (male, female)

with 2 non-disabled students.

(668 disabled and 1336 non-disabled students)



# Methology: The research

- Analysis of institutional data on student achievement, 2007/08.
- Analysis of quantitative data from a survey on the student experience, 2007/08\*.
- Analysis of qualitative data from the survey (2007/08), and 18 student interviews (2008/09) (not covered today).

\* amended version of a survey from an Economic Research Social Council project see Healey *et al.* 2006; Fuller *et al.* 2009, Routledge Falmer



# Findings – Part 1: Attainment Results

- An average mark was created for each student using individual module marks and taking into consideration the module credit weight.
- Students within the sample were categorised according to whether or not they had declared a disability, and whether or not they had a learning contract.



# Attainment Results (continued)

<u>Disability Status</u>	<u>Average Mark</u>
No known disability	<b>59.35</b>
Disabled with learning contract	57.67
SLDs* with learning contract	56.45
Declared disability or SLD* with no learning contract	<b>54.22</b>

- Only the difference between students with no known disability and those who declared a disability or SLD but had no learning contract is significant ( $p < .05$ )



\* SLD = specific learning difficulty

# Findings – Part 2: Questionnaire results

## Survey respondents

- Survey sent to entire sample (just over 2000 undergraduate students) in Spring 2008
- 484 completed questionnaires (172 from disabled students and 312 from students with no known disability)
- Responses recorded on 'Teleform' and analysed in SPSS / NVivo.



## Questionnaire results (continued)

- Six dependent variables were derived through carrying out a factor analysis of the 34 questions in the questionnaire:
- Understanding requirements (of the course)
- Literacy difficulties
- Support from lecturers
- Feedback (e.g. on assessment)
- Academic participation
- Academic development



## Questionnaire results (continued)

- Questions answered using a scale of 1 to 5
- 1 = strongly disagree with the statement
- 5 = strongly agree with the statement
- None of the scores excessively high or low
- Highest level of satisfaction - Academic Development
- Lowest level of satisfaction - Understanding Requirements



# Questionnaire results (continued)

## Impact of disability status on results

### Disability categories (as used for attainment):

- No disability
- Disabled with learning contract
- SLDs with learning contract
- Declared disability or SLD with no learning contract

The only category in which disabled students differ from non-disabled students is literacy difficulties.



# Questionnaire results (continued)

## Literacy difficulties – disability status

- Students with Learning Contracts for SLDs reported the most literacy difficulties.
- Students with Learning Contracts for a disability reported more difficulties than those with no declared disability.
- In **all** groups, there are students who report that they are experiencing literacy difficulties.



# Correlation of attainment and questionnaire results

- **Across the sample**, students who report literacy difficulties achieve a lower average mark than those who don't.
- **Students who declared a disability** and reported difficulties in class discussions, assessed group work and oral presentations achieved lower average marks.
- **Across the sample**, students who say they understand what is required of them, or feel positive about support from lecturers, achieve higher marks than those who don't.



# Conclusions

- Disabled students who disclose a disability and receive learning support do just as well, academically, as non-disabled students.
- There is a statistically significant difference between the attainment of non-disabled students and disabled students without learning support.
- Literacy is an issue for all students, but particularly for those with specific learning difficulties, and there is a relationship between literacy difficulties and academic attainment.



# Conclusions

- Some disabled students do not feel able to engage as effectively as non-disabled students in class discussions, assessed group work and oral presentations.
- If students feel confident about support from academic tutors and about understanding the requirements of their course, it could have a positive effect on their results.



# Recommendations

- Raise greater awareness of the benefits of disability disclosure and support provision.
- Consider how best to develop students' literacy skills, to improve experience and maximise achievement.
- Further develop support for disabled students, to enhance engagement in group work and presentations.
- Further develop an inclusive approach to ensuring that all students feel well supported on their course, and understand what the university is asking of them.

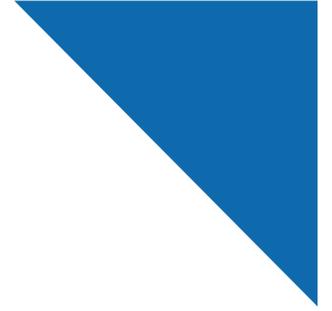


# What next?

- Dissemination of findings to colleagues across the institution.
- Use the disabled student learner support forum to steer actions resulting from the research.
  - This forum includes the institution's:
    - disabled student support team;
    - widening participation policy unit; and
    - disability coordinators within academic departments.



# Questions / Discussion?



# Background information: UK disability legislation

- Disability Discrimination Act 1995
  - disability discrimination made illegal
- Disability Discrimination Act 2001
  - 'reasonable adjustments' requirement introduced
- Disability Discrimination Act 2005
  - 'positive duty' to prohibit discrimination, with requirement for a Disability Equality Scheme



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# References

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