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)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disability Status</th>
<th>Average Mark</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No known disability</td>
<td>59.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disabled with learning contract</td>
<td>57.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SLDs* with learning contract</td>
<td>56.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Declared disability or SLD* with no learning contract</td>
<td>54.22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- 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

