DISABILITY LIBRARY:
CONCLUSIONS, REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

The aim of this discussion paper is to provide a summary of our conclusions and a library for links to resources that may be useful for practitioners, students and other interested readers in disability issues. The paper includes: an overview of the DEIP project, a list of DEIP discussion papers, conclusions, a list of internet and web resources to support the development of effective inclusive policies, a reference list of all texts referred to in other discussion papers, a list of other DEIP publications available in July 2006 and our acknowledgement to participants in the DEIP project.

DEIP

This paper is the final one of a series of discussion papers produced by the Disability and Effective Inclusion Policies (DEIP) project that was funded by the European Social Fund. The DEIP project is a piece of collaborative research undertaken by Sussex and Lancaster Universities. The project aimed to explore ways in which higher education institutions support disabled students through higher education and into employment.

The research was shaped by four research questions which provided the opportunity for considering the influence of disability models with respect to sector and institutional higher education policy and practice as reported by disabled students and university staff at Sussex and Lancaster University as well as the experience of disabled graduates making the transition into employment and the views of employers. The DEIP project contributes to an increasing body of institutional research surrounding the experiences of disabled students in higher education.

DEIP Discussion Papers

- Institutional Disability Policy analysis DP1
- Research methodology DP2
- Disability and disclosure DP3
- Disabled students and employability DP4
- Transition issues: entering and leaving HE DP5
- Identity, disability and students in HE DP6
- University students experiencing mental health difficulties DP7
- Dyslexia: experiences of students and staff DP8
- University students with hearing impairments DP9
- Physical and sensory impairment DP10
- Graduate experiences DP 11
- Disability 'Library': references and resources DP12

The Discussion Paper Series is available on the following websites:

Conclusions
The main conclusions emerging from the DEIP research are presented below. For further details on these points please refer to the previous discussion papers and check for forthcoming papers by going to the DEIP web sites at Sussex and Lancaster University (see above for web addresses).

1. The disability label
Students generally appeared resistant to describing themselves as ‘disabled’. It seemed that their perceptions of disability were associated with a medical or individual model of disability where disability is seen as lack or deficit rather than as a product of disabling barriers in society (following the social model). Also, the term disabled tended to be associated with physical and sensory impairment rather than being understood more broadly to encompass mental health difficulties and specific learning disabilities which were the focus of DEIP case studies.

2. Disability Terminology
Whilst amongst disability activists and theorists using the social model being ‘disabled’ is a political statement, amongst the general population the term continues to have negative connotations rooted in individual model understandings. An additional factor, which may lead to uncertainty over the meaning of the term disability, is the lack of consistency within the UK educational system where the terminology shifts from Special Educational Needs, to learning support requirements, to disability. Thus, resistance to the label ‘disabled’ tended to mean that it was used strategically, that is, to secure resources, which would help in removing barriers.

3. Awareness
Amongst the students there seemed to be low levels of awareness regarding rights and entitlements to support. Although universities had a comprehensive array of policies and a range of specific services, students were often unaware of their existence. Feedback on the services used was generally very positive, but the challenge of raising awareness about specialist services remains. Awareness of support mechanisms within the work place was very limited and there was evidence that even though students had accessed support during higher education they were reluctant to seek support in the work place for fear of discrimination.

4. Disclosure
There appeared to be greater levels of confidence amongst students in disclosing in an educational context compared to an employment situation. But the decision to disclose is complex. It appeared to be related to prior experiences of disclosure and the attitudes of family members and friends. While some types of impairment are more visible than others (e.g. physical) and disclosure may therefore appear unnecessary, there is a danger of other people making incorrect assumptions about a student's support needs. There may be a particular reluctance to disclose information relating to mental health difficulties which appeared to be related to a fear of others' reactions as well as the changeable character of the difficulties (i.e. fluctuations over time and in different contexts).

5. Effectiveness of existing support systems
Staff at the HE institutions placed emphasis on the importance of disclosing in enabling students to gain access to resources. Overall, student experiences were largely positive when they disclosed to staff. Problems generally related to the delays in information being forwarded to relevant staff members and the time taken to process Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) forms.

6. Difference and disability
Amongst some of the students and staff involved in the research there was a perception that there are differing degrees of acceptability and knowledge about different disabilities (i.e. a hierarchy) which also seem reflected in institutional policies e.g. specific policies for students with dyslexia
but not for other disabled students. There is a danger in using the umbrella term of disability that the different barriers faced by, and support needs of specific groups, and individuals within a particular group, will not be recognised or addressed. An individual’s needs may be complex and their impairment may not be their main concern.

7. Technology
While some may view technology as a panacea this was not always supported by student experiences. Technology requires staff and students to be trained in its use and application. The potential of technologies in some areas seemed underutilized (e.g. in the field of mental health), whilst in other areas, such as hearing impairment, there appears to be a misplaced reliance upon technologies- including the hearing loop- which do not always work effectively for students.

8. Social networks
Social networks of support, particularly good peer relations, are an important influence on students’ experience of higher education. While some students reported good peer support networks others indicated negative experiences. Overall, there seems to be need for greater awareness amongst student communities, particularly as they become increasingly culturally diverse which may result in differences in disability awareness.

Social networks also seemed important to obtain and ensure a smooth transition into employment. The benefit of gaining work experience and helping to dispel future employer's concerns should not be underestimated. Due to the additional demands of managing the course, some disabled students found it difficult to engage in work experience and are at a potential disadvantage. However, careers advisors stressed the importance of students disclosing the skills that they have acquired and developed to manage their experience of disability whilst studying in HE.

9. Transition
Services and support mechanisms are in place within HEIs to try and support the transition process. Although change is uneven there is evidence that the sector is exploring different ways of adopting a more effective and inclusive approach. The process of transition into HE shares a number of common features with transition into employment. However, transition out of HE appears to be filled with a lack of awareness about employment rights, a greater degree of uncertainty about disclosure and in some cases this can lead to lower aspirations and expectations.

10. Remaining barriers?
Whilst recent legislation has prompted many visible changes in the physical environment of universities, less tangible changes are of equal, if not more, importance. For example, implementation of effective inclusive policies are influenced by the attitudes of staff members, the awareness of peers, as well as changes in curricula towards greater inclusion. Widening access will require an increasing awareness within society as well as further research into the barriers, which continue to exclude some people from education.

Legislation

Direct Gov provides further information for disabled people with regard to services and rights in education and employment: http://www.direct.gov.uk/DisabledPeople/fs/en

For links to the Acts of Parliament:
Internet / websites

- Action on Access: The national co-ordination team for widening participation. The site incorporates materials developed by the 'National Disability Team' and provides a number of useful resources, checklists and information about disability issues in higher education.  
  http://www.actiononaccess.org/?p=1_3

- Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services: includes links to the Prospects web page that offers advice and guidance for disabled graduates and employers.  
  http://www.prospects.ac.uk/cms/ShowPage/Home_page/Handling_discrimination/Disability/Overview/p!eFqLaa

- British Dyslexia Association  
  http://www.bdadysexia.org.uk/

- DEMOS On line materials for staff development about disability awareness, dyslexia, admissions, assessment and SENDA  
  http://jarmin.com/demos/course/index.html

- The Disability Archive (Leeds): Excellent resource for book chapters, journal articles and conference papers  
  http://www.leeds.ac.uk/disability-studies/archiveuk/

- Disability Equality in Education  
  http://www.diseed.org.uk/

- Disability Rights Commission  
  http://www.drc-gb.org/default.aspx

- Higher Education Statistics Agency (for details on numbers of disabled students in HE)  
  http://www.hesa.ac.uk/

- Mind: For better mental health  
  http://www.mind.org.uk/

- National Association for Disability Officers  
  http://www.nado.org.uk

- OUCH BBC – a disability magazine covering disability issues includes student experiences, quizzes and background material for use within staff development sessions  
  http://www.bbc.co.uk/ouch/

- Royal National Institute of the Blind  
  http://www.rnib.org.uk/xpedio/groups/public/documents/code/InternetHome.hcsp

- Royal National Institute of Deaf people  
  http://www.rnid.org.uk/

- RNID also provide the Typetalk website which gives details about textphone communications  
  http://www.rnid-typetalk.org.uk/

- SKILL National Bureau for Students with Disabilities  
  http://www.skill.org.uk/

- Teachability A Scottish funding council project at University of Strathclyde that supports the creation of an accessible curriculum via comprehensive audit materials  
  http://www.teachability.strath.ac.uk/

- TechDis – supports a co-ordinated and coherent UK approach to technology, disability and inclusion and has links to a wide range of resources  
  http://www.techdis.ac.uk/
Books and reports

This list of references includes details of all texts referred to in the DEIP discussion papers and other key references, which provide additional background reading.


DEIP Dissemination


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We hope that the discussion papers will both contribute to ongoing debates and act as a stimulus for debate by policy makers and practitioners working in education and employment.

For further information about DEIP Project

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