



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

## **Support for Higher Education Students with Specific Learning Difficulties**

**Report to HEFCE by  
York Consulting and  
University of Leeds**

July 2015





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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Introduction

A review of the provision and support for disabled students in higher education (HE) was last carried out for the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) in 2008/09. Since then, the HE system in England has undergone significant change. Institutions providing HE have legal responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 to support disabled students, including those with a diagnosed specific learning difficulty when they are both applying to HE and studying.

SpLD is a commonly used and widely accepted term that refers to conditions such as dyslexia, dyscalculia and dyspraxia. The number of students presenting with Specific Learning Difficulties/Differences (SpLD) has increased by over one third since 2008/09, impacting quite significantly on institutional services and support structures. Across 138 higher education institutions (HEIs) and further education colleges (FECs) in 2012/13, over 74,000 students declared an SpLD, representing 6% of the population of students, compared to 55,895 in 2008/09<sup>1</sup>. However, the proportion of SpLD students within institutions varied, with the mean institution proportion at 7.5% in 2012-13.

The study was designed to explore the way in which institutions have been responding to the increasing trend in the number of students presenting with SpLD. An institutional study approach was employed covering 25 institutions selected for detailed case study investigation.

The case studies involved consultations with 200 members of staff including vice chancellors, disability advisors and academics, and 150 students and student union representatives.

The following study objectives were identified for investigation:

- What are the key issues for institutions in the provision of support for students with SpLD?
- What models of support are being used or are changing/evolving?
- What is the level, type and funding source of support already offered by institutions as a mainstreamed element of their provision?
- What is the level, type and funding source of support already offered by institutions in response to specific individual needs as a reasonable adjustment?
- What is the relationship between learning support and learning outcome?

### Context

- SpLD student numbers in the sample institutions increased by an average of 38% from 2008-2013.
- The proportion of SpLD students in the sample institutions ranged from 2.5% to 27.2%.
- SpLD students as a proportion of all disabled students ranged from 15% to 88% across sample institutions.

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<sup>1</sup> This work uses the regional profiles population of students and presents headcount data of students registered at an HEI or FEC in England, see HEFCE 2012/07 'Regional profiles of higher education 2009-10' ([www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2012/201207/](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2012/201207/)) for definition information.

- 
- The percentage of SpLD students in the sample institutions claiming Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) ranged from 25% to 88%.

## Strategic Approach and Direction

- At a strategic level, institutions tend not to identify specifically with the term SpLD and do not have an explicit vision statement that directly articulates their aspirations in this area of support.
- Typically SpLD is packaged together around the wider disability and equalities agenda with the clearest links to student health and wellbeing. Institutions tend not to think about SpLD outside the wider cluster of their particular definition of 'disability support'.
- Almost all institutions have recently reviewed their approach to delivering SpLD support or are planning to do so.
- SpLD support is mainly delivered through a centralised support model. Most models are branded as highly visible, student-friendly centres.
- Almost all institutions have aspirations towards a social model of SpLD support but face funding and implementation challenges on their journey from the traditional medical model of disability.
- The integration of SpLD support with other student services is driven by an institution's desire to wrap support around a holistic student journey and at the same time achieve improved management efficiencies.
- There is evidence of increased management commitment to SpLD support reflected in the levels of institutional funding invested in support models.
- Moving forward, the most significant SpLD challenges faced by institutions relate to funding, demonstrating effectiveness, integrating with teaching and learning, and improving student and staff awareness.

## Delivery Model: Classifications of Support

- In order to better understand the complex nature of interconnected SpLD delivery issues within institutions, York Consulting has developed three generic model classifications highlighting aspects of common practice:
  - The **Core and Periphery** model is a functional classification, which shows a clear distinction between the support and funding of the central SpLD team, and both academic support and DSA support. DSA support is student specific and is often a contracted-out service delivered to the institution.
  - **The Hub and Spoke** model is a locational classification which highlights the issues faced by clustering SpLD support in a central-hub team. The spokes are the interfaces with individual faculties plus satellite campuses.
  - The **Stratification of Student Need** model recognises the heterogeneity of students' SpLD needs. It classifies SpLD students into four categories: Pre-enrolment; early identification; late identification and non-identification.
- The three classification models highlight the generic challenges all institutions face in the delivery of SpLD support. The specification, in this way, makes it easier to understand both operational responses and opportunities.

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## **The Central Team: The Core and Periphery**

- All institutions attach a high priority to encouraging their students to disclose any SpLD issues. The student journey from identification to assessment to receiving DSA is intense and lengthy, and each stage presents challenges for institutions.
- Almost all institutions offer an 'opt in' dyslexia/SpLD screening test to assess a student's propensity towards dyslexia or an SpLD. They use a range of screening tests that vary in sophistication. One of the most effective identification methods is to use a screening tool on all students.
- In order to encourage reluctant or possibly unaware students to disclose potential SpLD issues, institutions actively promote their support teams and range of services through a diverse portfolio of initiatives.
- Some institutions have outreach schemes and pre-entry support that seek to increase early identification and encourage applications from students with SpLD.
- DSA is a prime resource of both funding and support for students with SpLD in HE. Once a student has completed a formal SpLD assessment, all institutions actively encourage students to make a DSA application and provide extensive assistance in the application process.
- Institutions report that DSA entitlements are increasingly homogeneous and do not reflect the variability of SpLD need. There appears to be a trend towards all SpLD students receiving the same support package as a result of the needs assessment.
- All institutions provide some form of support for SpLD students who do not claim or are ineligible for DSA support. However, this tends to be less comprehensive than the DSA package.

## **The Academic Interface: The Hub and Spoke**

- In most institutions, the interface between the central support team and frontline teaching staff is managed by a disability tutor or academic staff member with a similar title.
- Institutions have introduced a wide range of practice to improve communication and practice between the central SpLD support team and academic staff in faculties.
- Learning contracts are thought to be particularly effective in securing support from academic staff in implementing reasonable adjustments for SpLD students.
- Institutions identified anonymised marking, student placements and international students as particular challenges in relation to implementing reasonable adjustments.
- Institutions reported significant variability in faculty responsiveness to implementing reasonable adjustments for SpLD students. This was felt to be due to a combination of staff training and managerial compliance issues.
- Most institutions have in place fairly extensive staff training for academic staff in relation to SpLD and the application of reasonable adjustments. As this training is generally optional, take up is fairly low.
- Most institutions are seeking to introduce more inclusive teaching methods designed to reduce the need for reasonable adjustments.
- Some institutions are seeking to expand academic support as part of a progression towards a more social model of disability support.

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## Funding of Support

- SpLD funding is complex and difficult to estimate. Institutions tend not to separate it out from increasingly integrated wider student support. It is also important to distinguish between institutional funding (including HEFCE contributions) and other student funding from DSA.
- In most organisations, HEFCE funding and other institutional income is used to support the core central SpLD team. DSA monies are used to fund personal student specific support.
- In most institutions DSA-funded support is estimated to account for over half of total SpLD support.
- All institutions felt that reductions in HEFCE funding (SO Fund) had impacted on their support models. Most however had overestimated the size of the cuts. This was due to confusion regarding the treatment of the former Access to Learning Fund (ALF) and balancing compensations elsewhere. The average contribution of HEFCE funding to total SpLD funding was estimated to be 15%.
- Institutions already invest significant amounts of money in delivering core disability support from sources outside DSA and HEFCE SO Fund including fee income, other HEFCE grants and private sources of income. They have increased this investment to balance both HEFCE funding cuts and increased SpLD-support demand. On average, institutions contribute to one third of the total cost of disability support from other income streams. This ranges from £50,000 to £500,000. Most institutions feel that this can be sustained in the short term; however, many are exploring alternative delivery models.
- The SpLD funding model is significantly dependent on DSA. Students unable or unwilling to claim DSA (including international students), in most institutions, receive a significantly lower level of support.
- Institutions are well aware of their vulnerability to any future DSA cuts. Strategies to address this tend to focus on enhanced universal support and the development of an increasing social model of disability support.

## Measuring Effectiveness

- Most institutions are unable to break down their management information to SpLD student level.
- Most institutions are able to assess particular aspects of SpLD performance. There is, however, no systematic analysis of effectiveness.
- Institutions lack a clear logic model to measure SpLD impact through inputs, outputs and outcomes.
- Most institutions feel that on the basis of very patchy and, generally, anecdotal information the support delivered is meeting student needs. A common key indicator is the lack of student complaints.
- Almost all institutions are seeking to improve the range of performance information they collect to inform the future direction of service delivery. The measuring of effectiveness will be an important part of a future business case.
- It has not been possible to formally assess the impact of SpLD support on student learning outcomes or indeed the relative effectiveness of different support practice.



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## The Student Experience

- Approximately three quarters of SpLD students expressed disappointment about the lack of support they received from teaching staff. Almost all students were very positive about the support they received from the central support team.
- SpLD students felt that they were not consulted regarding the support they received and would like to have a greater input.
- Some students complained that particular faculties within their institutions were ignoring centrally agreed reasonable adjustments for SpLD.
- Students complained that there was an inconsistency in support between centralised support staff and faculty staff.
- Students were concerned about potential cuts to DSA for SpLD.
- Students placed a high value on one-to-one support for SpLD.
- Some SpLD students complained that the support they received was misunderstood by others in the student population. They also felt that a universal support offer would disadvantage them.
- Some international students felt that they were unable to access the degree of support they felt they needed and which was available to home students with SpLD.



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# 1 CONTEXT

## Key Points to note

- Specific Learning Difficulties/Differences (SpLD) student numbers in the sample institutions increased by an average of 38% from 2008-2013.
- The proportion of SpLD students in the sample institutions ranged from 2.5% to 27.2%.
- SpLD students, as a proportion of all disabled students, ranged from 15% to 88% across sample institutions.
- The percentage of SpLD students in the sample institutions claiming Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) ranged from 25% to 88%.

1.1 This section presents the study origins, approach and methodological considerations associated with research design. It is structured as follows:

- Operational Context
- Study Objectives
- Methodology
- Case Study Selection.

### Operational Context

1.2 A review of the provision and support for disabled students in higher education (HE) was last carried out for HEFCE in 2008/09. Since then, the HE system in England has undergone significant change, particularly with regard to increases in tuition fees introduced in 2012 and the consequent reductions in the HEFCE grant. In addition, from 2015/16 changes will be made to the support provided to disabled students through the DSA and the definition of disability for the purposes of receiving DSA; this is the first review of the DSA in almost 25 years.<sup>2</sup>

1.3 Since 2009, the evidence base of disabled students' attainment and outcomes in HE has grown. This evidence has shown an overall increase in the number of students declaring themselves as disabled. UCAS reports a 37% increase in the number of UK accepted applicants declaring a disability between 2010/11 and 2014/15<sup>3</sup>. Institutions have also observed some significant shifts in the most commonly reported impairments: mental health and social/communicative impairments (such as SpLD). In particular, the number of students presenting with SpLD has almost doubled since 2008/09, impacting quite significantly on institutional services and support structures.

1.4 Institutions providing HE have legal responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 to support disabled students, including those with a diagnosed specific learning difficulty, when they are both applying to HE and studying.

1.5 Decisions about how to provide such support are matters for individual institutions. The student-support regulations provide support for disabled students in the form of DSAs, but have not defined who should be treated as disabled in that context.

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<sup>2</sup> Higher education: student support: changes to Disabled Students' Allowances (DSA). 2014). Gov.UK [online] [www.gov.uk/government/speeches/higher-education-student-support-changes-to-disabled-students-allowances-dsa](http://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/higher-education-student-support-changes-to-disabled-students-allowances-dsa)

<sup>3</sup> See End of Cycle 2014 Data Resources. 2014. UCAS [online] [https://www.ucas.com/sites/default/files/eoc\\_data\\_resource\\_2014-dr2\\_025\\_05\\_0.pdf](https://www.ucas.com/sites/default/files/eoc_data_resource_2014-dr2_025_05_0.pdf)

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- 1.6 Institutions are expected to have arrangements in place that can proactively meet the needs of disabled students and which can also be adapted to individual circumstances. The detailed decisions on how an institution will comply with legislation and more broadly support disabled students will be determined by the institution itself within the requirements of the law.<sup>4</sup>
- 1.7 SpLD is a commonly used and widely accepted term that refers to conditions such as dyslexia, dyscalculia and dyspraxia. The British Dyslexia Association defines it as “an umbrella term used to cover a range of frequently co-occurring difficulties, more commonly: dyslexia, dyspraxia/DCD, dyscalculia, ADD/ADHD and auditory processing disorder. SpLD can also co-occur with difficulties on the autistic spectrum such as Asperger’s syndrome.”<sup>5</sup> As many of the effects of different SpLD are similar or overlap, it is common for individuals to be diagnosed with more than one, or to simply be diagnosed as ‘having specific learning difficulties’. However, it is important to be aware that SpLD vary significantly in form and severity from individual to individual and, therefore, so do support needs.
- 1.8 While there is no absolute definition of what constitutes SpLD, most universities tend to use similar lists to that below from the University of Sheffield website.<sup>6</sup>

“At the University of Sheffield we support students who have:

- **Dyslexia:** this is the most widely known SpLD. It mainly affects the development of literacy and language-related skills.
- **Dyspraxia:** this is another well-known SpLD. A student with dyspraxia will generally have a weakness in motor coordination that often makes it difficult to undertake practical activities in an organised fashion.
- **Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD):** this affects the part of the brain associated with the control of attention, impulse inhibition and concentration. Students with ADHD are likely to find it hard to focus on work and often experience difficulties organising themselves around dates.
- **Dysgraphia:** difficulties remembering alphanumeric characters and replicating them by hand;
- **Dyscalculia:** difficulties with calculations and the effective processing of mathematical information.”

- 1.9 The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) SpLD Guidelines (July 2005)<sup>7</sup> state that SpLD should include the following:

- Dyslexia
- Dyspraxia/Developmental Coordination Disorder
- Dyscalculia
- Attention Deficit (Hyperactivity) Disorder (AD(H)D).

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<sup>4</sup> Disabled Students’ Allowances: Equality Analysis, October 2014, Department for Business Innovation & Skills.

<sup>5</sup> What are Specific Learning Difficulties? 2015. British Dyslexia Association [online] [www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/educator/what-are-specific-learning-difficulties](http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/educator/what-are-specific-learning-difficulties)

<sup>6</sup> Disability and Dyslexia Service. 2015. University of Sheffield [online] <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/disability>

<sup>7</sup> SpLD Working Group 2005/ DfES Guidelines. 2005. SpLD Assessment Standards Committee [online] [www.sasc.org.uk/SASCDocuments/SpLD\\_Working\\_Group\\_2005-DfES\\_Guidelines.pdf](http://www.sasc.org.uk/SASCDocuments/SpLD_Working_Group_2005-DfES_Guidelines.pdf)

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1.10 Whitelegg (2013)<sup>8</sup> notes that the term ‘specific learning difference’ is starting to be preferred because it emphasises that dyslexic students think differently from other learners and should therefore be encouraged to make use of their ‘natural learning preferences’. This reflects shifts towards de-stigmatisation and the reappraisal of diversity (for example in discussions of neurodiversity) – such reappraisals require a change of perception towards difference in thinking, learning styles and cognitive processing.

1.11 This definitional uncertainty emerges in the literature review (Appendix B), desk research and case study visits. Table 1.1 highlights the definitional inconsistencies amongst sample institutions based on case study visits and analysis of website literature.

**Table 1.1: SpLD Definitions**

HEI	Dyslexia	Dyspraxia	Dyscalculia	Dysgraphia	Asperger's Syndrome	AD(H) D	Specific Language Difficulty
1	x						
2	x						
3	x						
4	x	x	x	x		x	
5	x	x	x			x	
6	x						
7	x	x	x	x		x	
8	x						
9	x	x				x	
10	x	x	x				
11	x						
12	x						
13	x	x				x	
14	x						
15	x	x	x			x	
16	x	x	x			x	
17	x	x					
18	x	x	x				
19	x	x	x	x		x	
20	x	x	x			x	x
21	x	x				x	
22	x	x				x	
23	x	x	x		x	x	
24	x	x	x			x	
25	x	x				x	
<b>Total</b>	<b>25 (100)</b>	<b>17 (68)</b>	<b>11 (44)</b>	<b>3 (12)</b>	<b>1 (4)</b>	<b>14 (56)</b>	<b>1 (4)</b>

*Various Sources: Definitions based on where each SpLD is explicitly mentioned in institution's literature.*

1.12 Disability categories in Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data indicate the type of disability that a student has on the basis of their own self-assessment; however, students are not obliged to report a disability. Therefore, data may not be representative of the total student population in a given higher education institution (HEI). Since 2010/11, with the introduction of the Disability Equality Duty, HESA has adopted a version of the coding frame introduced by the then Disability Rights Commission (DRC, now Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC)). From 2010/11, new entrants could not be returned to HESA coded as ‘information refused’, ‘information not sought’ or ‘not known’. Therefore, the data should be of improved quality. Attempts to foster disclosure via awareness and buddying have also led to

<sup>8</sup> Whitelegg, L. 2013. Supporting STEM Students With Dyslexia [https://www.iop.org/publications/iop/2013/file\\_61190.docx](https://www.iop.org/publications/iop/2013/file_61190.docx)

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greater openness about disability that may lead to greater long-term validity in HESA disability and SpLD data.

1.13 The HESA website<sup>9</sup> explains that:

“In certain analyses of students who entered in 2010/11 or later disability may be grouped as follows:

- ‘Known to have a disability’ includes students who reported a disability that categorised as: a specific learning difficulty; blind or a serious visual impairment; deaf or a serious hearing impairment; a physical impairment or mobility issues; personal care support; mental health condition; social communication/Autistic spectrum disorder; a long-standing illness or health condition; two or more conditions listed plus another disability, impairment or medical condition;
- ‘No known disability’ includes students who reported that they have no known disability plus students who refused to provide disability information, students for whom this information was not sought, those for whom information was not known and those for whom this information was not applicable.”

1.14 All of the above has significant implications for HEIs for reasonable adjustments to be made to the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment; however, there remains uncertainty regarding what constitutes a reasonable adjustment. This means there is scope for substantial institutional discretion and, hence, quite widespread variation in practice by individual institutions.

## Study Objectives

1.15 The study was been designed to explore the way in which institutions have been responding to the increasing trend in the number of students presenting with SpLD.

1.16 The following study objectives were identified for investigation:

- What are the key issues for institutions in the provision of support for students with SpLD?
- What models of support are being used or are changing/evolving?
- What is the level, type and funding source of support already offered by institutions as a mainstreamed element of their provision?
- What is the level, type and funding source of support already offered by institutions in response to specific individual needs as a reasonable adjustment?
- What is the relationship between learning support and learning outcome?

## Methodology

1.17 An institutional study approach was employed covering 25 institutions selected for detailed case study investigation. **Figure 1.1** presents an overview of the methodological approach taken. The methodology was conducted in five analytical stages:

### Stage 1: Planning

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<sup>9</sup> Definitional Support. 2014. Higher Education Statistics Agency. [online] <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/content/view/2880>

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- 1.18 The purpose of the steering group meetings was to agree timescales and broad approach, selection criteria for case studies, key sources of secondary data and datasets to be analysed, links to parallel study, report structure and deadline, and the billing schedule.

## **Stage 2: Preliminary Assessment**

### Evidence Review

- 1.19 The University of Leeds undertook a short review of recent literature based on its knowledge of SpLD and various academic databases of journals and articles. This scoping literature review ensured that all major reports in SpLD support in HE were studied and used to underpin the roll out of the fieldwork element of the study. A full literature review has now been conducted by the University of Leeds and is set out in Appendix B.

### HEFCE Data

- 1.20 We used the HEFCE companion assessment of secondary data to assist the case study selection and contextualise the findings of case studies and conduct analysis of learning outcomes.

### Learning Outcomes

- 1.21 Our proposed approach to assessing the impact of disability support on learning outcomes followed the methodology developed by Fuller et al (2008)<sup>10</sup>. The analysis set out to compare course completion and agreed achievement levels by institution for a sample of disabled and non-disabled students. In practice, however, the majority of institutions were unable to generate the required data to conduct the analysis.

### Parallel Study

- 1.22 We worked closely alongside the parallel study that focused on the nature, level and cost of institutional provision for students with severe to moderate health conditions, and/or complex physical impairments in HE.

### Hypothesis Development

- 1.23 We constructed a research investigation to identify critical performance hypotheses. The key factors influencing success were found to be:
- Teaching and learning
  - Assessment
  - Model structures
  - Student engagement
  - Funding
  - Personalisation
  - Staff training
  - Management reinforcement
  - Monitoring and evaluation.

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<sup>10</sup> Fuller, M. et al (2008). Enhancing the quality and outcomes of disabled students learning in higher education RES-139-25-0135.

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## Research Design

- 1.24 Draft versions of topic guides and frameworks for collecting funding information to be used during case study fieldwork were provided to the HEFCE project manager for approval prior to the fieldwork activity. The aim of the questionnaire was to establish a clear analytical framework which explored the themes to emerge from hypothesis development with key case study stakeholders.

## Pilot Case Studies

- 1.25 We undertook two early pilot case studies to explore how the overall approach being developed might work and to test out the topic guides and questions.

## **Stage 3: Sample Selection**

- 1.26 We selected our sample using objective data regarding institutions. We also took into account the proposed fieldwork for the parallel study to ensure avoidance of the same institutions.

## **Stage 4: Fieldwork**

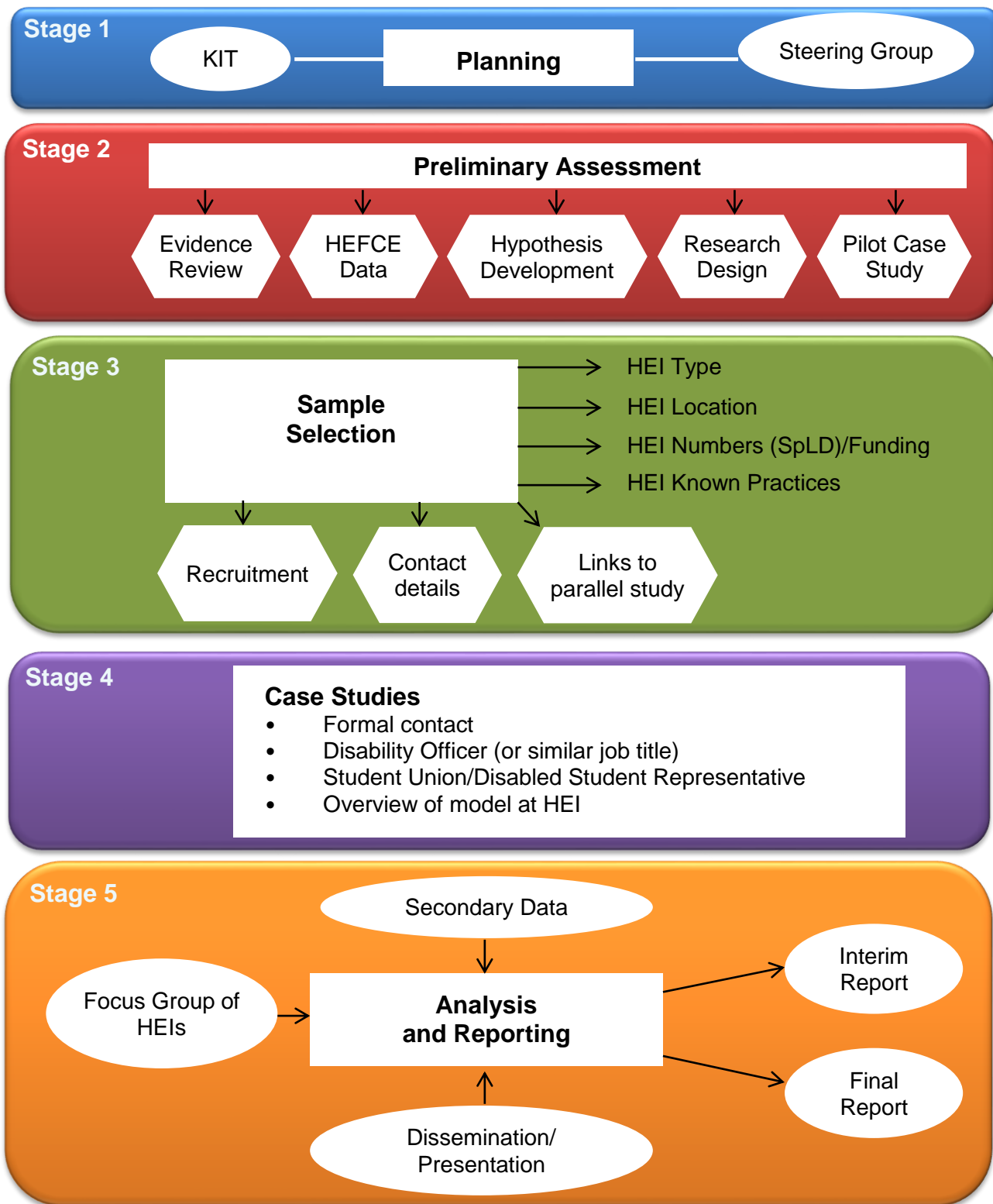
- 1.27 The fieldwork involved a series of case studies designed to gain an effective overview of the arrangements of each of the institutions visited.
- 1.28 As part of the case studies, we introduced the HEFCE analysis of secondary data for that institution to inform debate and discussion. We also sought to establish additional local data on impact and learning outcomes for students.
- 1.29 Case studies were undertaken on the basis of anonymity.
- 1.30 We developed a structured topic guide to ensure consistency across all interviews and case study visits. Upon review of the pilot case studies and discussion with the HEFCE project manager, we agreed the structure and topic guides for the remaining 23 case studies.
- 1.31 Twenty five case studies were undertaken between September 2014 and February 2015.

## **Stage 5: Reporting**

- 1.32 An interim report was produced in December 2014 based on the findings from the first round of case studies. This was submitted to the Project Steering Group but was not published.
- 1.33 Following the further round of case studies in January and February 2015, we undertook the final analysis stage in March 2015. We have made further contact with the researchers on the parallel study to identify where findings could be corroborated.



**Figure 1.1: Methodology Overview**



**Case Study Selection**

- 1.34 Twenty-five institutions were selected from a sampling framework of 137 institutions to reflect both proportion of students with disabilities (disability ranking) and type of institution.
- 1.35 Throughout the report, to maintain anonymity, quotations have been labelled using generic positions within the institution and the disability ranking of the institution. Disability ranking classifications used are:

- 
- Low (L) (under 10% of students have a disability)
  - Medium (M) (10%-13% of students have a disability)
  - High (H) (over 13% of students have a disability).

1.36 Details of the sample selection and method implementation report are outlined in Appendix A. A list of abbreviations used and a glossary of terms are outlined in Appendix C.

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## 2 STRATEGIC APPROACH AND DIRECTION

### Key Points to Note

- At a strategic level institutions tend not to identify specifically with the term SpLD and do not have an explicit vision statement that directly articulates their aspirations in this area of support.
- Typically SpLD is packaged together around the wider disability and equalities agenda, with the clearest links to student health and wellbeing. Institutions tend not to think about SpLD outside the definition of 'disability support'.
- Almost all institutions have recently reviewed their approach to delivering SpLD support or are planning to do so.
- SpLD support is mainly delivered through a centralised support model. Most models are branded as highly visible, student-friendly centres.
- Almost all institutions have aspirations towards a social model of SpLD support but face funding and implementation challenges on their journey from the traditional medical model of disability.
- The integration of SpLD support with other student services is driven by an institution's desire to wrap support around a holistic student journey and, at the same time achieve improved management efficiencies.
- There is evidence of increased management commitment to SpLD support, reflected in the levels of institutional funding invested in support models.
- Moving forward, the most significant SpLD challenges faced by institutions relate to funding, demonstrating effectiveness, integrating with teaching and learning, and improving student and staff awareness.

### Introduction

- 2.1 In this section, we consider the strategic factors that have shaped the current structure and future direction of SpLD support within HEIs. We establish a framework of overarching issues and priorities, which we revisit in more detail throughout the report.
- 2.2 Analysis of the strategic positioning and institutional importance of SpLD support is addressed under the following themes:
- Strategic Labels and Policies
  - SpLD Positioning and Model Evolution
  - Social Model Aspiration
  - Strength of Commitment and Improvement
  - Forward Challenges.
- 2.3 The findings in this section reflect consultations with 95 senior managers drawn from 25 institutions. The individuals were drawn from the following generic positions within institutions:
- Members of Executive Team
  - Directors/Managers of Student Services
  - Heads of Disability Support
  - Managers Responsible for SpLD Delivery.

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## Strategic Labels and Policies

- 2.4 At a strategic level, institutions tend not to identify with the term SpLD nor have an explicit vision statement that directly articulates their aspirations in this area of support. There is, in effect, a raft of policies and procedures and shared responsibilities reflecting the inter-connectivity between SpLD, wider student wellbeing and the complexity of both student needs and support responses.

“There is no current strategic plan specific for disability or SpLD, save for the Disability Equality Scheme document published in 2009. This then provides the backdrop to the study in pointing out that the core values of the university are concerns with: a) people, by development and reward, b) inclusivity, through equity and diversity, c) innovation, through learning and discovery, and d) partnerships, by cooperation and mutuality.” (H, Disability Support Manager)

“We do not have a strategic vision for disability support. Not sure that we need one. It is implicit within our university vision statement and equalities policies. We do, however, have a clear business plan and student offer of support. SpLD support is part and parcel of disability support; we do not plan or budget for it separately.” (L, Member of Executive Team)

- 2.5 Typically, SpLD support is packaged together around the wider disability and equalities agenda, and is often most clearly linked to student health and wellbeing services. This is perhaps not surprising given the range of interlocking agendas that institutions have to deal with at a strategic level. Indeed, it confers a greater advantage than disadvantage. It means that responsibility for this support area rests at the highest level with the senior management team. This has been evidenced by a number of institutions recently with SpLD-related items being placed prominently on the senior management team agenda, mainly related to DSA and funding.
- 2.6 In most institutions, the line of SpLD responsibility travels down from the senior management team through the head of student services to the head of disability support to managers responsible for SpLD support. It is uncommon to see specific reference to the term SpLD in this hierarchy of responsibility. Most institutions categorise their SpLD support as dyslexia support, academic support or within a disability-support catch all.
- 2.7 Within smaller institutions, roles are often cross-cutting, providing a flat structure rather than a hierarchy.

“I am Head of Student Support, but I also act as a disability advisor because we haven’t got one.” (M, Head of Disability Support)

- 2.8 Explicit policies and procedures relating to SpLD are promulgated at the more operational level often classified as disability support. These are documented and feature on institution websites and stand-alone publications including admissions and support procedures. However, prominence and awareness by staff and students varies significantly across institutions.

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## SpLD Positioning and Model Evolution

### Greater Integration of Disability

- 2.9 More than three quarters of institutions had recently restructured or were planning to restructure SpLD/disability support. This trend represents a movement away from viewing disability in isolation as a specialist silo and a shift towards a joint operation and student-centred approach.

“We are currently in a transition agenda and are looking to re-structure disability and academic support. Currently, support for students with SpLD sits within academic support. All students in the university can access this service. This support is now centralised in Student Services.” (M, Member of Executive Team)

- 2.10 In the majority of institutions the integration of SpLD support, and disability support more widely, is being driven by a range of factors beyond the moral, equity and legal responsibilities traditionally associated with disability support. This is a recognition of the benefits of seamless support that follows the student journey in a more holistic fashion and also delivers economies of scale through improved management and delivery efficiencies.

- 2.11 These drivers for change relate to institutional desires to improve:

- The inclusiveness of student recruitment
- The attractiveness of institutions to potential student applicants
- The quality of the student experience and student wellbeing
- Student retention rates across the widest diversity of student
- Student satisfaction across the widest diversity of student
- Student achievement rates across the widest diversity of students
- Equality of teaching and learning
- The way support is delivered and overall cost effectiveness
- The financial security and sustainability of the organisation.

- 2.12 Presented in this context, SpLD has a shared responsibility and a shared benefit, if effectively addressed.

### Centralisation and Rebranding

- 2.13 The characteristics of the changing face of SpLD support are increasing centralisation and rebranding. Virtually all institutions have moved to, or are moving towards, a centralised model where disability support is coordinated from a central support team, which in many cases is located alongside other student support services. Typically, this has involved the creation of a highly visible, one-stop shop which acts as a gateway to the full range of student support services including:

- Health Centre
- Counselling
- Chaplaincy
- Welfare
- Academic Support
- Library

- 
- Student Union
  - Complaints
  - International Student Support.

2.14 The rationale behind centralisation is to improve awareness and access to all student support services equally and promote the concept of ‘no wrong door’.

“We have recently restructured our disability support into a centralised one-stop shop model. This was part of a process of increased professionalisation.” (M, Disability Support Manager)

“The centralised team was introduced a few years ago from what was then a faculty model. The faculty support model was much better funded than the central model. Indeed centralisation was introduced as a cost saving.” (M, Member of Executive Team)

“Within our centralised model, disability support sits under the banner of student wellbeing and is clustered within student counselling and student health. This, we feel, offers a more holistic service and takes us away from the ‘hut in the corner’ syndrome. All of these services have been brought together in a single building, which will improve visibility and access.” (L, Member of Executive Team)

2.15 Typically a front desk team acts as a first point of contact and will advise students and direct them to the most appropriate support. This may involve an initial needs assessment and/or a tailored combination of support and may result in students accessing services they did not know existed or that they needed. This is particularly beneficial in a SpLD context where students enter the institution undiagnosed, have multiple disabilities or may also have other support needs e.g. counselling.

“We will often see students with multiple disabilities. So, for example, you will have a student with a specific learning difference who may also have autism, and what we didn’t want to do was have students have to go to separate places for the advice and guidance element of what we did. So we brought that together.” (L, Head of Disability Support)

2.16 These centres are designed to be welcoming and student friendly. With titles such as Access Centre, Life Centre, Wellbeing Centre, it is clear to all what they are about.

2.17 A few institutions (three) were considering a more devolved route with individual faculties having their own SpLD support structures. This was being driven by communication, quality links to academic support and funding issues.

2.18 The repositioning of SpLD support has also coincided in some institutions with the re-labelling of the service. Examples include:

- Academic Support
- Learning Support Service
- Additional Learning Support
- Student Wellbeing
- Student Enabling.

2.19 This has been designed to remove the potential stigma that might be associated specifically with SpLD or, more generally, with disability.

“The Academic Support team was renamed (from Learning Support) to lose their remedial association. There is a deliberate focus on support rather than diagnosis.” (H, Member of Executive Team)

- 2.20 Employing the term ‘learning’ or ‘academic’ also seeks to draw it closer to the academic support services available to all students, often linked to library services. As the symptoms of undisclosed SpLD are often linked to study organisation and essay writing, a closer association with a universal service can provide a route to more accessible support. It is also more consistent with the social model of disability support, which many institutions aspire to. Table 2.1 shows that while re-labelling of SpLD support is a definite forward trend, over two thirds of institutions still currently promote the service under the title of disability or dyslexia support.

**Table 2.1: Disability Support Hierarchy**

Disability Rank	Tariff	Institution Size (student numbers)	Name of Disability Team
H	1	Small	Academic Support Team
H	1	Small	Dyslexia and Study Support Team
H	1	Large	Disability Support
H	1	Small	Dyslexia Teaching Centre
H	1	Small	Disability and Dyslexia
H	3	Medium	Disability and Dyslexia Team
H	3	Large	Disability Service
H	3	Medium	Learning Support Team
H	6	Small	Additional Learning Support
M	2	Large	Academic Support
M	2	Large	Disability Support Office
M	3	Medium	Disability and Dyslexia Service
M	3	Large	Disabled Student Support
M	3	Large	Dyslexia Service
M	4	Medium	Disability Support
M	4	Large	Disability and Dyslexia team
M	4	Large	Disability and Dyslexia Support
M	6	Small	Learning Difficulties Support Team
L	2	Large	Disability Advisory Service
L	2	Large	Disability Advisory Service
L	3	Large	Student Life Team
L	3	Large	Dyslexia Support Team
L	4	Large	Disability Team
L	4	Large	Disability Support
L	4	Large	Student Enabling Centre

### Social Model Aspiration

- 2.21 Virtually all institutions indicate that they are actively moving towards or aspire towards a social model of disability support, particularly in relation to SpLD.

“Our vision is to have all SpLD support become mainstreamed as part of the support offer to all students. This is part of a strategic shift to focus less on a medical model reliant upon diagnosis and much more on providing support to all students. This will represent a truly developmental approach rather than a deficit model.” (H, Member of Executive Team)

“We are seeking to develop a fully embodied model. Support will become integrated into wider learning and teaching and promoted as

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such rather than disability/equalities provision. It will be a fully inclusive approach rather than a bolt-on.” (H, Member of Executive Team)

2.22 The term ‘social model of disability’ derives from research conducted by the Leeds University academic, Mike Oliver, in the 1980s and 1990s (Appendix A, Literature Review). Essentially, the social model of disability states that disability is caused by the way society is organised rather than by a person’s impairment or difference. It seeks to identify ways of removing barriers that restrict life choices for disabled people. It is contrasted with the traditional medical model of disability, which states that people are disabled by their impairments or differences. In this way, the medical model looks at what is ‘wrong’ with the person not what the person needs. It is regarded as a deficit model, which can create low expectations and reduce individual independence, choice and control.

2.23 In an HE context, disability support in the main currently follows a medical model. Students with a disability have their needs assessed, services in the form of personalised support are funded through DSA and reasonable adjustments are made to their teaching and learning experience to overcome what are perceived as their problems. According to the majority of institutions, the existence of DSA, which only funds specialist personal support for disabled students, effectively perpetuates the medical model approach.

2.24 In the social model of support the responsibility for the accommodation of students with SpLD rests with the institutions. Institutions are required to adapt the working environment to make it more accessible. The decision to adopt the social model approach is consistent with the strategic drivers identified earlier in this section (see 2.11).

2.25 Institutions wishing to adopt more of a social model approach are seeking to do so by implementing universal improvements that removes potential barriers for all students and minimises specific student adaptations. In the context of SpLD, this might include:

- Access to computers with learning supported software
- Improvement in teaching methods and curricula
- Introduction of lecture capture
- Expansion of learning needs support.

“I think our whole vision is that, if we provide inclusive practice and teaching and learning to the mainstream, then fewer individual reasonable adjustments will be required and that really is where we are going with our strategy. There will always be some individual requirements needed, but if you can mainstream a lot of the reasonable adjustments that now are individually required then actually that is going to be better for everyone.” (L, Student Services Manager)

2.26 Progress towards the social model varies significantly across institutions but is generally at an early stage. However, any significant changes to the planned DSA funding regime might hasten the pace of change. Institutions that are close to achieving social models tend to be smaller, specialist institutions.



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“We feel we are close to establishing a social mainstreamed model. Initial dyslexia screening has been mainstreamed and SpLD type support is available to any student in the university. It is not dependent on medical diagnosis.” (H, Student Services Manager)

### **Practice Example: Working toward a social model**

Key features include:

- All students are able to access support from the Academic Support.
- In 2013/14, the institution had 74 SpLD and 71 non-SpLD students accessing the support service.
- Provide a wide range of learning-development workshops to both SpLD and non SpLD students. Topics delivered in one-hour slots include: Basic academic language; Time management; Mindfulness for creativity; Motivation and procrastination; Memory strategies; Sleep well – feel well; Basic essay structure; Emotional intelligence.
- All students can make use of the assistive software on the campus computers.
- The institution offers all students an initial screening service to identify either a SpLD or to help identify a student’s preferred learning style. The institution has assignment-based assessments so exam time is not an issue.
- According to the National Student Survey (NSS) 2012/13, students with dyslexia were equally as satisfied with their overall experience as non-disabled students and students with a disability were more satisfied than non-disabled students.

## **Strength of Commitment and Improvement**

2.27 Overall, the increase in the integration of SpLD support alongside other services appears to have increased its institutional profile and management commitment to provide support. It is high on the agenda as part and parcel of the central desire to improve the student experience and student outcomes. This is reflected in institutional investment in SpLD/disability support. On average, institutions contribute approximately one third of the total cost of SpLD support (excluding HEFCE and DSA funding). There is also a commitment to at least sustaining these levels over the short to medium term. Beyond this, any further investment is likely to be more indirect and linked to social model type activities.

## **Forward Challenges**

2.28 We have painted a picture that presents a stronger strategic commitment to SpLD support. This has potentially quite radical implications for the way support is delivered in the future. The social model approach for many institutions is still aspirational and all acknowledge the significant challenges associated with transitioning from medical to social. These include:

- **Funding**

Some institutions are concerned with what they perceived as declining HEFCE funding. Most, however, had greater fears around potential plans to cut elements of DSA support.

“Our biggest challenge is declining HEFCE funding. Historically, we have used this money to cover the core staffing costs of disability support. We are, however, committed to retaining support at current levels therefore the gap was plugged by our own monies. This has

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now been flagged as an area of concern, and we need to review contingencies for the future. Our expectation is that further direct university funding will be needed next year.” (L, Member of the Executive Team).

- **Demonstrating Effectiveness**

Most institutions feel that they need to collect better information to assess the effectiveness of SpLD support.

“We review success outcomes in terms of those who did and those who did not receive support from our team to support SpLD [...] we do our own (secondary) analysis of high level data, including drop out/retention, but it does not identify outcomes by impairment, say physical versus learning difficulties.” (M, Disability Support Manager)

- **Implementing Teaching and Learning Strategies; Particularly Technical Solutions**

Most institutions are seeking to minimise the need for SpLD specialist support adaptations by improving teaching methods.

“We’re currently developing new frameworks for new programmes of learning so in future, programmes will be designed to embrace the needs of all students.” (M, Disability Support Manager)

“The aim via curriculum review is to get all teaching in an accessible format via Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) multi-modal products, good practice in teaching and learning – almost a mainstreaming approach [...] in student support you get 20% of students using 80% of resource, but we want to get the resource out there and have this formula reverse. This requires an analysis of what our standard offer is and what we mean by standard.” (H, Student Services Manager)

- **Maximising Student and Staff Awareness**

Most institutions are seeking to introduce strategies to improve both student and staff awareness of SpLD support.

“The biggest challenges we face relate to student and staff awareness of the service on offer.” (H, Member of Executive Team)

2.29 Further details relating to the nature of these challenges will be addressed by illustration later in the report.

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## 3 DELIVERY MODELS: CLASSIFICATION OF SUPPORT

### Key Points to Note

- In order to better understand the complex nature of interconnected SpLD delivery issues within institutions, York Consulting has developed three generic model classifications highlighting aspects of common practice.
- The Core and Periphery model is a functional classification which shows a clear distinction between the support and funding of the central SpLD team and both academic support and DSA support. DSA support is student specific and is often a contracted-out service delivered to the institution.
- The Hub and Spoke model is a locational classification which highlights the issues faced by clustering SpLD support in a central-hub team. The spokes are the interfaces with individual faculties plus satellite campuses.
- The Stratification of Student Need model, recognises the heterogeneity of students' SpLD needs. It classifies SpLD students into four categories: pre-enrolment; early identification; late identification and non-identification.
- The three classification models highlight the generic challenges all institutions face in the delivery of SpLD support. The specification in this way makes it easier to understand both operational responses and opportunities.

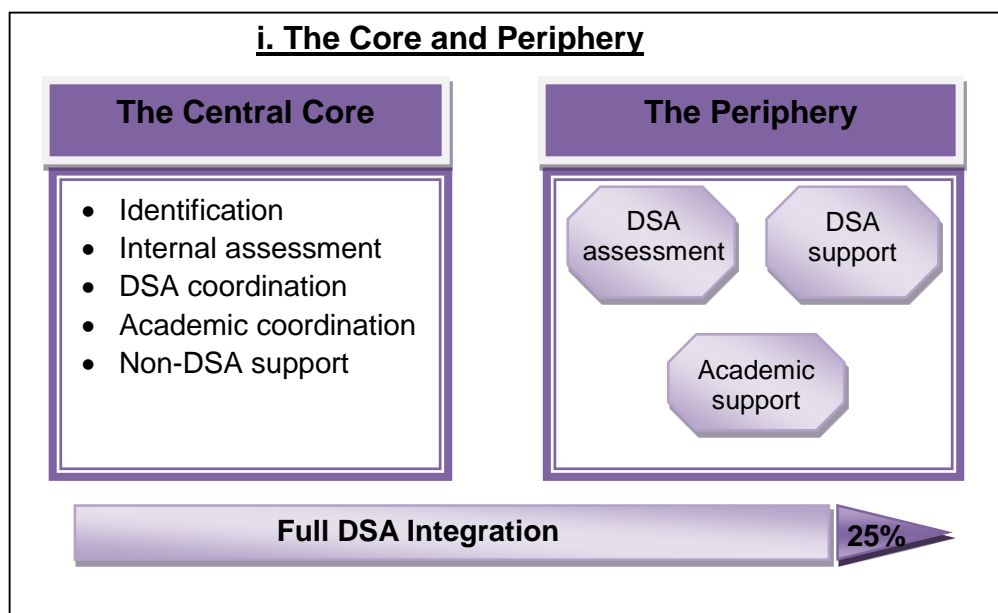
### Introduction

- 3.1 This section explores the operational delivery of SpLD support. While there is considerable variation across institutions in scale, emphasis and combinations of specific support, what might be described as the generic model is common to all. By first clarifying the structure of the generic model, it will be easier to understand the context of delivery-practice themes highlighted in the next section.
- 3.2 The generic SpLD delivery model consists of three inter-related components, which we have characterised as follows:
- i) The Core and Periphery (Functional Support)
  - ii) The Hub and Spoke (Locational Support)
  - iii) The Stratification of Student Need (Student Categorisation)
- 3.3 It should be noted that these are York Consulting terms that we feel accurately describe the fundamentals of a complex set of overlapping priorities and processes. The analysis presented here, and in Section 4, is based on consultations with 125 individuals drawn from 25 institutions. The positions held by staff members include:
- Student Services Managers
  - Disability/Dyslexia Support Managers
  - Disability/Dyslexia Support Workers
  - Academic Tutors with responsibility for disability/dyslexia
  - Academic Support Managers
  - Disability/Dyslexia Administrators
  - Student Union Officers.

## i) The Core and Periphery (Functional Support)

- 3.4 The Core and Periphery model describes the general operational structure, which all HEIs we consulted broadly follow in delivering SpLD support to students. The 'core' refers to a centralised support function that manages and coordinates the institution-based SpLD support. The 'periphery' describes a collection of SpLD support services that in the majority of institutions are external to the central team and, in many cases, elements are sub-contracted and delivered by staff outside the institution itself. These relate primarily to DSA-funded assessment and support and academic support. A summary of the model is set out in Figure 3.1.

**Figure 3.1: The Core and Periphery Model Outline**



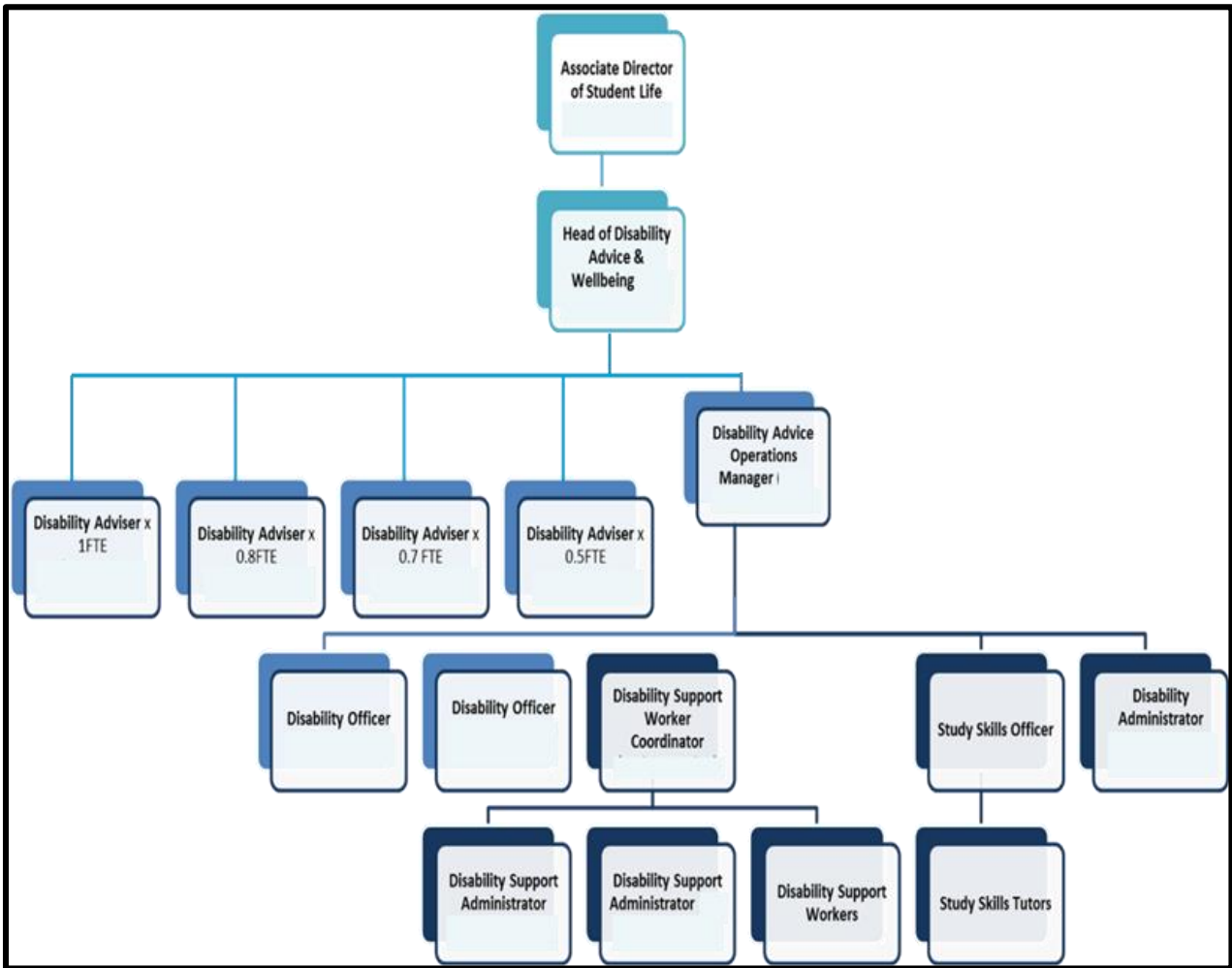
### The Core

- 3.5 The core team is made up of disability/SpLD administrators and support workers. In small institutions, it covers the whole disability function while larger organisations may have a dedicated dyslexia team or unit.
- 3.6 The core team, which consists of between 2 and 16 members of staff, is typically part of student services and often located within the integrated one-stop shop type location discussed in the previous section. Some, however, are more visible and accessible than others. An example of a core team structure is set out in Figure 3.2.
- 3.7 We have identified five key activities that are delivered by the central support team. These are discussed briefly below.

#### Identification of SpLD Students

- 3.8 One of the most time-consuming tasks involves the identification of potential SpLD students. This includes pre-entry disclosures and the screening of students within the institution to test for dyslexia propensity: evidence of dyslexia type symptoms.

**Figure 3.2: Core Team Structure Example**



3.9 One of the biggest challenges the team face, in this context, relates to late disclosures, which often appear around exam time, and non-disclosure (unidentified SpLD). Institutions identified the following student groups as having high levels of non-disclosure:

- International students: it is believed that in some cultures there is a stigma associated with disability and dyslexia in particular, even non-recognition of the condition. Issues also arise with understanding whether the issue is dyslexia or English as a second language.
- Postgraduate students and mature students: who may have developed coping mechanisms.
- Placement students concerned with repercussions for fitness to practice.

#### Internal Assessment

3.10 The core team is responsible for facilitating a formal SpLD assessment for students displaying SpLD propensity. This is typically conducted by an external educational psychologist and can cost up to £650. An assessment of this nature is a requirement in order to progress to potential DSA funding.

3.11 Approximately one fifth of institutions pay the total cost of the assessment on behalf of home students, 60% make a contribution (ranging from 50% - 70% of the total cost) and 20% require students to pay the full fee. A number of institutions will pay the full cost of an assessment for international students.

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- 3.12 Some institutions felt the student contribution toward the assessment was an access barrier.

“We used to operate a 50/50 policy where the students had to pay £150, but it was perceived that this put some students off undertaking the diagnostic assessment. So, this was changed around three years ago. International students are funded through another pot using university funds.” (M, Student Services Manager)

- 3.13 This internal assessment represents a significant cost to some institutions, in some cases up to £60,000 per year.

#### DSA Coordination

- 3.14 The core team encourages and supports students with a positive educational psychologist SpLD assessment to make a claim for DSA. This involves, in some cases, arranging the DSA assessment and actioning elements of the DSA support plan.

#### Academic Coordination

- 3.15 The core team works closely with academic staff in faculties to ensure that reasonable adjustments that fall outside the DSA plan are met. They also receive referrals from teaching staff regarding potential SpLD students.

#### Non-DSA Support

- 3.16 The core team provides direct support for SpLD students who are unable or unwilling to access DSA support. In most institutions, there is a minimal resource to devote to this activity. Students will often be referred to academic support. This represents a critical area of under-investment in most institutions.

### **The Periphery**

- 3.17 The periphery describes SpLD support, which in most institutions is essentially peripheral to the activities of the core support team: primarily DSA and Academic Support. In one quarter of institutions, we found evidence of full integration where they were directly delivering DSA support in-house on behalf of students. In the remainder of institutions, DSA support was in the main contracted out, although there was variation in the level of partial in-house delivery.

- 3.18 From the perspective of DSA, this support was also peripheral in the sense that funding is not allocated to the institution but rather is the entitlement of the individual student concerned and is paid to that student by Student Finance England (SFE) or to the organisation providing the service or equipment.

#### DSA

- 3.19 DSA is operated by SFE for English students with similar schemes operating in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. It was established in 1993 with SFE taking over delivery responsibility from local authorities in 2009. DSA grants are designed to help disabled students study on an equal basis with other students. The grant contributes to the additional studying costs or expenses that the student is obliged to incur as a direct result of their disability, including SpLD.

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## DSA Needs Assessment

3.20 All SpLD students with proof of their SpLD, based on a report by an educational psychologist or specialist teacher need, to have an assessment of need to establish the exact assistance required from DSA and the student's institution. This is conducted free of charge to the student and institution at an approved DSA assessment centre of the student's choice. One third of institutions we spoke to had their own DSA assessment centre, which they operated on a commercial basis for their own students and those of other institutions in the locality. For the majority of institutions without an assessment centre on site, students are provided with a list of centres close to their home or institution.

## DSA Support

3.21 The DSA study needs assessor will provide a list of recommendations to the Funding Body. Once the Funding Body has approved the recommendations, following the assessment process, students will receive an 'entitlement letter' from SFE that specifies their funded support under four headings:

- i) **Equipment allowance:** in a SpLD context this tends to be a laptop of varying specifications loaded with assistive software. The maximum grant value of is £5,212 for full-time undergraduate students.
- ii) **Non-medical help allowance:** this could cover training to use the assistive technology, the cost of scribes and one to one support. One to one support tends to be the more significant item with students eligible for between 20 and 30 sessions with a support worker per year. The maximum grant allowance per year is £20,725 for full-time undergraduates.
- iii) **General Allowance:** this covers the cost of the study needs assessment, plus photocopying paper, printer cartridges etc. The maximum annual allowance is £1,741 for full-time undergraduate students.
- iv) **Travel Allowance:** this covers the reasonable costs to enable the student to access their course, less public transport costs. This is an uncapped allowance.

3.22 A full-time undergraduate student on a three-year course entitled to the maximum DSA allowance could potentially receive support to a value of £71,083+. This support is specific to the student concerned, and they must produce receipts for any service received in order to make a claim. What they do not use they cannot claim.

3.23 Full-time and part-time postgraduates are entitled to a single allowance of up to £10,362 a year. This can be used for each of the four categories above. Students on full-time Initial Teacher Training (ITT) courses qualify for the same maximum DSA funding awards as undergraduates.

3.24 It is clear that DSA support is very substantial and can be significantly greater than the funding that institutions themselves invest in disability support (including HEFCE support).

3.25 Students can decide who they want to deliver the support but most are directed to the appropriate support by the institution's core support team. A majority of institutions contract out this service to third parties; therefore, any funding flows through the institution. A minority (40%), however, deliver elements of the service themselves and, in so, doing are closing the gap between the core and the periphery.

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## Academic Support

3.26 Academic support is a universal service available to all students within an HEI. The support provided is in addition to that which students would receive from course lecturers and coordinators. It covers a wide range of areas, including practical one to one support and workshops on topics such as:

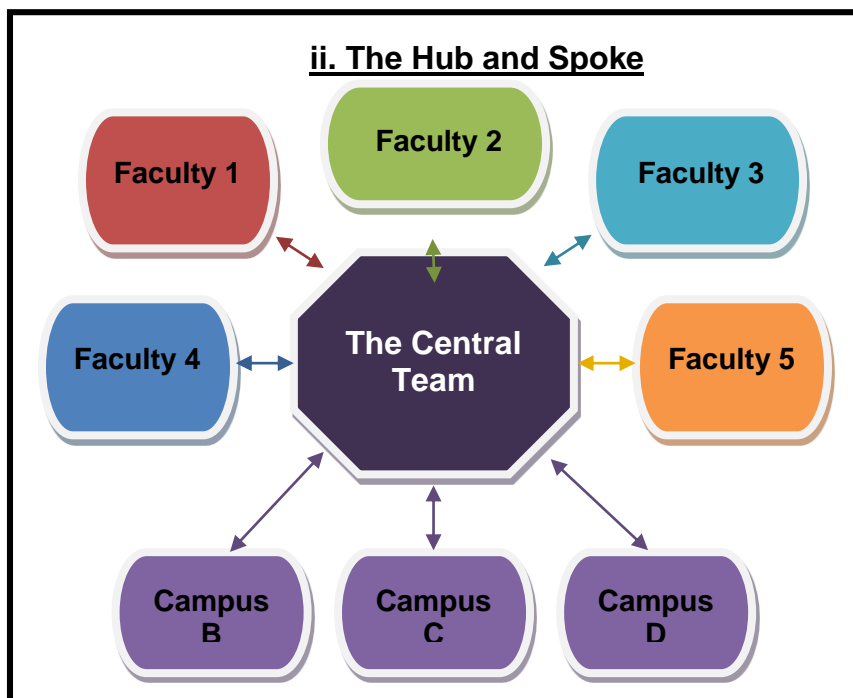
- Taking notes and lectures
- Essay writing
- Managing time
- Organising and writing dissertations
- Preparing for exams and revision techniques
- Strategies for spelling and grammar.

3.27 The range of support provided is highly relevant to SpLD students but, in all but one institution we spoke to, it is delivered separately from SpLD support. There is, however, a close referral arrangement particularly for SpLD students not able or willing to be supported through the DSA route. A number of institutions indicated that they were seeking to extend academic support functions as part of their aspiration towards a social model of disability support.

### **ii) The Hub and Spoke (Locational)**

3.28 The Hub and Spoke element of the generic support model focuses on the relationship between the centralised SpLD support team and the critical points of support delivery. Irrespective of integrated practice, there are key locational interfaces that need to be managed. These relate to relationships with academic faculties and satellite campuses. An overview of the model is set out in Figure 3.3.

**Figure 3.3: Hub and Spoke Model**





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## Faculties

- 3.29 A critical dimension in SpLD support relates to the responsiveness of faculties to the reasonable adjustments identified centrally. This can be a challenge for the central team, spreading resources to provide customised support for what, in some institutions, can be a significant number of faculties.
- 3.30 This is addressed through a range of initiatives including learner support plans, disability/SpLD tutors in faculties and academic continuing professional development (CPD) relating to SpLD. Each set of activities and relationships from the central support team represents an individual support spoke. In order to overcome hub and spoke issues, some institutions are considering devolving support to faculties.
- 3.31 Perhaps the biggest challenge for the Hub and Spoke support model is determining/influencing what happens in a range of academic locations with differing structures and cultures where the central team have no direct responsibility.

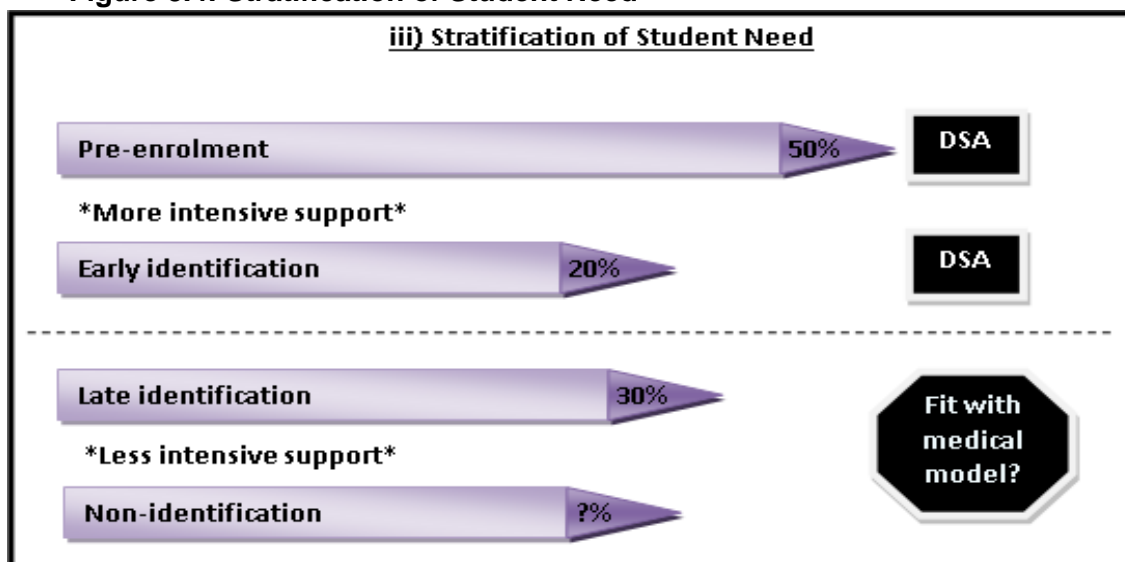
## Satellite Campuses

- 3.32 Satellite campuses represent the second set of spokes in the Hub and Spoke support model. The majority of support is delivered from the main campus with, typically, staff operating part time out of satellite locations. In institutions with several campuses, this can be a difficult and resource-intensive operation to manage effectively. In some institutions there is evidence of limited part-time student support presence in satellite campuses.
- 3.33 The operational spokes represent the potential Achilles heel of a highly centralised SpLD support model. A combination of funding issues and service effectiveness is leading some institutions, to introduce greater decentralisation within their Hub and Spoke model.

## iii) Stratification of Student Need

- 3.34 The third generic model addresses the heterogeneity of SpLD students. Students have differing needs and present in different ways, which has implications for both the operating structure and nature of support delivered by institutions. For the purposes of analysis, we have split potential SpLD students into four descriptive categories as set out in Figure 3.4.

**Figure 3.4: Stratification of Student Need**



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### **(a) Pre-enrolment**

- 3.35 These are students who make themselves known to the support team prior to entering the institution. This is the easiest group to deal with from a support perspective and tends to be students who will have had been previously assessed for SpLD. We estimate that approximately half of supported SpLD students fall within this category.

### **(b) Early Identification**

- 3.36 These are students who present for testing in their first or second term on entering the institution. This is a priority group who are the focus of extensive targeting through both central team and faculty activity. They account for approximately 20% of supported students
- 3.37 All SpLD good practice is designed to increase the proportions of SpLD students who fall within these categories. They are also by definition the easiest group to identify and consequently will typically have higher support needs on the SpLD spectrum.

### **(c) Late Identification**

- 3.38 These are students who typically present at the end of their first year or even second or third years. They might appear to have been coping with their disability but a crisis of some sort may have triggered their need for support. This is often exam- or dissertation-induced. This is a difficult group to deal with given their crisis situation and the time it takes to progress both internal assessment and DSA procedures. This group is thought to be on an increasing trend across institutions and is thought to account for almost 30% of SpLD supported students.

“Increasing numbers of students are disclosing later and are identified by academic staff. Many are mature students who have struggled with the condition for most of their lives but have been unaware of it.” (H, Student Services Manager)

### **(d) Non-Identification**

- 3.39 These are the students who have an SpLD issue but have chosen not to identify themselves or don't recognise that they have a problem. This is a group whose size is unknown but thought to be significant in institutions with a higher ethnic mix of students and/or numbers of international students. Institutions highlighted the fact that this is thought to be influenced by cultural issues which attach a stigma to disability generally, and dyslexia in particular, thus leading to non-disclosure.
- 3.40 Student Groups (c) and (d) are often less of a priority with busy central support teams dealing with Student Groups (a) and (b). These groups are likely to have less severe SpLD needs and fit less well into a medical disability model. It is thought they could benefit more from expanded social support model activity.

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## 4 THE CENTRAL TEAM: THE CORE AND PERIPHERY

### Key Points to Note

- All institutions attach a high priority to encouraging their students to disclose any SpLD issues. The student journey from identification to assessment to receiving DSA is intense and lengthy and each stage presents challenges for institutions.
- Almost all institutions offer an opt in dyslexia/SpLD screening test to assess a student's propensity towards dyslexia or an SpLD. They use a range of screening tests that vary in sophistication. One of the most effective identification methods is to use a screening tool on all students.
- In order to encourage reluctant or possibly unaware students to disclose potential SpLD issues, institutions actively promote their support teams and range of services through a diverse portfolio of initiatives.
- Some institutions have outreach schemes and pre-entry support that seek to increase early identification and encourage applications from students with SpLD.
- DSA is a prime source of funding support for students with SpLD in HE. Once a student has completed a formal SpLD assessment, all institutions actively encourage students to make a DSA application and provide extensive assistance in the application process.
- Institutions report that DSA entitlements are increasingly homogeneous and do not reflect the variability of SpLD need. There appears to be a trend towards all SpLD students receiving the same support package as a result of the needs assessment.
- All institutions provide some form of support for SpLD students who do not claim or are ineligible for DSA support. However, this tends to be less comprehensive than the DSA package.

### Introduction

4.1 Having established the generic structure of SpLD support in the previous section, here we provide illustrations of SpLD support practice linked to the operation of the central team core-support hub linked to our Core and Periphery model. The analysis is presented under the following headings:

- Identification and Access
- Formal SpLD Assessment and DSA process
- DSA Funded Support
- Support for Non-DSA Students.

### Identification and Access

#### Screening

4.2 In a UK study of over 100 institutions, 43% of the total dyslexic population were diagnosed as dyslexic after admission to university (Reid and Kirk, 2005:19)<sup>11</sup>. Therefore, early student identification is a key part of the support process. All institutions attach a high priority to encouraging their students to disclose any SpLD issues.

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<sup>11</sup> Reid, G., & Kirk, J. (2005). *Dyslexia in Adults: Education and Employment*. Chichester. Wiley.

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- 4.3 Early identification is in the best interests of the student, and it means that potentially time-consuming administrative processes relating to assessment can be addressed up front. It also means that it is easier for support teams to plan and spread their resources over a very busy first-term period.
- 4.4 Almost all institutions use a dyslexia/SpLD screening process to assess a student's propensity towards dyslexia or an SpLD. They use a range of screening methods that vary in sophistication and include:
- Screening questionnaire designed by the institution
  - Formal screening questionnaire e.g. Dyslexia Adult Screening Test (DAST)
  - IT screening software e.g. Quick Scan
  - Screening interview conducted by institution staff
  - Screening conversation conducted by institution staff
  - Screening using examinations and assignments.

#### **Practice Example: Screening**

One of the most effective identification methods is a 'screen all' policy. The two sample institutions with the highest percentage of SpLD students (as a percentage of total student population) both have a screen all identification procedure. Three quarters of the screen all sample institutions have an incidence of SpLD above the approximate national average of 15% of the population. In one institution, 80% of students who were diagnosed as having dyslexic tendencies were subsequently assessed by educational psychologists as being dyslexic.

The screen all approach is currently only undertaken by sample institutions with 'small' total student head counts. Whilst apparently effective, it is not financially viable for larger institutions, although this could be addressed through an online testing option.

- 4.5 Generally institutions are divided on the value of screening. Some place a high value on it and put significant numbers of students through the process. In this way, it is part of their SpLD promotional activity: "If in doubt, have a quick and simple test." Others point out that most students who self-refer to the screening process progress to a full assessment. Therefore, it is not an effective screen.
- 4.6 One of the potential drawbacks of screening is its resource intensity. Some institutions have cut back on activity, as they felt it was crowding out the delivery of actual support to SpLD students.

#### **Practice Example: IT-based SpLD Screening Test**

One institution indicated that screenings, at the beginning of the year, were consuming large amounts of SpLD and disability advisors' time. This was then causing a waiting list of students needing support. To balance this, they introduced an IT-based screening test that students can access independently at a time suitable for them. Students could then bring the results to discuss with a disability advisor reducing the time required down to a thirty-minute slot.

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- 4.7 The relative effectiveness of different screening methods is not clear and establishing consistency and identification of effective screening methods in the future may be beneficial. Some institutions collect management information (MI) data on success rates of those who are screened to those who go on to have a formal assessment, and those who are then identified as SpLD.

“We often use something known as ‘Quick Scan’, IT screening software, but we’re not convinced that this is as effective at identifying needs.” (M, Student Services Manager)

#### **Practice Example: Screening using Examinations and Assignments**

One institution adopted the practice of referring students who failed critical examinations to be assessed for dyslexia. This institution was concerned that there were students who might otherwise have to leave or switch courses who had undiagnosed dyslexia. Over 90% of students tested in this way received a positive dyslexia diagnosis and were able to continue successfully on their degree course with the appropriate support. This screening practice had also served to encourage other students to disclose or be tested earlier. The institution attracts highly able students not used to questioning their abilities or seeking additional support. It is likely that undiagnosed dyslexics have developed coping strategies that only begin to crumble under the highest pressure of critical examination. Since introducing examination, testing the proportion of students within the institution with diagnosed SpLD has increased, reflecting a shift in culture among students that testing positive for dyslexia can only be beneficial.

Another institution allocates its Nursing and Social Work students an intensive assignment within the first few weeks of term to use as a screening process for those who may need support. This was a decision taken at faculty level where staff members felt that students may not disclose their SpLD due to fitness to practice concerns.

- 4.8 The screening test is a precursor to a full educational psychologist’s assessment. Students with a higher propensity score in the screen test will then be encouraged to progress to the formal assessment.

#### **Disclosure**

- 4.9 The greatest challenge faced by institutions that cannot operate a screen all policy is encouraging students to come forward for screening and a formal assessment. In order to encourage reluctant or possibly unaware students to disclose potential SpLD issues, institutions actively promote their support teams and range of services through a diverse portfolio of initiatives including:

- Posters and leaflets
- Freshers’ Week workshops
- Presentations at halls of residence
- Circulation of materials through academic staff and teaching sites
- Websites, online blogs and social media
- Video messaging/conversations
- Student union and student publications

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- Providing information detailing the characteristics of an SpLD and how to identify them to assist self-referral for a screening
  - School outreach activity and transition work
  - Encouraging students to consult a Dyslexia symptoms checklist
  - Providing an SpLD questionnaire that students can download and submit throughout the year.
- 4.10 Institutions that have experienced a large growth in SpLD student numbers since 2008 feel that these practices and a strong presence by the disability team are encouraging students to come forward.
- 4.11 One institution indicated that they promote SpLD declaration or at least dyslexia testing by advertising that students will receive a free laptop as part of the SpLD support package.
- “The laptop is a lure for going ahead for a full assessment, and I think that the changes will affect this. We need a hook to pull them in and once they come to us they want all the support, but without the hook, we might not get them to show them all the support on offer.” (M, Disability/Dyslexia Support Manager)
- 4.12 However, the majority of institutions felt that students placed high importance on the whole support package and that they would not be comfortable with this promotion strategy.
- “If laptop support was removed from DSA, there would be fewer DSA claims. However, the majority of SpLD DSA claimants are not doing it for the laptop [...] if there are to be cuts in DSA support, I would rather see cuts in relation to IT kit than personal support. I also think that most students would agree.” (L, Head of Disability Support)
- 4.13 Despite the significant proactivity to promote the SpLD message, many institutions felt that student communication was still an issue as evident from increasing numbers of late SpLD declarations. Informal word-of-mouth contact through fellow students and teaching staff was cited as a more effective tool for the late disclosing group.
- 4.14 Although students should be able to access the same SpLD support, irrespective of at what time they disclose, it appears that in some institutions late disclosing students might be losing out. This relates to unanticipated pressures on demand for central support and the time-consuming nature of the application and assessment process. At least two institutions indicated that they were reluctant to progress final-year student declarations through the DSA process because of the time it would take vis-à-vis the amount of term time outstanding.

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## Outreach and Pre-entry support

- 4.15 There are examples of institutions actively promoting SpLD as part of the admissions process, which extend to school visits and extensive dialogue with students even before an offer is made.

### Practice Example: Outreach Events

- University support for Year 10 or 11 pupils with SpLD: meeting the pupils, giving them a taste for university and a chance to meet current SpLD university students.
- Teacher information conferences to update schools' sixth-form staff to changes in the student finance system and advice on how to guide SpLD students through the application system.
- Transition officer at the institution who can visit schools and colleges on request to discuss DSA and the application process.

- 4.16 In some cases, it was felt that students had been attracted to the institution due to the supported reputation and well publicised support for SpLD. This was particularly evident among art institutions who, in their promotional literature, state explicitly that they welcome applicants from dyslexic students.

“Our students have actually fed back that the proactive support they received, in terms of how we were very happy to have that conversation with the applicants and to support them, was something that made the difference between them coming to [the institution] and then declining another university...their transition into university life was as smooth as possible.” (L, Student Services Manager)

“As a [institution], we positively embrace dyslexic students. They are an important part of our social and cultural mix. Indeed on our website we highlight the benefits of being dyslexic.” (H, Member of Executive Team)

- 4.17 A number of institutions highlight their levels of support through a profile on DisabledGo. These online profiles allow students to have an element of standardised comparison across universities and a breakdown of campus accessibility by building. Profiles can include information, such as which buildings include assistive technologies or large-print books. Searches can be made by institution and broken down further by building type e.g. library, restaurant. The information relating to services is represented in both text and by figures.
- 4.18 A number of institutions have social media profiles, e.g. on Twitter, that specifically cater for disabled students and, in some cases, particularly SpLD students allowing prospective students to ask questions and the institution to post information.
- 4.19 Some institutions have their own early disclosure forms that are completed by students prior to entry and means that:
- They have an opportunity to visit the support team in advance.
  - Support arrangements, including DSA application and specific adaptations with academic tutors, can be in place from the outset.

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## Formal SpLD Assessment and DSA Process

### Formal SpLD Assessment

- 4.20 Students who are identified by university support staff as having a propensity towards an SpLD, or who have been diagnosed as having a SpLD but require up to date medical evidence, are advised to have a formal SpLD assessment by an educational psychologist or dyslexia assessor. At this point, support staff will explain the whole assessment process including the progression to DSA.
- 4.21 This is a potential point of drop out where students may disengage with the process. The majority of students diagnosed as dyslexic and eligible for DSA progress with the application. The most common reasons for not making a DSA application include:
- **The shock of receiving the dyslexia assessment report** from the educational psychologist. This can be daunting and difficult to understand. It can be a fairly factual and blunt assessment of characteristics and capacities e.g. IQ. It is clear that institutions need to do more to support students to better understand the implications of their assessment and to reinforce the positivity.
  - **The need for a further external assessment** of their dyslexia, which in most cases is not located at a centre within their institution.
  - **The disability stigma** that some students associate with SpLD. This is amplified by the requirement to make a direct application to the 'disability support agency' and effectively to be declared as registered disabled. This is a particular barrier for some cultural groups.
  - **The time-consuming nature of the process** (it can take up to three months).
  - **The cost of an initial educational psychologist's assessment**, which can range from £250 to £650.
- 4.22 Institutions seek to minimise student drop out at the formal assessment stage by introducing strategies that reduce the time of the assessment process and by subsidising the cost of the educational psychologist's assessment.
- “We recognised about 18 months ago that assessments were taking too long and that students were getting quite chewed about this and that meant we risked needless withdrawals. So, we reviewed the assessments process and pumped extra money into the screening and signposting services in Disability Support and this has brought us up to what we feel is the correct infrastructure for disability and SpLD support.” (H, Finance Manager)
- 4.23 One institution has 88% of its identified SpLD students receiving DSA support. Strategies used by this institution to minimise student drop out throughout the DSA process include:
- Students pay £75 towards their dyslexia assessment, which is done by the Dyslexia Teaching Centre rather than an educational psychologist allowing the price to be kept low;
  - International students diagnosed with dyslexia are entitled to a £500 package of support. International students are shocked that support is available and seem very satisfied with the support package and offer;
  - Tracking DSA students and contacting them if they have not accessed support.
- 4.24 Some institutions seek to minimise drop out by clearly demonstrating to students the steps that need to be taken throughout the assessment process and how the pre-entry and core support team will proactively support the DSA application process.
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4.25 A number of institutions have created process maps (Figure 4.1, Figure 4.2), designed to clarify the process to students. These maps highlight the progressive SpLD assessment and DSA process, the responsibility placed on students and the volume of institutional resource that the 'push and pull' process requires.

Figure 4.1: Student Journey: Pre-entry Support (L)

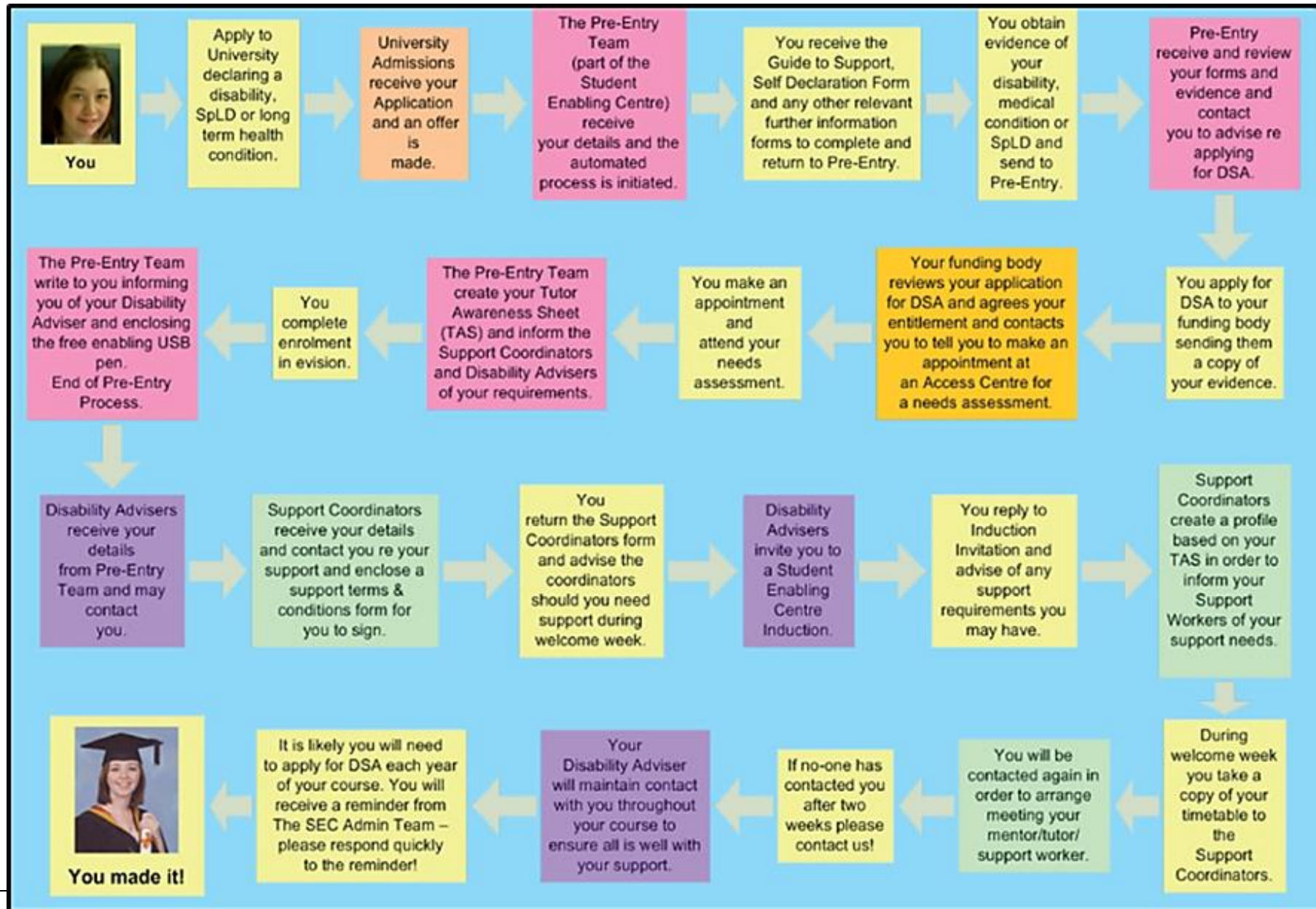
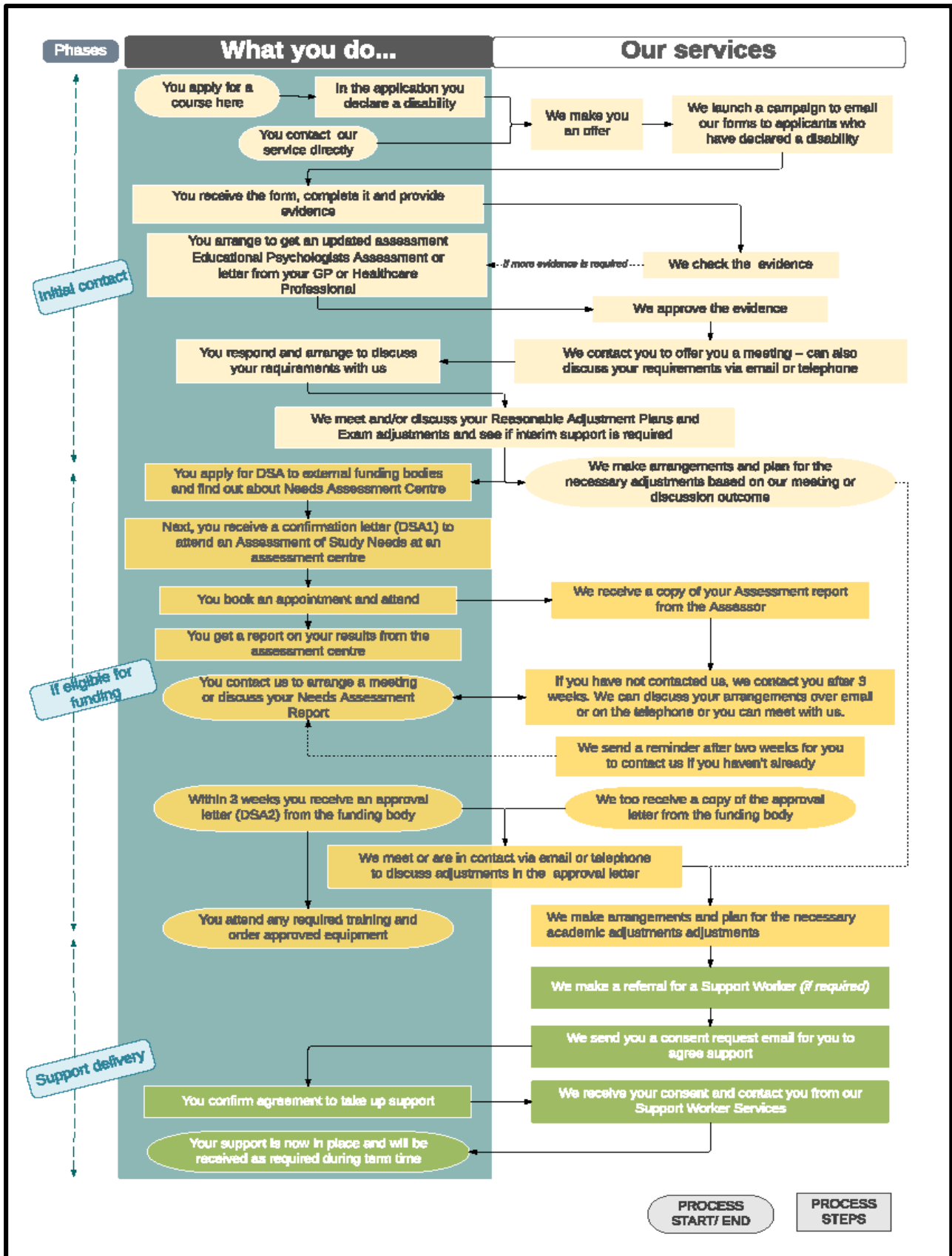


Figure 4.2: Proactive Student Support through Assessment and DSA Process



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## DSA Process

- 4.26 DSA is a prime resource of both funding and support for students with SpLD in HE. Once a student has completed a formal SpLD assessment, all institutions actively encourage students to make a DSA application and provide extensive assistance in the application process (Figure 4.2). All institutions provide information about DSA on their website, or links to other websites that can provide the information. Institutions also provide information and links to other potential sources of funding such as hardship funds.
- 4.27 It is made clear to students that this is an application that they are making themselves to an outside funding body, also stressing that the institution will not be in a position to replicate a similar support package, should they choose not to go down the DSA route.
- 4.28 The dropout rate at DSA application is higher among institutions with a more diverse ethnic minority mix of students. One institution reported a drop out of up to 40%. A number of institutions felt this could be attributed to a cultural stigma associated with SpLD. All institutions do their best to support this group, but in most cases the support available is minimal.
- 4.29 As might be expected, DSA has a fundamental influence on the design and structure of SpLD support within institutions. The core support team is modelled around it and essentially facilitates the process. In most institutions, it provides the glue to any additional top up support plus support for those students unwilling or unable to access DSA support.
- 4.30 The length of time it takes to process a DSA application can cause problems for an institution. Some are prepared to take intermediate action.

“When we do an assessment, we do not just focus on the DSA application. If a student has immediate assistive-technology or learning-support needs, we progress that regardless of the outcome of the DSA application; this helps bridge any gaps, but also suggests we do not just see support thresholds in our college as synonymous with Student Finance England’s thresholds – given the time SFE take to process applications, I am absolutely certain we would lose [through drop out] students if we did not adopt this stance.” (M, Student Services Manager)

### Practice Example: Support whilst waiting for DSA Assessment

One institution creates a ‘provisional learning contract’ that puts in place a standard set of adjustments for this period of time so that students get the basic level of support required including one to one support and the agreement of specific adaptations (reasonable adjustments). This is put in place for three months and then updated to reflect the DSA entitlement letter.

## DSA Funded Support

- 4.31 As identified in the generic support model, following DSA assessment students will receive an ‘entitlement letter’ that sets their funded support under three headings: Equipment allowance, non-medical help allowance and general allowance.

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4.32 DSA funded support can be delivered in-house by the institution or delivered by an external provider. Whether support should be delivered in-house or externally is not clear with a number of institutions having recently restructured in opposite directions.

4.33 Those who have restructured to bring specialists in-house feel that this gives their service greater integrity, increased professionalisation, and better communication and provides a stronger quality assurance process to ensure consistency in delivery. A number of institutions that currently contract out services also expressed concerns over their lack of control over what is delivered.

4.34 However, others who contract out services feel that this ensures quality of service delivery.

“In terms of student support workers and specialist tutors and mentors, for me one of the important elements that we did was taking the decision to outsource [...] It was important to make sure that support delivery was more than just an administrative system of putting the provision in place and clawing back DSA. For me, I wanted to make sure that the customer service excellence for the student on that element, as well as on the advisory element, was there. So, we chose to outsource that and work closely with (external company manager).”  
(L, Head of Disability Support)

4.35 Institutions report that DSA entitlements are increasingly homogeneous and do not reflect the variability of SpLD need. There appears to be a trend towards all SpLD students getting the same support package as a result of the needs assessment. There are also concerns regarding the static nature of the support package. Once in place, it applies for the duration of study with no opportunity to review potentially changing student circumstances.

4.36 There are also concerns that students are not taking full advantage of their DSA support package. Many do not access technical support, which means they are unable to take full advantage of supported software. Also, few take up their full entitlement of one to one support sessions, which may be a reflection of both need and quality.

“Our experience is that SpLD students do not make extensive use of the learning support software available for them to use on their laptops e.g. Mind mapping etc.” (H, Student Services Manager)

“The provision of laptops for dyslexic students is an expensive distraction. We find that students are applying for DSA in order to get a laptop. They are much more interested in getting a Mac than accessing developmental support. More students now have access to a laptop that could run the necessary support programmes. DSA is, therefore, being used to provide a technological upgrade. This is also a source of significant dissention among non-DSA students.” (H, Student Services Manager)

4.37 One institution highlighted potential inefficiency in the current DSA assessment process:

“Can I ask you why they [SFE] pay £600-700 to an assessment centre for what are 99% of the time almost the same assessment of needs? Why should that much money be spent on duplication for thousands of students? It seems such a waste...” (M, Disability Support Manager)

4.38 Aspects of DSA delivery deemed to be effective by institutions included:

- **One to one support guide:** One institution felt that particularly effective elements of support were the mentoring and one to one support, both the quality of the support and the evidence base that underpins it. The institution developed a good practice guide on one to one support that helps both students and mentors to comprehend the degree of challenge from quite diverse case studies on a sort of spectrum of challenge. This has been widely disseminated.
- **Team of specialist mentors:** In response to increased numbers of students with specific learning needs one institution appointed a team of specialist advisors. This expert support has received very positive feedback from SpLD students, compared to when students were supported by an advisor who may not have been trained that extensively in SpLD.
- **Strategy workshops for students with dyslexia and dyspraxia:** Group sessions seek to introduce students to a number of strategies, which the students can try out within a safe and supportive environment. The sessions begin with an explanation and description of the particular difficulties or issues. Various strategies are then presented, which the students explore and try out for themselves. The sessions end with a discussion about the relative merits and possible applications for each strategy. The length of each session is generally 45 minutes, and covers areas of difficulty such as memory, spelling, reading and writing, note-taking, verbal presentations and relaxation techniques. Every sixth session is a review session where they revisit the learned strategies.

4.39 Supporting placement students through DSA-funded support is challenging for institutions. Some institutions offer adjustments to accommodate placement students and ensure delivery of DSA-funded entitlement. One institution supports placement students using Skype sessions with a specialist tutor or mentor.

## Support for Non-DSA Students

4.40 Non-DSA students essentially fall into five categories:

- SpLD students who do not want to/have not been through the DSA assessment process
- SpLD students who have exceeded their DSA allowance
- SpLD students waiting for their needs assessment
- International students (who are not eligible for DSA)
- Non-SpLD students.

4.41 All institutions provide some form of support for SpLD students who do not claim or are ineligible for DSA support. However, this basic support package is far removed from the DSA package and would typically include:

- Up to five one to one sessions with a SpLD support worker
- Non-resource intensive specific adaptations
- Students referred to academic support – however, they might be accorded priority on a range of support modules.

4.42 Institutions are presenting a range of solutions to supporting non-DSA students beyond this basic package. The solutions are varied and dependent on the institution: size, type, number of students, institution finances and degree of integration. Examples include:

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- **Two levels of support for DSA and non-DSA:** One institution splits its levels of support into DSA and non-DSA. DSA support has three one to one dyslexia practitioners who work with students on reading, writing and communication. Non-DSA support has a study skills tutor available for all students, including those without full DSA assessments. The institution data shows that these sessions are well used by non-DSA students.
  - **Fully funded support for those who exceed DSA:** One institution is able to fund support for students who exceed their DSA costs. However, they highlight this isn't actually very common for students with SpLD.
  - **Interim support for students waiting for their needs assessment:** A number of institutions are able to provide interim support. In one institution, the disability team will put in place a statement of support needs, which is an internal, individual plan for a student. This plan provides details of what support the student will require based on the institution's assessment.
  - **Full support for those not eligible for DSA:** One institution was able to support students from Southern Ireland who would not be eligible for DSA by negotiating with the Irish government.
  - **Providing recommendations for those not eligible for DSA:** In one institution, the dyslexia support manager uses a blank needs-assessment report to give recommendations to students who are not eligible for DSA, including international students, about the sort of support they would be recommended if they had gone through the DSA process.
  - **Funding international students' assessments:** A number of institutions will fund international students' educational psychologist assessments. One institution will also provide students with appropriate one to one support and ensure they have access to the appropriate IT including offering laptops on loan providing specialist software on the network.
  - **Inclusive practice:** A number of institutions are moving toward inclusive practice. One institution highlights that this is appropriate because there are lots of standard, reasonable adjustments that we might be recommending for students, but actually, if they're so standardised, these are going to be things that are helpful for the student body at large.
  - **Pooling all funding:** One institution asks students to simply apply for funding support. The institution pools its funding into a single pot and distributes this among students who need support.

4.43 Challenges, however, are still identified by institutions particularly in relation to:

- **Tensions within SpLD models:** Tensions exist around not being able to support students who have been identified as having SpLD-type needs but with no formal diagnosis i.e. 'not dyslexic enough'. Where institutions are able to provide some level of provision for these students, there is an on-going challenge to balance DSA and non-DSA work and from meeting student (and parent) expectations of diagnosis while also promoting a more holistic model of support. Some institutions feel that the HESA benchmark focuses on DSA and so alters the focus of work to diagnosis/DSA application instead of focusing on supporting students.
- **Intensive users:** Where institutions want to target the whole university population of SpLD and non-SpLD students, it is often found that the service is used by a small number of very intensive users, primarily SpLD/DSA recipients.

4.44 Some institutions are considering how they can accommodate non-DSA students in the future.

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- **Mini assessment:** One institution is considering offering a ‘mini assessment’ through the institution’s assessment centre for students who are not eligible for DSA. The idea would be to have a half-hour talk with a needs assessor where students can gain information about the kinds of support they would get if they were eligible for DSA.
  - **Group sessions:** One institution is piloting a programme that uses dyslexia tutors to facilitate small group sessions for students that have a disability, and who have provided the evidence and are with the disability service but are not able to get DSA straight away or are not eligible for DSA, e.g., international students or those on short courses. Sessions include a very small group undertaking study skills: up to eight students. The institution intends to run a pilot and compare the costings and benefits against those of providing interim support on a one to one basis.
- 4.45 International students perhaps represent the most problematic group in relation to SpLD support. Significant access barriers include:
- Cultural issues that attach a stigma to disability, generally, and dyslexia, in particular, thus leading to non-disclosure;
  - Difficulties in testing for dyslexia in students who have English as a second language and display associated literacy issues;
  - Ineligibility to claim DSA.
- 4.46 Institutions felt a clear duty of care to international students but, generally, felt unable to match the DSA package. Some institutions were able to be more generous than others, with some establishing specific hardship funds to deal with the problem. There are also examples of specific faculties providing their own support and funding:
- “We know we don’t get it right with international students – they fall between so many funding stools. We have difficulties from the off really, and some of it is language – assessment and dyslexia support can be challenging for linguistic reasons alone – how much is dyslexia effect, how much second language related? We do our best to provide in the absence of DSA for most, but we know that they may not come in the first place if they do not identify with our web messages about who can get support.” (H, Student Services Manager)
- “It is really difficult getting international students to disclose their needs [...] but we know needs exist and respond where we can and encourage disclosure as our main interest to provide students, all students, with a very tailored and positive experience... Culturally, if they arrive after 18 to 20 years’ educational experience of not mentioning learning difference, it is no surprise they are not easily able to articulate these readily.” (H, Student Services Manager)
- 4.47 In institutions where there was a high level of integration between the central support team and the delivery of DSA one to one support, there is evidence of greater support available. As these institutions were delivering all, or a significant proportion of, DSA one to one support themselves it’s easier to piggy-back international student needs.
- 4.48 Most institutions felt that the most effective way to support international students in the longer term was through the expansion of a social disability model that would minimise the need for SpLD specific support.
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## 5 THE ACADEMIC INTERFACE

### Key Points to Note

- In most institutions, the interface between the central support team and frontline teaching staff is managed by a disability tutor or academic staff member with a similar title.
- Institutions have introduced a wide range of practice to improve communication and practice between the central SpLD support team and academic staff in faculties.
- Learning contracts are thought to be particularly effective in securing support from academic staff in implementing reasonable adjustments for SpLD students.
- Institutions identify anonymised marking, student placements and international students as particular challenges in relation to implementing reasonable adjustments.
- Institutions are reporting significant variability in faculty responsiveness to implementing reasonable adjustments for SpLD students. This was felt to be due to a combination of staff training and managerial compliance issues.
- Most institutions have in place fairly extensive staff training for academic staff in relation to SpLD and the application of reasonable adjustments. As this training is generally optional, take up is fairly low.
- Most institutions are seeking to introduce more inclusive teaching methods designed to reduce the need for reasonable adjustments.
- Some institutions are seeking to expand academic support as part of a progression towards a more social model of disability support.

### Introduction

- 5.1 In this section, we explore the implementation of SpLD support in the teaching environment, and the important relationship between the central SpLD support team and academic staff in faculties (essentially the Hub and Spoke model discussed in Section 3).
- 5.2 The analysis is presented under the following headings:
- The Academic Role
  - Reasonable Adjustments
  - Variable Faculty Responsiveness
  - Inclusive Teaching
  - Staff Training
  - Academic Support Expansion.
- 5.3 As part of the consultation process, we spoke to 90 members of academic staff across 25 institutions plus members of the SpLD central support teams.
- 5.4 The positions of the academic staff consulted include:
- Head of Student Support Services
  - Disability/SpLD Support Managers

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- Disability Tutors
  - Heads of Department
  - Academic Staff
  - Administrative Staff.

## The Academic Role

- 5.5 Academic staff play a critical role in the SpLD support process and perform joint roles in relation to both teaching and learner support. They have the advantage of direct contact with the student in a learning environment and can take the appropriate action to maximise the effectiveness of support. In this context it is important that they work closely alongside the central SpLD support team.
- 5.6 There are a number of dimensions to the academic role and the context, of SpLD support. These include:
- Identification and referral of potential SpLD students;
  - Providing active SpLD support while also acting as teacher, mentor, advisor and assessor;
  - Communication with the central support team;
  - Interpretation of support needs in terms of specific adaptations and learning styles in the context of the subject matter and the area of study;
  - Communication of progress against SpLD objectives to both the central support team and the student.
- 5.7 The extent to which academic staff recognise these roles and deliver against them is highly variable, but generally thought in most institutions to be good and getting better.
- 5.8 In most institutions, the interface between the central support team and frontline teaching staff is managed by a disability tutor or academic staff member with a similar title. While titles vary between institutions, this tends to be a member of the academic staff who has an additional disability-support promotion and coordination role. In some institutions, there will also be a disability administrator responsible for arranging reasonable adjustments relating to examinations, assignments and dissertations.
- 5.9 Disability tutors and administrators manage the flow of information and advice between the central support team and teaching staff. In institutions where it worked well, there was evidence of:
- **Highly Committed Tutors:** Staff members highlighted how they had obtained a reputation within their department as a result of their knowledge of the support system and their championing of this role. Where faculties had dedicated officers located within them, this was seen as producing highly effective levels of communication.  
  
"I still find staff coming to me asking what to do when they acknowledge a difficulty in a student." (M, Member of Academic Staff)  
  
"It is the Faculty Study Support Officer's responsibility to agree the extension period for reasonable adjustments...I think the FSSO having this role has helped any tensions with the academics because they feel the FSSO has an understanding of their team and their

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department; it definitely feels like there is less tension than there used to be.” (Head of Disability Support, M)

- **A Tutors’ Forum:** Effective communication resulted from the existence of a ‘tutors’ forum’, which the central support team facilitates on a regular basis and that includes representatives of tutors from all faculties across the institution.

“In terms of implementing the strategy [plan] we ensure that our senior staff input wider academic boards, input a range of meetings and input FAESC, EDI and SSC meetings [teaching and learning boards at various levels].” (H, Head of Disability Support)

- **Clear Strategic Communication:** Less than one quarter of institutions had a documented SpLD-specific plan regarding the SpLD support model, including DSA and responsibilities relating to specific adaptations. The lack of strategy need not, of itself, equal a poor institutional response and lack of system in disability support; however, the operational reality is that the lack of a strategy does impact materially on the staffing and the overall effectiveness of SpLD support and the central provision of support. In some institutions, the view was expressed that an implicit strategy is sometimes not consistently communicated from the central systems to a wider range within the institution:

“Although there was an implicit strategy and delivery plan, this was not widely disseminated or thought-through. Students and staff had no real way of knowing what we aimed to achieve – which made things too reliant on staff and students navigating systems. We’ve not been good at communicating with staff, or students, what we do and aim to do. We are only now reviewing, in a major way, our disability/SpLD strategy within broader reviews to ensure we are embedding good learning and study/time skills from the start; and this will underpin the SpLD specifics.” (M, Head of Disability Support)

- **Clear Learning Support Plan:** The majority of institutions provided some variation on a learning support plan for each student articulating their needs and specific adaptations. These were most effective where systems of reasonable adjustments were well established and where academic staff and support staff understood clearly the implications and responsibilities of the adjustments.

“The engagement with faculty and faculty staff is high [...] We work closely with staff on specific needs... our system of reasonable adjustments is distributed very well across faculties [...] We have a quite well established system. We have tremendous support from the secretariat system and this allows us to work effectively with academics regarding any complaints.” (M, Head of Student Services)

- **Opportunity and take up of SpLD staff training:** Where uptake of training was good central support teams felt staff awareness was high.

“Support is communicated to staff through new staff induction, tutored briefings and occasional staff training sessions. We feel that staff awareness levels are high.” (H, Member of Executive Team)

- **Clear communication routes and systems:** Institutions have been developing systems of communication amongst complex faculties and campuses. Many feel they are moving in the right direction and that dialogue between support teams and academics is improving.

“I think the major achievements in the last two years have been very much getting from a position of integrating the Disability Services and the advisers and the support to make it feel more joined-up with the university at large. When I came here, I spoke to colleagues within the

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faculties, and there was a feeling of it being distinctly separate [...] So we've done a lot of work in building up good relationships and working relationships with the faculties, which has been a good achievement.” (M, Student Services Manager)

“We have a strong dialogue with Disability and Dyslexia Service (DDS) including case conferences, to discuss how to manage individual student circumstances, in particular discussing what is possible and what is reasonable. This helps to avoid students playing off the DDS against the faculty. This enables the DDS to be the therapist, and we can remain being the academics.” (M, Member of Academic Staff)

- 5.10 Although elements of effective practice are evident in institutions, none of the institutions we spoke to thought they had totally cracked the relationship between the central support model and locally delivered practice, particularly in relation to influence and responsibility.

“One continuing challenge is the Disability Support Office itself: it remains centralised despite our greatest efforts...we have not managed to get it to permeate its role and embed it in normal school and faculty activities...although we have managed to get both an academic and administrative layer to the Disability Support Officers in faculties, which helps link those two domains...we tend to construct disability as part of a broader wellbeing issue and wellbeing cannot really equate to a centralised specialist office for disabled students day-to-day.” (M, Member of Executive Team)

“The proposed changes to DSA-modernisation are an opportunity to, perhaps, get some consistency across teaching in particular and we would need senior management buy-in and a document specific to SpLD would have a value in selling this idea and getting the right support from academics.” (H, Student Services Manager)

## **Reasonable Adjustments**

### **Learner Support Plans**

- 5.11 As identified earlier, a clear learner support plan is associated with effective delivery of SpLD support. Most institutions prepare some form of support plan for SpLD students. The format, customisation and level of detail varies between institutions. The plan, which is prepared by the central support team, takes into account what is stipulated in the DSA entitlement letter and what they know about the student from their own assessments. An example of a plan – in this case referred to as a ‘learning contract’ – is set out in Figure 5.1.
- 5.12 The plan sets out the SpLD needs of the learner and reasonable adjustments that are felt to be necessary to equalise the learning experience. In some institutions, this will be accompanied by implementation guidance, which most academic staff should already be familiar with through contact with disability tutors.

**Figure 5.1: Reasonable Adjustment Communication**

<b>LEARNING CONTRACT</b>	
Version 2 Dated 12/Nov/2014	
<b>Student:</b>	<b>Amy Smith</b>
<b>SI Number:</b>	<b>00000000</b>
<b>Course:</b>	<b>BUSINESS AND HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT</b>
<b>Level:</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Faculty:</b>	<b>School of Business Studies</b>
<b>Disabilities:</b>	<b>Dyslexia</b>
<b>PEEP Required:</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>Preferred Accessible Format:</b>	
<b>Line Spacing:</b>	-
<b>Paper Colour:</b>	-
<b>Font Details:</b>	-
<p>Please note that where it is stated in this Learning Contract that Disabled Student Support (DSS) can advise, we can be contacted using the details at the very top of this document.</p>	
<b>The Learning Contract is divided into the following sections</b>	
<b>Section 1 - Faculty Responsibilities</b>	
<b>Section 2 - Timetable Team Responsibilities</b>	
<b>Section 3 - Exams Team Responsibilities</b>	
<b>Section 4 - The Learning Centre's Responsibilities</b>	
<b>Section 5 - Disabled Student Support's Responsibilities</b>	
<b>Section 6 - Amy's Responsibilities</b>	
<b>Section 7 - Amy's Disability</b>	
<b>Section 8 - Faculty Contact Information</b>	
<b>Section 9 - Web links</b>	
<b>Each section is then divided into the following sets of recommendations</b>	

5.13 A number of institutions make these contracts available to view online to allow simple viewing from module leaders and to make it easier to separate adjustments and send out consistent messages about alternative exam arrangements.

“A learning contract makes a significant difference to their studies; 272 responded as having a learning contract of which 85% were satisfied and 15% dissatisfied.”(M, Head of Disability Support)

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## Reasonable Adjustment Responsibility

- 5.14 Reasonable adjustments reflect legal and ethical obligations to ensure disabled students are offered a 'level playing field', without lowering academic standards. According to the Equality Act 2010, once a student has notified the institution of a disability, it is incumbent upon the institution to put appropriate measures in place. Therefore, the way in which these measures are reflected in universities varies.
- 5.15 The influence and importance of reasonable adjustments has changed in light of the 2015/16 DSA announcements, where implementing adjustments will be non-optional upon receipt of a student's SpLD assessment report, and the discussion about what defines a reasonable adjustment is expected to become more prevalent.
- 5.16 SpLD students are able to access a range of specific adaptations linked to their programme of study. These are linked to the needs assessment conducted by the DSA; however, some institutions will provide specific adaptations to SpLD students who have not gone through the official DSA needs assessment.
- 5.17 All institutions have a standard list of adaptations that vary by type and specification across institutions. Some institutions provide documentation or colour code systems to allow tutors and students to understand what the adjustments are and whose responsibility they are.
- 5.18 The details of the support available are posted on university websites and promoted extensively as part of SpLD disclosure strategies. As indicated earlier, some institutions will put these in place in advance of official SpLD diagnosis but many will not, particularly those relating to examinations and assignment extensions.
- 5.19 Practices of effective support emerged from case study visits.

### Alternative Format

A number of institutions expressed the view that alternative format is a quickly growing service. One institution identified an increase of 1800% in demand for alternative format books from the first year of the service up to 2014.

### Library SpLD Services

- 5.20 Institutions highlighted the increased importance of a strong relationship with the library service for delivering effective support to SpLD students. One institution commented that this was particularly important to them given the potential changes to DSA.
- 5.21 In one institution, the dyslexia support team used their strong relationship with the library team to establish a colour-coded library system that provides a 'dyslexia-friendly library':
- "We fund a part-time library assistant to support SpLD students. Support is available on a one to one basis and FAQ sheets prepared on common questions." (H, Student Services Manager)
- "The library are currently working on different ways of bringing information to students such as YouTube, using software and things like that." (M, Disability Support Manager)
- 5.22 One institution highlighted how the library plays a key role in "providing a generic resource for those with 'milder' learning difficulties." (M, Disability Support Manager)

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### Study Skills Support

- 5.23 The majority of institutions that delivered study skills support felt that the service had been effective,

“We have had a waiting list for the study skills support so that is really well used.” (H, Disability Support Manager)

“Ninety-seven per cent of the 32 disabled students, who indicated they had attended study skills sessions, indicated they either strongly agreed or agreed that their study skills support had been important in helping them reach their potential and complete their degree.” (M, Disability Support Manager)

- 5.24 A number of adjustments, although widespread in their use, had institutions divided as to their effectiveness:

### Assistive Software and Hardware

- 5.25 A number of institutions discussed the provision and availability of assistive hardware and assistive software. The type and extent of software varies across institutions. The majority of institutions provide assistive software and hardware on the institution’s network of computers. One institution highlights the fact that it has around 20 different pieces of software to support individuals with different needs.

- 5.26 However, a number of institutions highlight the fact that students with DSA are expected to obtain their own support and should not expect wide access to networked software. Others highlight the practical difficulties that come with assistive technologies:

“There has been a programme of investment in expanding hard-ware lecture-capture systems but ultimately different faculties have different systems in place. Currently, we have around 15 lecture rooms with this technology. However, the differences between faculties’ capabilities sometimes makes it hard to provide consistent guidance.” (M, Student Services Manager)

### Lecture Note Provision

Institutions were split on the effectiveness of providing lecture notes in advance. In a number of cases, central support teams recommended the adjustment but academics were resistant for fear of reduced attendance or unauthorised distribution of lecture materials. *“Providing notes of lectures is not university policy but it is strongly encouraged by the university. However in the Maths department, we avoid it in the first year as it discourages students from attending lectures. We also have to be careful about selectively handing out copies as we know students are highly likely to share materials.”* (M, Member of Academic Staff)

### Examination and Coursework Adjustments

- 5.27 Adjustments for SpLD students during examinations appear to be widespread; however there is variation in implementation. The majority of institutions offer rest breaks, readers/scribes, ergonomic chairs, separate rooms and alternate format exam papers. These adjustments are generally agreed to be necessary and provided without dispute. However opinion is divided around offering extensions and stickering systems (see 5.33 below).

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5.28 Additional time is more consistently offered for examinations with the majority of institutions offering near to 25% extra time for those with diagnosed SpLD. One institution indicates that they do not offer examination extensions as they felt it would disadvantage non-SpLD students. Institutions instead feel that the support provided for SpLD students pre-deadline is sufficient to allow them to have addressed the disadvantages they may have been facing.

“We did not make any adjustment in essays or exams for the content of student work. Our view is that students with specific learning difficulties have been supported and given extra time and that this is sufficient. It would be unfair on others to make further adjustments.”  
(L, Member of Academic Staff)

5.29 However, others feel it is necessary to have the option of extensions for students with SpLD to recognise the barriers that SpLD can raise.

“Students with SpLD often take longer to produce written work than their peers as their reading speed can be slow and problems with working memory and structuring and organising information may make the process of writing itself much slower. Extensions may be a way of compensating for these difficulties on particular occasions.” (H, Marking Guidelines)

5.30 Institutions do, however, acknowledge the potential practical difficulties that can arise through extensions for coursework and examinations.

“Extensions should not be used for every piece of assessed work as this results in the student being persistently behind.”(M, Website)

“Extensions are difficult in, for example, a workshop that is timetabled rigidly or a Maths class that would be having the answers read aloud to them.” (M, Head of Disability Support)

5.31 In a number of institutions students with dyslexia, dyspraxia and other SpLD may use a sticker provided by the examinations office to label their answer books and/or submitted pieces of coursework. This advises the marker not to penalise errors in spelling, punctuation, untidy handwriting or clumsiness of expression.

5.32 However, others do not offer this service or expressed that they found it added further confusion to their marking system. In some cases, stickers are not used as institutions feel that students have been given sufficient support during the coursework or essay process so as to allow them to perform in the assessment.

5.33 In two case studies, academic staff reflect contrasting opinions about how stickers/anonymous marking can be effective:

“How do you separate difficulties a student is having in general from those specific to their SpLD when you are marking exams with stickers?” (M, Member of Academic Staff)

“This objectivity of marking causes a distance between lecturer and student, which may make it difficult for a lecturer to identify and support an SpLD student.”(M, Member of Academic Staff)

5.34 Although opinion is unified on the necessity of adjustments, such as separate rooms and scribes, timetabling staff highlights the practical issues that arise in doing this:

“You have to have an academic to start and end every exam. Now we've only got a small staff team and the first Monday of exams, we'd



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got – I think it was 14 different exam rooms – we'd got two exams running concurrently, a second-year one and a third-year one. And by the time we'd got all the additional rooms, we hadn't got enough academic staff to cater for all the individual rooms.” (M, Disability Advisor)

### **Adjustment Challenges**

- 5.35 Certain student groups were particularly challenging for institutions when implementing reasonable adjustments.

#### Placement Students

- 5.36 Students who undertake placements as part of their course present additional demands and challenges for academics. A number of institutions are working toward adapting the reasonable-adjustment framework to accommodate this including using placement learning contracts in addition to academic learning contracts, using a star system on registration forms to prompt placement staff to discuss additional needs with certain students and tutors assisting students on their first external visit to help assess the support that can be put in place.
- 5.37 One institution identified the fact that the peer role model system has a powerful effect on dyslexic students on placements:

“Three staff within the department overtly declare that they have dyslexia and, in particular, one is very senior. Students often refer to the fact that if someone can achieve this level within their professional career then they can also achieve a similar outcome.” (M, Student Services Manager)

- 5.38 Despite positive progress in reasonably adjusting for placement students, many challenges still exist in the provision for these students:

- **Fewer controls in place for students.** This puts additional pressure on the institution to manage the risk that might arise e.g. for a dyslexic Nursing students in tasks such as note-taking and measuring drug quantities. One academic felt that:

“There can be a dependency on the quality of the mentor who will be a practicing nurse whose responsibility is to assess the clinical competence of the student.” (M, Member of Academic Staff)

- **Unable to monitor implementation of adjustment plans.** A number of institutions provide their own adapted version of a learning contract used to communicate reasonable adjustments in a placement setting. However, academics are typically unable to monitor the implementation of these.

“How many decide to tell that placement about the adjustments form is something we can't monitor.” (M, Social Work Member of Academic Staff)

- **Statutory requirements.** Many highlight the conflict in trying to reasonably adjust for SpLD students where statutory requirements exist.

“Statutory written requirements can cause real problems for some students and there is not much we can do to reasonably adjust this....statutory requirements are challenging to adjust for SpLD students.” (M, Member of Academic Staff)

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## International Students

- 5.39 Academics identified difficulties in understanding how to interpret reasonable adjustments for marking examinations and coursework for international student work.

“The biggest challenge in correcting work appears to be distinguishing between dyslexia and students who have English as a second language.” (M, Member of Academic Staff)

## Postgraduate Students.

- 5.40 Postgraduate students are funded using a different system to undergraduates meaning that some areas, such as proofreading are left unsupported by some institutions who do not fund this themselves.
- 5.41 Other institutions feel there are challenges particularly where postgraduate students are returning to education after a period of time and may not have identified their SpLD or who have developed coping mechanisms throughout undergraduate study and, therefore, received no formal support but their issues arise during a more intensive postgraduate course.

“I think we’re pretty poor with postgraduates, and I am thinking of setting up a group. With research students the coverage is very thin. We don’t fund proofreading. We tend to try to upskill the student, but we don’t deny the net has more holes in it. We act on behalf of the funding body to arrange assessment, support and reclaim. Doing the same job as SFE for postgraduates.” (M, Disability Support Manager)

## **Student-led Support**

- 5.42 Many institutions provide advice and support on what good practice students can put in place to help mitigate these issues. Some also provide information on how students can view their SpLD as a strength and which learning styles and practices may allow them to use this to their advantage.

### **Practice Example: Understanding dyscalculia – guide for students**

Dyscalculic people often have strengths such as: creativity, problem-solving, practical ability, a love of words and intuitive thinking.

A student with dyscalculia may experience difficulties with:

- Arithmetical issues: Understanding place values, doing sums without a calculator, working out money
- Reasoning issues: Moving from concrete to abstract, following steps in a mathematical process
- Memory difficulties: Remembering what different symbols mean, remembering formulae or theorems, recalling names, dates, phone numbers, reading and understanding Maths books, relating printed questions to mathematical techniques.
- Generally: Fluctuations in concentration or ability, increased stress and fatigue and exasperation.

- 5.43 Many institutions provide links to external sites and sources for SpLD checklists and diagnosis information.

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## Variable Faculty Responsiveness

- 5.44 All institutions reported a lack of consistency regarding the implementation of SpLD support in faculties within their organisations. All could refer to 'rogue departments' or 'out of touch' lecturing staff. This was a source of some frustration from central support team staff. This was a challenge they felt they had to address locally through persuasion rather than passing up through the management chain, where it might become a compliance issue to be dealt with by the senior management team. At a time of significant organisational change within institutions, this strategy is often driven by local politics rather than achieving better SpLD support.
- 5.45 Academic compliance with SpLD procedures is, however, a live issue. If some faculties/staff are observed not to comply with SpLD procedures and nothing happens this undermines the importance of the support and the relative priority that academic staff may attach to it.

"Our SpLD strategy is probably not implemented uniformly across the organisation. [...] course support varies from course to course. For example, on some courses, a support tutor will be available in a course studio as part of a lesson. This can work well but can be inefficient use of staff time. We make all tutors aware of our offer but their promotion to students varies across courses." (H, Member of Executive Team)

"We know that not all faculties respond in the same way to dyslexia. I guess, as there are distinct academic cultures and personalities. We no longer have any philosophical objections to the idea of support for dyslexic students, but we do have islands of resistance to specific stated requests. We are working on this. Academic autonomy, of course, is still very powerful and professional judgement can trump disabled students' needs." (H, Dyslexia Support Worker)

"I think it comes down to lack of understanding of reasonable adjustments. If we ask lecturers to make reasonable adjustments then really there shouldn't be any issue. They sometimes don't realise they are not optional." (M, Disability Support Manager)

- 5.46 In some institutions, there is evidence of some friction between the central team and academic teaching staff regarding the nature of these specific adaptations. There's a feeling among some academic staff that they are too generic and fail to reflect either the subject matter or the prevailing teaching environment. Teaching staff felt that the central support team needed to be more consultative with departmental staff to improve both interpretation and applicability. This is largely a resource issue. It could be addressed by either expanding the role/time allocation of academic tutors or embedding central support team staff in faculties.
- 5.47 A further grey area relates to the monitoring of learner-support plans. This applies both to operational implementation and learner outcomes. Exploring, for example, the extent to which actions taken achieve parity of objectives. In most institutions, there is no formal mechanism to monitor the impact of plans. Responsibility appears to fall between the central support team and faculties.

"Many faculties still appear to delegate responsibility for disabled student to the Disability Officer in their department and do not realise the onus of responsibility for support for SpLD student's rests on their shoulders as well. A university-wide framework is in place for alternative assessment arrangements, but some aspects of this are not complied with, e.g. extra time for in-class tests or provision of class

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material prior to the session. Some ignore quite clearly the SpLD marking guidelines on the VLE portal.” (H, Disability Support Worker)

- 5.48 It is clear that some subjects (whether by design or inadvertently) provide a more conducive environment for students with a range of SpLD:

“Faculties with more practically based subjects can find that their SpLD students enjoy the opportunity to engage in a more kinaesthetic way with their learning. Nursing is an obvious example, where a broader range of attributes are being assessed. In subjects where the word and textual mastery is foremost, this is much more difficult and relies on faculties presenting their materials in many imaginative ways.” (H, Disability Support Worker)

- 5.49 A member of academic staff makes a similar point:

“Some disciplines lend themselves to more visual or graphic representation of ideas and colleagues feel they have more tools in their educational toolbox; it’s more demanding, but not impossible to do a good and creative job with simply words.” (H, Member of Academic Staff)

“We have asked faculty staff about their understanding of what we were asking them to do in reasonable adjustments: it is clear they have been interpreting them quite differently.” (M, Student Services Manager)

### **Academic Devolution**

- 5.50 In some institutions, there is a push to break down the Hub and Spoke SpLD delivery model. This would involve faculties delivering their own SpLD support customised to their own departments. In the main, this appears to be influenced by funding issues where a charge may be placed on faculties to cover the increasing costs of central disability support. The attitude appears to be ‘if we have to pay for it, we would rather deliver it’. Arguments regarding greater devolution of support are also emerging from the ‘service reviews’ which most institutions are conducting. All are posing the same question: “Is this the best way to deliver disability support?”

- 5.51 As one might expect, centralised support teams regard service devolution as a retrograde step that they feel will compromise the professionalism, consistency, access and ultimately the quality of SpLD support to the students that need it.

“Without centralisation we would be concerned about expertise, oversight and consistency of support.” (M, Member of Executive Team)

### **Inclusive Teaching**

- 5.52 Most institutions are seeking to introduce more inclusive teaching methods, which will reduce the need for reasonable adjustments. Methods employed include:

- **Mainstream Support System:** A belief that a system of support catering to all students will be beneficial to students with SpLD.

“The degree of response across the university is patchy – and we are aware of that and this review of HEFCE funding and this study have prompted us to look again at mainstreaming and getting all staff engaged with disability and SpLD policy and practice.” (H, Finance)

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- **Inclusive Teaching:** A number of institutions are creating groups to push the agenda of inclusive teaching and an 'inclusive curriculum.' Institutions feel that by involving academic, teaching and support staff in these groups and having them led by academics that they are getting lots of 'buy in' from colleagues allowing the curriculum to be effectively pushed forward.

"There is a 'task and finish group' ... In particular, they are focusing on making the learner more inclusive to the system of support and they see this as being beneficial to all students including those with SpLD." (M, Member of Executive Team)

"We worked very closely with colleagues from within Student Services and particularly, with the learning disability field to make sure that in terms of the validation and re-validation of modules within the academic framework review, the inclusivity of curriculum was considered." (L, Head of Disability Support)

- **Universal Reasonable Adjustments:** Institutions are working toward making reasonable adjustments applicable universally so as to minimise burden of individual requirements.

"One of the things that we battled with, but we were successful in 2011, was bringing in an audio recording of lectures policy across the entire university and not just for students who were disabled or had a specific learning difference, but for any student ...because what we'd got was feedback from some students to say, 'I really don't want to have to declare in class, disclose my disability. But I can't use – or I can't audio record without doing so.' So for us, that was a real achievement. So we've got an audio recording of lectures for all the students." (L, Head of Disability Support)

## Staff Training

5.53 There appears to be a range of issues surrounding the ability of academic staff to effectively implement specific adaptations for SpLD students. These include:

- Awareness of the legal requirement
- Awareness of the nature of the required changes
- Agreement with the nature of the required changes
- Willingness to change teaching and learning practice
- Attitude towards dyslexia
- Finding the time to make the necessary changes
- Relative priority and importance.

5.54 While these do not apply to all staff, and are not equally important, they appear to be reflected in significant pockets of staff within institutions. This is perhaps best addressed through staff training.

5.55 Coverage of training offered is varied but appears to be fairly comprehensive across institutions and includes:

- General induction training
- Equality and diversity CPD
- SpLD training modules delivered by central support teams

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- Customised SpLD support delivered to faculties
  - SpLD awareness campaigns
  - SpLD blogs and support modules on websites.
- 5.56 However, despite the volume of available training, institutions highlight issues with the demand for and enforcement of training.
- 5.57 In some institutions, there is evidence of significant proactivity to improve communication lines to academic staff, largely through the activities of the central support team. Many are currently reviewing or considering proposals that seek to improve relationships between support staff and academics. Some institutions provide academics with a handbook to guide their support for SpLD students; where this is not provided academics have expressed a desire to have one:
- “Really, the university needs a student handbook containing all the relevant information including what a SpLD student would need to know.” (M, Member Academic Staff)
- 5.58 One institution had recently conducted an inclusivity report looking at the integration of best practice into the institution. Off the back of this report, they are organising a day of best practice sharing. Another institution has created a ‘hub’ focused around enhancing staff practice, sharing good practice and increasing effectiveness.
- 5.59 The bottom line, however, is that the central support team has limited influence on faculty/school training practice. Central teams also feel that they cannot be as forceful as they would like to be in order to maintain good working relationships.
- 5.60 A number of institutions identified the key barriers that are preventing the expansion and delivery of staff training around SpLD.
- **Limited financial resources:** Institutions identify that they have the drive and desire to do more training but increasingly tight budgets mean that they do not have the immediately accessible funds. One institution highlighted that if they were to run formal training they would have to fund this through faculties and that this could be difficult to obtain and manage.
  - **Lack of mandatory training requirements:** Beyond compulsory inductions, training is largely voluntary for staff to access it. This tends to mean that the staff who need it most are the ones who do not come forward.
 

“A lot of the teaching staff we work with grasp just what, say, dyslexia means and how to respond...and we do an awful lot of training for staff throughout the year. This is optional but more staff are signing up for this and see it as core to their role.” (M, Disability Support Worker)
  - **Lack of enforcement of mandatory training requirements:** Where training is identified as mandatory often the drive and enforcement within the institutions is not monitoring the attendance.
 

“Staff induction includes mandatory attendance at an equality and diversity session but this is not enforced and, therefore, not all staff attend.” (M, Disability Support Manager)
  - **Lack of or variable levels of in-house expertise to deliver training:** Staff in one institution felt that training for SpLD needed to be delivered by external trainers with expertise in the area.
 

“The support provided by faculties through [the learner-support plan] is highly variable. Some are brilliant and others do less than the bare
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minimum. It is felt there is a significant need for staff training to make them aware of what should happen. Diversity coordinators are not in a position to provide training. They provide a conjugate but do not offer active support.” (M, Disability Support Manager)

### **Academic Support Expansion**

5.61 Some institutions are seeking to expand academic support to minimise the requirements for reasonable adjustments as part of a progression towards a social model of disability support.

5.62 These models seek to portray an ethos of inclusivity and a focus on learning and support not on diagnosis and medical terminology.

“Support will become integrated into wider learning and teaching and promoted as such rather than disabilities/equalities provision.”(H, Member of Executive Team)

“In terms of evolution, the Academic Support team was renamed (from Learning Support) to lose their remedial association. The services are now available to any student on a drop-in basis. There is a deliberate focus on support rather than diagnosis.” (H, Member of Executive Team)

5.63 Institutions identify potential challenges in realising their aspirational social model of support.

- Monitoring and maintenance of mainstreamed facilities would be difficult:

“We have a mainstreamed study support and then support for dyslexia that we call study support, and we have a team supporting faculty in learning...we are currently in the process of bringing all of these together [...] Keeping a handle on a mainstreamed model across faculties would be difficult.” (M, Student Services Manager)

- The notion of removing labels may cause problems in applications for funding:

“We would like to get away from the ‘support for dyslexia’, but I know that labels are important for funding.” (M, Disability/Dyslexia Support Manager)

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## 6 FUNDING OF SUPPORT

### Key Points to Note

- SpLD funding is complex and difficult to estimate. Institutions tend not to separate it out from increasingly integrated wider student support. It is also important to distinguish between institutional funding (including HEFCE contributions) and other student funding from DSA.
- In most organisations, institutional and HEFCE funding is used to support the core central SpLD team. DSA monies are used to fund personal, student-specific support.
- In most institutions, DSA funded support is estimated to account for over half of total SpLD support.
- All institutions feel that reductions in HEFCE funding (SO Funding) had impact on their support models. Most, however, overestimate the size of the cuts. This is due to confusion regarding the treatment of ALF and balancing compensations elsewhere. The average contribution of HEFCE funding to total SpLD funding is estimated to be 15%.
- Institutions already invest significant amounts of money in delivering core disability support from sources outside DSA and HEFCE SO Fund including fee income, other HEFCE grants and private sources of income. They have increased these investments to balance both HEFCE funding cuts and increased SpLD support demand. On average, institutions contribute to one third of the total cost of disability support from their own monies. This ranges from £50,000 to £500,000. Most institutions feel that this can be sustained in the short term; however, many are exploring alternative delivery models.
- The SpLD funding model is significantly dependent on DSA. Students unable or unwilling to claim DSA (including international students) in most institutions receive a significantly lower level of support.
- Institutions are well aware of their vulnerability to any future DSA cuts. Strategies to address this tend to focus on enhanced universal support and the development of an increasing social model of disability support.

### Introduction

6.1 In this section, we review the way in which institutions fund SpLD support. This explores the combination of funding from internal fee income and support from HEFCE and the DSA. The analysis is presented under the following headings:

- Understanding the Funding Mix
- HEFCE Funding
- DSA Funding
- Institutional Funding
- International Students
- Other Issues.



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6.2 The positions of the individuals consulted as part of the delivery of funding support included:

- Members of Executive Team
- Finance Manager
- Student Services Manager
- Disability Support Manager.

### **Understanding the Funding Mix**

6.3 Institutional funding of SpLD support has proved difficult to calculate. The inherent complexity is well articulated by the following description from a Head of Student Support:

“Several budget headers fund disability and SpLD support. DSA, Access funding, the Student Opportunity element of block grant and fee income are all used to fund disability-related work. Some bursaries have also gone to disabled students, although the primary driver there has been family or personal income. The only clear and traceable funding for SpLD is the DSA spend of £344,000, which reflects the numbers in receipt of DSA with a specific learning difficulty. Student support at [the institution] have been allocated £400,000 for this financial year from the Access element of the block grant – but colleagues could not be sure how much of this is apportioned to disability or SpLD. The money is used to support assessed needs for dyslexia, the other SpLD categories are rarer, but growing – for example dyspraxia.” (H, Head of Student Support)

6.4 Obtaining accurate financial information on SpLD spend from institutions has been problematic. Figures quoted in this section should be regarded as estimates.

6.5 All institutions we spoke to were concerned about the funding of SpLD support and, in particular their ability to meet future commitments. This is a potentially complex territory that needs to be unpicked in order to fully understand competing drivers and the implications of actions. In contextualising the general issue, it is important to be clear on the following four points

i) Increasing Student Numbers:

6.6 The number of students presenting with SpLD is on a rising trend, which has clear funding implications for institutions.

ii) Isolating SpLD Funding:

6.7 Most institutions cannot isolate their actual spend on SpLD support. At best, they can identify total disability spend. This is in turn a subset of student support spend and includes various crossover items. Disability support spend is a reasonable proxy as SpLD in the majority of institutions accounts for the greater part of all disability activity.

iii) Distinguishing between Institutional and Student Funding:

6.8 SpLD/disability support funding essentially falls into two categories: institutional funding and student funding. Institutional funding derives from student fee income plus HEFCE support from the SO fund. Student support derives from DSA and it is a student’s responsibility to claim. Unlike the SO fund, the DSA money is not paid

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directly to the institution as a block payment but is paid either directly into the student's bank account or to the organisation providing the service or equipment. The student can choose to purchase support services from the institution if they are available.

- 6.9 The operation of DSA can allow institutions to channel DSA funding. Where institutions deliver SpLD services in-house, such as one to one support and note taking, they aggregate income per DSA claimant allowing them to more efficiently use the funding. Several institutions felt that if DSA income was to come directly to institutions, support could be more efficiently and effectively delivered.

“Well if they [BIS/SFE] gave us the money [DSA], we could be really creative in deciding how the money is used, drop-in services, one to one support in high needs, and a more streamlined approach for the majority of students with straightforward assessments.” (M, Head of Student Services)

- 6.10 A number of institutions that deliver services in-house highlighted the administrative costs associated with the DSA claiming process due to DSA funded staff requiring associate or zero hours contracts and the burdens placed on staff when having to evidence a student's use of services. Institutions also felt the funding system for staff gave the feeling of a lack of a concrete staffing plan.

“Most are on fractional contracts and many are term-time only. Given that we encourage applicants to apply for DSA in the recess, it leads inevitably to a lack of staff contact continuity – not ideal...we have not had a good staffing base and the formula for staffing has never been clear – but only driven by a rough sense of how we could avoid a crisis.” (M, Head of Student Services)

“We spend an inordinate amount of time battling with funding bodies [including NHS] as they will check registers and say well so and so has only turned up for one seminar in three...an awful lot of energy and time-resource chasing funding body payments that the university has to pick up the tab for.” (H, Head of Student Services)

iv) Central Funding Pots:

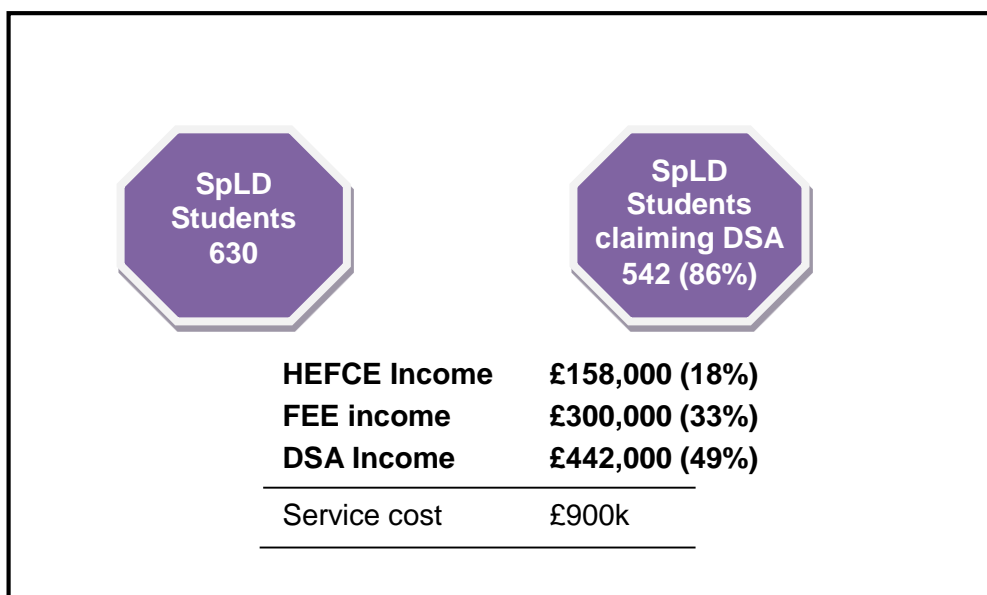
- 6.11 Most institutions operate central funding pots. There tends not to be ring-fencing of monies from particular sources to particular activities. Thus HEFCE SO money would not be specifically earmarked for disability beyond the disability element of SO funding calculated by HEFCE. Similarly, any surpluses generated by institutions through the operation of DSA assessment centres would not be directed towards disability support. Funding tends to be allocated to disability from a central funding pot on the basis of need and relative priority. It is not, therefore, determined by the flow of specific external funds although indirectly this could impact on relative priorities.

“The funding of disability support is based on a business plan that reflects student need. We identify the level of resource we require and the DSA and HEFCE funding sources available. The difference is made up by university funding.” (H, Student Services Manager)

### **Funding Illustration**

- 6.12 In order to assess the relative contributions of the three most significant SpLD funding sources, Figure 6.1 provides an example of the balance of funding for a particular institution.

**Figure 6.1: Institution SpLD Funding Illustration**



6.13 This funding illustration (Figure 6.1) shows that DSA accounts for 50% of total SpLD support. In contrast, HEFCE spend accounts for 18% and institutional spend 33%.

### **HEFCE Funding**

6.14 The majority of sample institutions experienced a reduction in HEFCE funding in 2014/15 with the merging of ALF with the SO. Table 6.1 shows combined levels of ALF and SO from academic year 2013/14 to 2015/16.

6.15 Interpretation of these figures should consider that the amount that institutions receive from HEFCE will fluctuate year to year as a result of the allocation being calculated on the FTE number of students returned by the institution with the requisite characteristics in any given year. Therefore, some of the changes between years seen here will also be a result of normal volatility in the funding method. Consideration should also be given to the recent increases in tuition fees charged to students by institutions.

**Table 6.1: Total Student Opportunity Fund (and equivalent funding) from 2013/14 (October Allocation) to 2015/16 (March Allocation).**

Rank	Tariff	Total SO Fund + ALF 2013/14 excl. ALF in year reallocation	Total SO fund (Oct) 2014/15	Total SO fund 2015/16 (March)	% change 2013/14 to 2014/15 (March)	% change 2014/15 to 2015/16 (March)	% change 2013/14 to 2015/16 (March)
H	1	861,368	673,816	858,575	-22%	27%	0%
H	1	456,168	450,257	487,884	-1%	8%	7%
H	1	34,496,397	34,899,989	34,370,893	1%	-2%	0%
H	1	55,266	27,281	30,013	-51%	10%	-46%
H	1	246,024	211,756	207,256	-14%	-2%	-16%
H	3	2,239,623	2,326,890	2,390,640	4%	3%	7%
H	3	3,475,241	3,311,340	3,291,238	-5%	-1%	-5%
H	3	1,201,576	1,296,755	1,457,541	8%	12%	21%
H	6	1,538,149	1,348,138	1,107,540	-12%	-18%	-28%
M	2	1,790,752	1,213,666	1,320,473	-32%	9%	-26%
M	2	2,186,920	1,555,474	1,623,648	-29%	4%	-26%
M	3	2,070,193	1,866,079	1,911,172	-10%	2%	-8%
M	3	7,179,696	6,408,186	6,664,077	-11%	4%	-7%
M	3	4,917,284	4,501,574	4,229,618	-8%	-6%	-14%
M	4	2,437,887	2,566,752	2,484,453	5%	-3%	2%
M	4	4,896,415	4,734,494	4,080,898	-3%	-14%	-17%
M	4	4,511,125	3,999,713	4,330,450	-11%	8%	-4%
M	6	1,101,146	1,933,283	1,592,228	76%	-18%	45%
L	2	1,087,740	708,099	753,784	-35%	6%	-31%
L	2	748,849	490,649	481,874	-34%	-2%	-36%
L	3	5,678,652	5,431,686	5,263,975	-4%	-3%	-7%
L	3	5,074,108	5,293,580	6,075,245	4%	15%	20%
L	4	6,098,411	6,023,756	6,122,496	-1%	2%	0%
L	4	4,302,709	4,125,080	4,291,531	-4%	4%	0%
L	4	6,455,682	6,268,722	6,547,532	-3%	4%	1%

*The SO fund was introduced in 2012/13. In 2014/15, ALF was incorporated into the SO. The SO draws together five existing funding elements: Full-Time Widening Access, Part-Time Widening Access, Disability Element, Full-time improving retention, and Part-time improving retention. Total SO represents the sum of these five elements.*

[www.hefce.ac.uk/sas/funding/](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/sas/funding/)

6.16 The average reduction in HEFCE funding across case study institutions was 9% from 2013/14 to 2015/16.

6.17 However, HEFCE have committed to an increase in the disability element of SO funding for 2015/16 as shown in Table 6.2.

**Table 6.2: Disability Element of Student Opportunity Funding 2013 to 2015  
(March allocation)**

Rank	Tariff	Disability SO 2013/14 (Oct)	Disability SO 2014/15 (Oct)	Disability SO 2015/16 (March)	%change 2013/14 to 2014/15 (March)	% change 2014/15 to 2015/16 (March)	% change 2013/14 to 2015/16 (March)
H	1	60,668	64,162	85,855	6%	34%	42%
H	1	25,951	27,044	37,695	4%	39%	45%
H	1	215,317	223,132	276,311	4%	24%	28%
H	1	25,094	27,281	30,013	9%	10%	20%
H	1	41,669	41,976	58,245	1%	39%	40%
H	3	211,956	222,783	239,404	5%	7%	13%
H	3	183,274	182,487	232,012	0%	27%	27%
H	3	84,140	67,976	93,035	-19%	37%	11%
H	6	54,429	55,470	69,424	2%	25%	28%
M	2	220,293	228,836	307,031	4%	34%	39%
M	2	374,027	248,745	339,648	-33%	37%	-9%
M	3	211,341	158,734	202,345	-25%	27%	-4%
M	3	321,634	310,383	414,395	-3%	34%	29%
M	3	275,548	265,036	328,580	-4%	24%	19%
M	4	90,012	90,384	78,466	0%	-13%	-13%
M	4	78,501	140,891	80,661	79%	-43%	3%
M	4	170,918	156,135	272,172	-9%	74%	59%
M	6	15,319	15,871	21,224	4%	34%	39%
L	2	83,942	85,044	125,250	1%	47%	49%
L	2	142,307	140,519	191,961	-1%	37%	35%
L	3	191,659	177,812	224,446	-7%	26%	17%
L	3	110,068	230,023	314,002	109%	37%	185%
L	4	283,708	186,641	123,822	-34%	-34%	-56%
L	4	73,517	71,373	98,600	-3%	38%	34%
L	4	129,084	132,106	172,192	2%	30%	33%

This disability element of SO funding is a grant based on HEFCE's calculations. However, institutions are free to use the funding however they choose within HEFCE's broad guidelines. *'Institutions receive most of their teaching, research and knowledge exchange funding as a grant that they are free to spend according to their own priorities, within our broad guidelines.'* (HEFCE)

- 6.18 The average change in the disability element of HEFCE SO funding, over the period 2013/14 to October 2015/16, was an increase of 30%. It should be noted, however, that the 2015/16 allocations are indicative and maybe subject to change.

### **Perceived HEFCE Cut in Funding**

- 6.19 All institutions feel that they experience a cut in HEFCE funding relating to disability support. In many cases, their perception of the cut was greater than the actual 9% cut based on Table 6.1 and does not take into account other funding compensations. It also appears to have been strongly influenced by what is regarded as the removal of the ALF, which was actually merged with the SO but does not feature in the disability element of the fund (Table 6.2) that actually increased by an average of 30%. In

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particular, this is linked to the quite significant costs in some institutions of conducting diagnostic assessments which are funded by the ALF.

“Home students who were screened for a SpLD positively are no longer automatically eligible for ALF funding (as in previous years) to cover the cost of a diagnostic assessment (£300+) and, therefore, were not able to be diagnosed and access support. The reduction in the number of students who have disclosed a disability in the current academic year results from the reduced number of students with a SpLD accessing the service; this number was down from 895 in 2012/13 to 800 in 2013/14.” (M, Disability Support Manager)

- 6.20 Disability support staff recognised the disability support element of the SO as the key contribution to their support budget. Essentially, this contributes towards the cost of funding the central support team. Institutional finance staff do not necessarily make this link and would argue that they respond to a disability business case that reflects the cost of delivering the required support service. On the basis of this analogy, the HEFCE contribution to the cost of supporting the central support team in 2015/16 averaged £176,672; it ranged from £21,000 to £414,000.
- 6.21 Institutions express a general concern that HEFCE funding may decline in the longer term requiring institutions to invest more of other income such as tuition fees.

### **Ring-Fencing**

- 6.22 Some institutions ring-fenced the equivalent of their former ALF allocation and accessed widening participation monies to support services under threat.

“The Access to Learning Fund has been reduced and rolled into the Student Opportunity Fund, but what we have done is ring-fence an amount of money that reflects what would have been the ALF funding equivalent so that there is not a sudden fall off of support year on year...our ability to sustain this of course is very challenging given the degree of recent and planned cuts to funding.” (H, Finance Manager)

### **DSA Funding**

- 6.23 As indicated earlier, DSA is the most significant element of funding support available to be accessed by SpLD students. It is, however, student specific and quite separate from HEFCE and Institutional SpLD funding. It cannot be used for universal disability support within the institution e.g. the core SpLD support team or wider academic support.
- 6.24 While DSA funding is critical to delivering the required level of SpLD student support, it is widely regarded as a medical and deficit model and a barrier to a more progressive social support model.

“The DSA continues to promote a medical model of disability and, in doing so, acts against the principles and requirements of the legislative developments made over the past two decades.” (H, Student Services Manager)

“While DSA funding is critical to ensuring adequate funding, it does medicalise specific learning difficulties and makes it more difficult to adopt a social model approach. Ideally, it would be better to support students outside DSA if possible.” (L, Academic Support Manager)

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“By distancing SpLD from DSA, it could move to a more mainstream model of support, which is fully inclusive of all students. The development and integration of inclusive teaching and learning methods would bring benefits to all students, without placing those with SpLD at a disadvantage. Higher education needs to adopt an approach to SpLD based upon the social model of disability, in which the focus is not upon individual impairment, but upon identifying and eliminating teaching, learning and social practices which create needless barriers.” (H, Student Services Manager)

6.25 Where the level of integration between the central support team and the DSA periphery is low, DSA contributes little directly to university funding of SpLD support.

6.26 Where institutions contract out services to external suppliers DSA is essential ‘in and out’ money. Where institutions contract out all services, it is generally more difficult to support those not on DSA. It is these institutions that are the most restricted by the DSA model and feel it perpetuates a medical model. Exceptions to this are wealthier institutions that are easily able to set up their own SpLD funding pots that can be accessed for students not on DSA.

“DSA is essentially ‘in and out’ money. We purchase specialist services with it. If the numbers fluctuate, it does not make much difference. Specialist support for SpLD is funded almost exclusively from DSA.” (L, Finance Manager)

6.27 Where institutions deliver DSA funded support in-house, this model is seen to be costly to the institution.

“DSA can be claimed back for student sessions but this does not cover things such as overheads and staffing.” (M, Academic Support Manager)

6.28 As a result, DSA is felt to perpetuate a contracted out model of student support, which potentially undermines the quality of student support and the engagement of SpLD support.

“A lot of our support staff are on zero hours contracts, and we would really like to be able to place that work and employees rights on a more secure footing, also core staff do end up having to do preparatory work and support work around DSA that ought really to be dealt with and funded perhaps as core funding...also we spend an inordinate amount of time battling with funding bodies [including NHS] as they will check registers and say well so and so has only turned up for one seminar in three.” (H, Academic Support Manager).

6.29 Potential changes to the way non-medical helpers are selected may remove the option of in-house provision for institutions. Currently, institutions can be named as a supplier of DSA funded services or they may have entered into an arrangement with a single external supplier. That arrangement is currently under review.

6.30 Where institutions currently deliver support in-house, this could pose a risk to this service.

## **Institutional Funding**

6.31 Institutions already invest significant amounts of money in delivering core disability support from sources outside DSA and HEFCE SO including fee income, other HEFCE grants and private sources of income. This we estimate averages around one

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third of total support. It ranges, however, from 8% to 80% based on the difference between total disability spend identified by the institution compared with the HEFCE disability element of SO funding.

“Excluding DSA, we spend £350,000 on disability support. Only 20% of this is funded through the HEFCE disability element of SO funding. The rest we now fund. Last year, all was HEFCE funded. This has been a big gap to fill. A business case was made so we found the money.” (L, Finance Manager)

- 6.32 Institutions have experienced significant reductions in this element since 2013 as identified in Table 6.2, which has resulted in institutions having to fund any gaps left in order to maintain levels of provision; this has been exacerbated for disability teams due to the merging of the ALF and SO funds due to institutions historically accessing up to one third of ALF allocations to pay for student SpLD assessments. The merging has left disability teams feeling they have ‘lost’ large amounts of funding: this appears to be due to institutions having to make a business case to access elements of the SO funding, whereas, the system of using the ALF to fund assessments had been well established.
- 6.33 However, these conclusions should be considered with the knowledge that institutions have experienced an increase in tuition fees in this period and that elements of the disability element of SO funding reduction can be attributed to normal fluctuations in funding based on FTE student numbers.
- 6.34 As identified in Table 6.2, the HEFCE disability element of SO funding for 2015/16 will result in significant increases in this element for the majority of institutions ranging from 7% to 47%. However, based on the reported spend on disability by institutions, the disability element of SO funding will still leave many institutions with a gap to fill (albeit based on provisional estimates).
- 6.35 Combined pressures of increasing student numbers presenting with SpLD, and concerns regarding finite HEFCE and DSA funding, place pressures on the institutional purse.
- 6.36 One finance manager felt that the disability support team would be under additional pressure to make a strong business case backed by hard evidence:

“It’s up to the disability support side to put all that information together to make a business case for more money. We don’t currently link the two. We will need to know exactly what return we get for our use of given funding. Any dramatic reductions in DSA or other income would require [the institution] to reflect on our wider obligations to students, for example, Equality Act requirements, to look for alternative sources internally. It would require [names withheld] to put a business case together to ask the university for enhanced funds from elsewhere to support this work.” (H, Finance Manager)

### **Potential Future DSA Funding Changes**

- 6.37 In April 2014, Ministers announced proposed changes to DSA funding, including for non-medical help support. In September 2014, Ministers announced that proposed changes to non-medical help would be deferred to 2016/17 to give further time for institutions to ready themselves for the changes.
- 6.38 In March 2015 the Department for Business, Innovation & Skills (BIS) announced that proposed changes concerning accommodation, peripherals and consumables that



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would have required additional reasonable adjustments from institutions would also be deferred until the academic year 2016/17.<sup>12</sup>

6.39 Guidance for DSA 2015/16 from the Student Loans Company outlines the changes confirmed to take place in the 2015/16 academic year which include:<sup>13</sup>

- New 2015/16 students who are recommended and agreed a computer via the DSA will be required to pay £200 towards the cost of this.
- For students who present at their needs assessment with a computer, BIS have developed guidance to determine whether this computer is suitable.
- Assistive software will continue to be funded through DSA.

6.40 With details of future DSA funding in flux, institutions are most concerned about future cuts to DSA support which would require institutional funds to fill the gap.

“Strategically, we recognise that there will be declining levels of funding for disability support from central government. As our plan is to become less DSA-reliant, this will have little impact on the implementation of our planned social model vision.” (H, Member of the Executive Team)

“We worry about what we might best do if money reduces – we are discussing this and will try to identify other sources, but these are not jumping out at us and there are no easy answers – we hope the university will cover and compensate for loss of funds for Bands 1 and 2 but who can say? The university has put more money in since 2011 to make up for the loss of Access to Learning funds, but this cannot continue without a major review of disability support. We certainly accept that we will need to focus on all practices in the institution to ensure inclusive practice – what you refer to as mainstreamed approaches.” (H, Head of Student Services)

6.41 DSA funding concerns are potentially hastening the drive toward a more social model of support.

## **International Students**

6.42 International students are unable to claim DSA and represent a funding challenge for many institutions.

6.43 Most institutions were able to support international students with SpLD, although not necessarily to the same level of support available to those students drawing down DSA.

“We have a contingency fund for International disabled students who cannot claim DSA. International students with SpLD will receive some specialist support but not as intensive as students on DSA.” (L, Disability Support Manager).

“Currently, the university is able to offer international students the same levels of support as those home students who claim DSA by

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<sup>12</sup> Changes to DSA Policy for 2015/16. 2015. Student Finance England. [online] [www.practitioners.slc.co.uk/about-us/practitioners-news/changes-to-dsa-policy-for-201516.aspx](http://www.practitioners.slc.co.uk/about-us/practitioners-news/changes-to-dsa-policy-for-201516.aspx)

<sup>13</sup> DSA 15/16 Policy Changes Fact Sheet. 2015. Student Loans Company. [online] [www.practitioners.slc.co.uk/media/893396/1516\\_policy\\_changes\\_-\\_fact\\_sheet.pdf](http://www.practitioners.slc.co.uk/media/893396/1516_policy_changes_-_fact_sheet.pdf)

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utilising the income surplus from DSA plus a ring-fenced fund of around £80,000 from the university.” (M, Disability Support Manager)

## **Other Issues**

### **Promotion of Support**

- 6.44 Some institutions feared that in the prevailing financial climate there might be a case for playing down the promotion of disability support.

“In the current disability deficit funding climate, some universities might start playing down the level of support they advertise on their websites to prospective students. It may not be the time to be seen as overly disabled friendly less you attract a disproportionate share that will need to be funded predominantly by the university; a terrible but perhaps realistic thing to say.” (L, Member of Executive Team)

### **IT Issues**

- 6.45 Institutions are considering IT solutions to actual and potential DSA cuts to ensure students do not have to provide £200 toward an IT kit.

“I’m having a conversation with colleagues in information technology services around the fact that some students are going to have to find two hundred quid for their kit now, their laptop or their PC, the first two hundred quid. We are looking to see what we can put in place to enable students to have the conversation we’re having now.” (L, Head of Disability Support)

- 6.46 A number of institutions felt that the effect of changes to DSA policy, such as not providing funding for laptops, is seen as probably having an effect for the following groups of students:

- Mature students who are less likely to have their own laptop or smartphone and therefore less likely to be familiar with technology;
- Younger students who may be using their parents’ laptop, which may not have a high enough specification to run some of the necessary software.

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## 7 MEASURING EFFECTIVENESS

### Key Points to Note

- Most institutions are unable to break down their management information to SpLD student level.
- Most institutions are able to assess particular aspects of SpLD performance. There is, however, no systematic analysis of effectiveness.
- Institutions lack a clear logic model to measure SpLD impact through inputs, outputs and outcomes.
- Most institutions feel, on the basis of very patchy and generally anecdotal information, that the support delivered is meeting student needs. A common key indicator is the lack of student complaints.
- Almost all institutions are seeking to improve the range of performance information they collect to inform the future direction of service delivery. The measuring of effectiveness will be an important part of a future business case.
- It has not been possible to formally assess the impact of SpLD support on student learning outcomes or indeed the relative effectiveness of different support practices.

### Introduction

- 7.1 In this section, we consider the effectiveness of SpLD support in delivering against operational objectives. Where possible, we have tried to access institutional output and outcome data; however, the analysis is largely based on the perceptions of the individuals consulted.
- 7.2 The positions of the individuals consulted as part of the management monitoring of effectiveness included:
- Administration
  - Student Services Manager
  - Member of Executive Team
  - Disability Support Manager.

### Overview

- 7.3 Most institutions are unable to accurately measure the effectiveness of their SpLD support. While a wide range of managerial information is generated and points to aspects of performance there is no systematic analysis. This partly reflects the increasing complexity of delivery with greater integration with wider disability support and other support services. There is also, however, a lack of clarity regarding what constitutes effectiveness and how it might best be measured.
- 7.4 Historically, there has been no pressing institutional demand for performance information, with SpLD support almost regarded as an intrinsic good and taken on faith. As the numbers of students presenting with SpLD increase, and there are questions raised over both future funding and methods of delivery, this is an area where all institutions recognise that they need to up their game.

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## Clarification of Effectiveness and Impact

- 7.5 Most institutions tend not to think about SpLD in the context of measuring effectiveness. While they might highlight particular activities which they regard as effective practice, such as student screening or drop-in sessions, it is not entirely clear what the collective impact is on individual students or the institution as a whole. Various statistics are generated from different sources at different times, which could claim a link to effectiveness but they tend not to be drawn together in a consistent manner or single accessible document.

“We have not been very good historically at drawing together management information to support impact. The information exists somewhere in the system; however, it seems difficult to extract in a way that we want it. We know we need to work harder on this.” (H, Head of Student Support Service)

“I feel confident that disability/SpLD support is effective. Retention is good. Student perception is good. Learning outcomes for disabled students outperform non-disabled students. We have had few complaints. This suggests to me we have got it right.” (L, Member of Executive Team)

- 7.6 What is missing is some form of clear logic model for SpLD support that clearly articulates:

- **Inputs:** funding and staff resourcing
- **Outputs:** the range of support activities
- **Outcomes:** impact on supported learners and institution as a whole.

- 7.7 Following this framework, it would be possible to establish a hierarchy of performance indicators, measures and targets against which effectiveness and impact could be assessed. A few institutions have started to think about following this route.

### An Incomplete Picture

- 7.8 Most institutions at present have a fairly incomplete picture of how well the SpLD service is operating. Where information is generated, it tends to relate to three aspects of delivery:

#### (1) Numbers of students supported

- 7.9 Most institutions collect information on:

- Number of pre-entry disclosures
- Number of screenings
- Number of educational psychologist’s assessments
- Number of DSA assessments
- Number of DSA students supported.

- 7.10 In the absence of more detailed information, institutions use numbers of students disclosing and those being diagnosed as indicators of success under the assumption that greater numbers disclosing/being diagnosed indicates that they are successfully supporting more students.

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7.11 Some institutions have information on numbers of students accessing support. However, in many cases where this is available it is broken down by disabled/non-disabled student but not by disability type allowing the isolation of SpLD students. In the majority of institutions, SpLD students make up between 50% and 95% of disabled students, therefore, in some cases inferences can be made from numbers only broken down by disability.

7.12 Areas that are less clear include:

- Student drop out between the stages and reason for drop out e.g. positive disability screening to educational psychologist's assessment; and educational psychologist's assessment to DSA assessment;
- Number of students including international students receiving non-DSA support.

## **(2) Implementation of required support and quality of support**

7.13 This is a very grey area and largely anecdotal. More information is needed on:

- Student take up of DSA support including technical support and one to one support
- Student satisfaction with one to one support
- Student satisfaction with implementation of specific adaptations
- Student satisfaction with non-DSA support

7.14 Where information is gathered it is generally through the NSS. However, as highlighted by a number of institutions the question relating to support in the NSS is not clear enough about what type of support it is asking about and does not provide the information that institutions would need to evaluate satisfaction levels of SpLD students regarding SpLD support.

7.15 A number of institutions report that they have recently or are in the process of designing their own student feedback survey, in order to measure satisfaction with services.

“We are currently designing a questionnaire to get student feedback; the NSS question about support is not clear enough about what type of support it is asking about so we can't get any conclusions about academic support from this.” (H, Disability Support Manager)

7.16 A number of institutions highlighted the fact that they use numbers of student complaints as a proxy for student satisfaction.

“[...] the fact that we have a fairly low complaint rate says to me that actually what we're doing is pretty much okay...there were six disability-related complaints in 2013/14 and a lot of these [state that] their faculty haven't put in place support for them in the class and that seems to be a key thing. But then again, that's something which can easily be addressed.” (L, Head of Student Support)

## **(3) Students completing the required and expected learning outcomes**

7.17 Relevant information collected by some institutions includes a comparison between disabled and non-disabled students in relation to:

- Institution retention rates;

- Institution achievement rates;
- Graduate employment;
- Over half of institutions had available data on student retention rates for disabled and non-disabled students and almost 20% of institutions had information on student retention rates by SpLD. This information was mostly contained in equality and diversity annual reports;

“One of the KPIs within the university is to focus on increasing the number of good degrees. In this respect analysis has been undertaken comparing the performance of disabled students with the wider student population [...] 8% achieve a first-class degree compared with 14% of the wider population, but 45% achieve a 2:1 compared with 41% of the wider population...” (M, Student Support Manager)

- Over half of institutions had available data on student achievements by disability. This information was mostly contained in the annual reports or equality and diversity reports. However, under 20% of institutions had information about student achievements broken down by SpLD;

“There is no specific analysis of SpLD students in terms of their academic outcomes. An analysis is done around disabled students in general...but we are aware that we have the data to do further SpLD analysis. There is a specific project this year for one of the advisers to explore and report on SpLD data in particular.” (M, Student Support Manager)

7.18 Some institutions have been looking toward wider evidence of outcomes including graduate employment.

“Our data is beginning to show some unexpected patterns, that students with SpLD are actually more likely to get graduate jobs than the general population.” (Member of Executive Team)

7.19 Where available to institutions, most of the analysis conducted relating to this data is indicative rather than conclusive.

7.20 Where data is not available, institutions are:

- Considering other anecdotal data sources to undertake analysis including: student barometer/inspirational teacher nominations, anecdotal information from email correspondence, external reports for DSA Quality Assurance Group (DSA-QAG) assessor.
- Developing methods to gather more concrete information including student questionnaires, quantitative analysis and tracking studies.

“We are starting an evaluation of SpLD students’ experiences, and we can disaggregate by SpLD but we do not do that yet – we know that students with DSA do better comparatively than non-DSA recipients – we simply need to draw out that data from a quantitative analysis as well as using questionnaire responses. It would be great to put some rigour on to this analysis – we know that there’s lots we have not got a full grasp of, just a gist anecdotally.” (H, Head of Learning Support)

“We have instigated a small piece of research to trace through the progression of a small group (30) disabled students through Level 1 to Level 2 for the next few years to explore how the support has helped them.” (M, Head of Disability Support)

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## Management Information Available

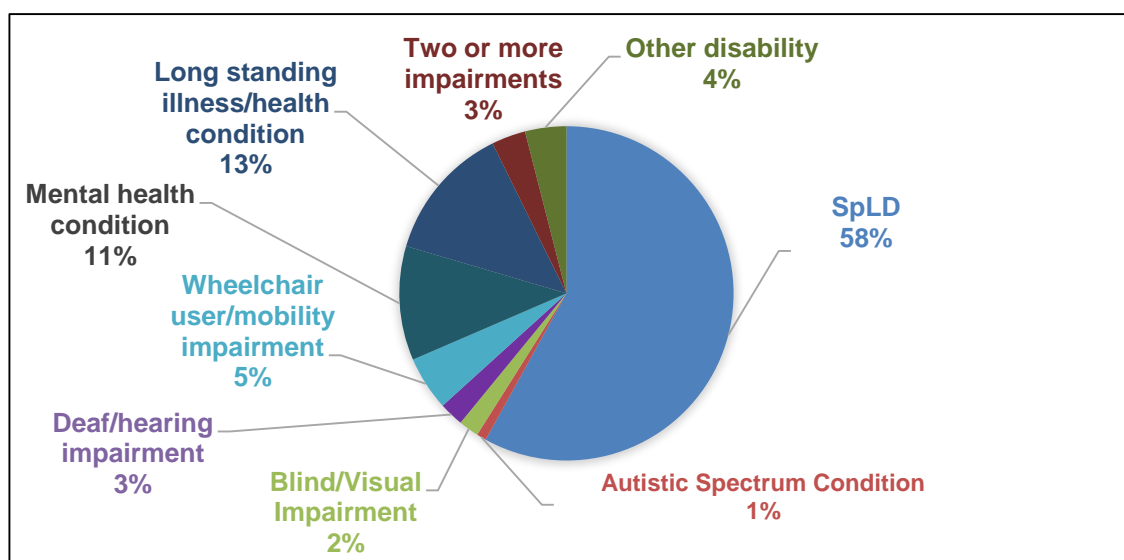
7.21 Outlined, in this section, are some examples of the disability-related MI institutions were able to make available. These include:

- Numbers of SpLD students
- Numbers claiming DSA
- DSA income
- Numbers of students accessing support
- Student satisfaction
- Learning outcomes
- Retention and progression.

7.22 In most cases, this information could not be broken down easily to show SpLD trends.

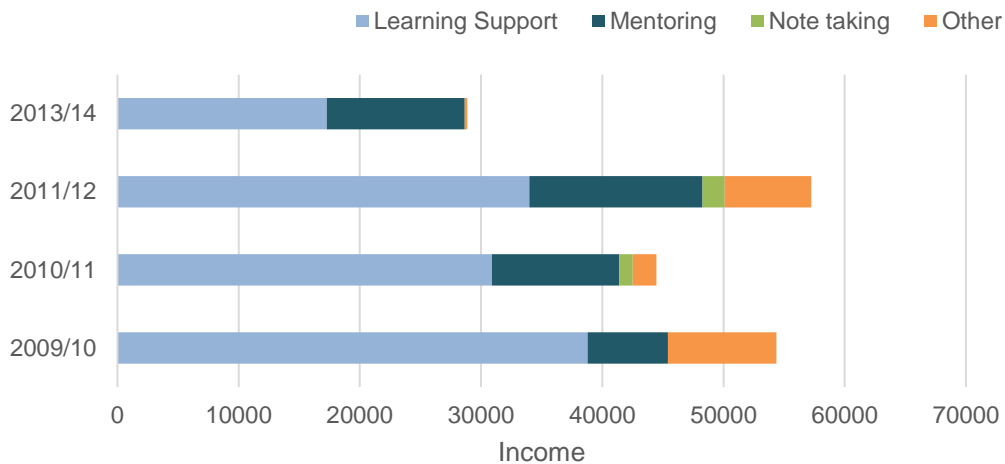
7.23 Figure 7.1 shows a breakdown of the disabled student population by disability type based on the institution enrolment records.

**Figure 7.1: 2010/11 Students with an Enrolment Record and Disclosed Disability in a Case Study Institution (H)**



7.24 DSA income, in one case study institution, has been spent largely on learning support and mentoring. Spending on other support has been reduced since 2009/10. This breakdown was not largely available from institution (Figure 7.2).

**Figure 7.2: DSA Income by Type of Support in a Case Study Institution (H)**

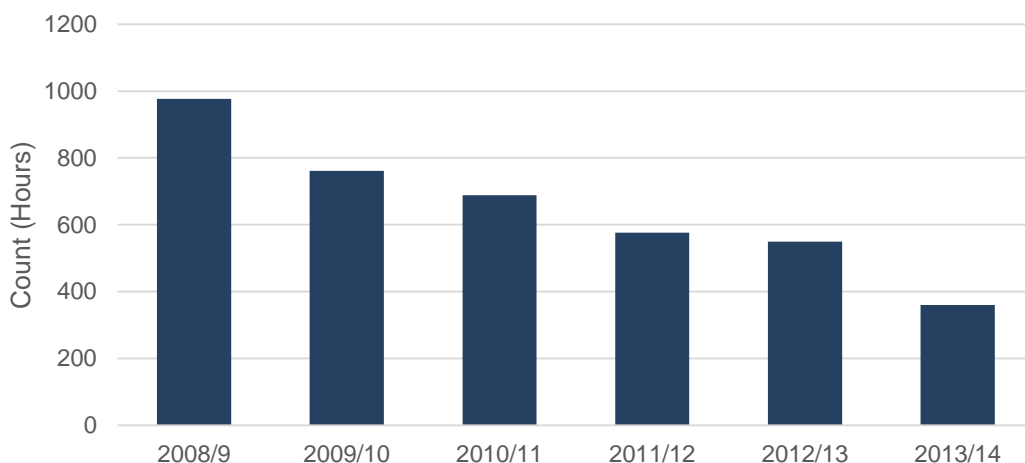


7.25 Numbers of students accessing support was not readily available from institutions. Where it was available in one institution, they were able to identify the balance between non-SpLD and SpLD students accessing academic support.

“In 2013/14, we had 201 SpLD students in receipt of DSA. Of those, 74 (37%) accessed the Academic Support service (26 first years, 21 second years, 27 third years). Interestingly, a total of 71 students without SpLD accessed the service in that year. Students may also have attended group workshops – we do not record individual attendance, but only 14 students attended workshops throughout the year.” (H, Student Services Manager)

7.26 Monitoring numbers of students accessing support allowed one institution to identify that the number of one to one tutorials had been decreasing year on year (Figure 7.3).

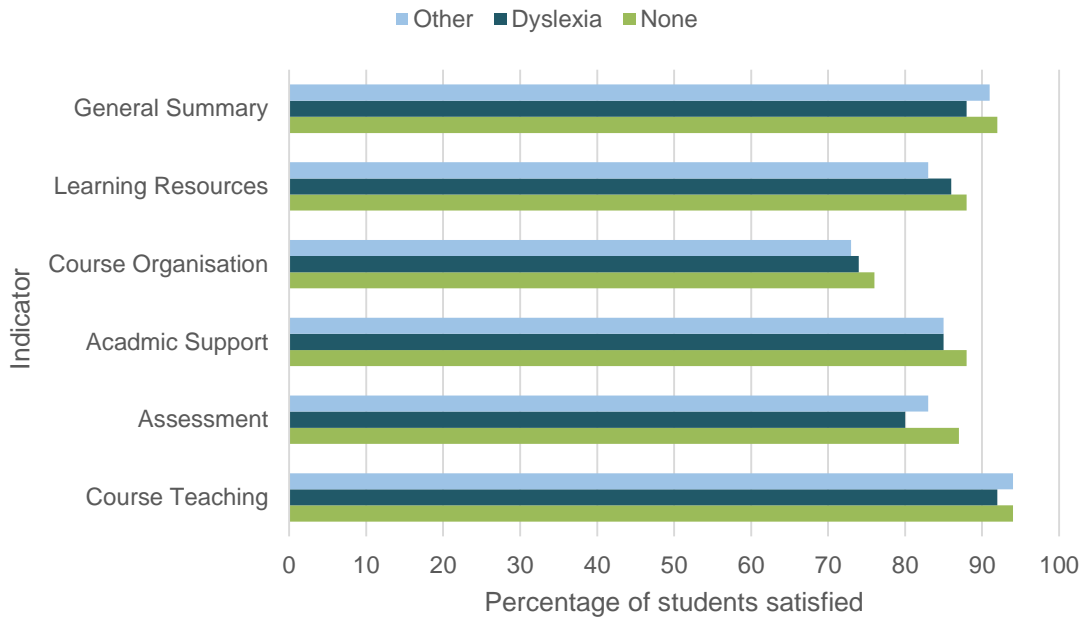
**Figure 7.3 Number of Tutorial Hours Provided in a Case Study Institution (H)**



7.27 One institution broke down student satisfaction by category of support and by dyslexic and non-dyslexic students. This allowed them to identify that, on the whole dyslexic, students were less satisfied with support than non-dyslexic students (Figure 7.4).

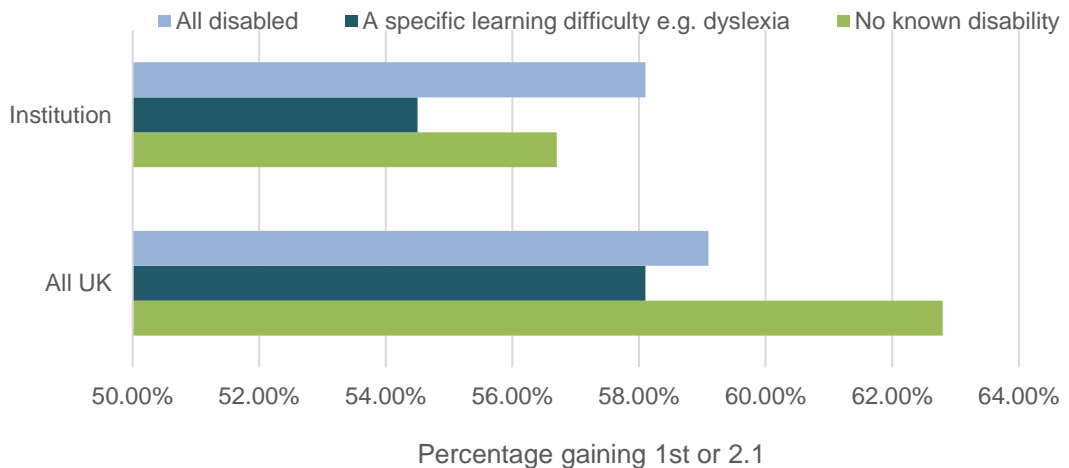


**Figure 7.4: Satisfaction of Students by Disability (H)**



7.28 Where institutions break down degree attainment by SpLD, it was evident that SpLD students were performing slightly below those with no known disability.

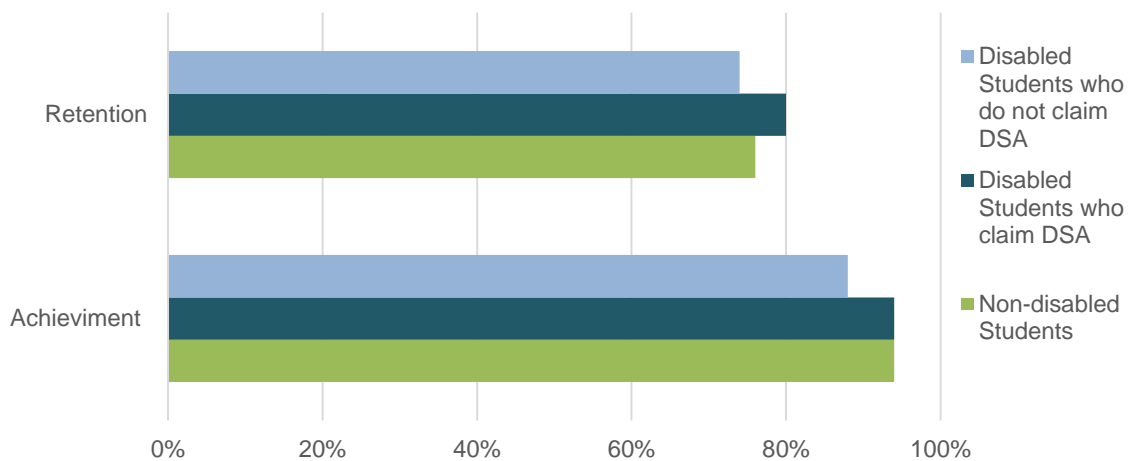
**Figure 7.5: Percentage of First-Degree Students Gaining a First or 2:1 in 2008/09 – Case Study Institution Comparison with All UK Institutions (H)**



### Retention and Progression

7.29 In some institutions, progression and achievement levels are recorded for disabled and non-disabled students. In this institution, disabled students who do not claim DSA had lower retention and progression rates than those who claim DSA (Figure 7.6).

**Figure 7.6: Disabled Students' Progression and Retention Rates in a Case Study Institution (H)**



### **Effective Practice not Proven**

- 7.30 While there is evidence of a wide variety of SpLD support models and practices across institutions, the dearth of comparable information on effectiveness and impact makes it difficult to draw any comparison relating to performance.
- 7.31 Most institutions feel that they are 'doing OK' but could do better with additional resourcing to their central support team. A few consider that they are doing well but may struggle to maintain resourcing in the future. A few institutions are concerned that they have lost their way but look forward to a restructuring of their delivery model. In the main, these views are based on 'gut-feeling' assessment supplemented by partial quantitative data.
- 7.32 The bottom line is that in reality, that the effectiveness of both absolute and relative practice remains unproven.

### **Future Business Case**

- 7.33 Most institutions are currently reviewing their models of disability support. This will inevitably require a business case to support either existing or alternative models. This process will inevitably increase the demand for better MI and clear measures of effectiveness and impact.
- 7.34 A few institutions have already begun this process and started to assemble key performance indicators and develop strategies to collect the information to measure them.
- 7.35 Where this process has not yet begun, a number institutions already collect a wide range of information that could potentially allow them to assess the effectiveness of SpLD support. Indeed, reports are generated on a regular basis by disability support teams. However, this type of information is not being used to demonstrate a business case for disability support. There is, however, the potential to use it more systematically for this purpose in the future.

“In terms of reporting arrangements, the Student Services Manager prepares a termly and annual report of activity and progress to a member of the Executive Team.” (H, Student Services Manager)

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## 8 THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

### Key Points to Note

- Approximately three quarters of SpLD students expressed disappointment about the lack of support they received from teaching staff. Almost all students were very positive about the support they received from the central support team.
- SpLD students felt that they were not consulted regarding the support they received and would like to have a greater input.
- Some students complained that particular faculties within their institutions were ignoring centrally agreed reasonable adjustments for SpLD.
- Students complained that there was an inconsistency in support between centralised support staff and faculty staff.
- Students were concerned about potential cuts to DSA for SpLD.
- Students placed a high value on one to one support for SpLD.
- Some SpLD students complained that the support they received was misunderstood by others in the student population. They also felt that a universal support offer would disadvantage them.
- Some international students felt that they were unable to access the degree of support they felt they needed and was available to home-based students with SpLD.

8.1 This section considers the views of students regarding the delivery and effectiveness of SpLD support. The analysis is presented under the following headings:

- Centralised Support
- DSA Support
- Teaching Support
- Social Model
- Missing Out Groups
- Funding Cuts.

8.2 The analysis is based on consultations with 150 students and student representatives across 18 institutions. The positions of the individuals consulted as part of the delivery of support include:

- SpLD students
- Non-SpLD students
- Student Union representatives.

8.3 Student experiences were highly varied and dependent on the nature of their SpLD, the type and size of the institution, the subject being studied, whether they had been diagnosed before entering the institution, and their current level of study. As a result, we have resisted the temptation to be overly analytical. We also wanted to avoid repeating early findings and arguments. Our approach here has, therefore, been to cluster illustrative student perceptions against key performance criteria identified earlier in the report. What emerges from the institutional analysis is a previously understated student voice and clear consistency in identification of themes.

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## Centralised Support

- 8.4 Almost all students we spoke to were very positive about the support they received from the central SpLD support team.

“The support I get from Disability Support is just brilliant. It’s amazing. I can go and see them at any time.” (M, SpLD Student)

“We have never received a formal or informal complaint from any SpLD student at the Union. The system is obviously working because we get complaints about lots of other things.” (H, Student Union Representative)

- 8.5 Key themes emerging from student discussions regarding the central team support included:

### Accessing support

- 8.6 On the whole students found accessing the support very simple. Central teams in some institutions were very proactive in reminding students about appointments through email systems and text messages, which students found helpful, especially those whose SpLD resulted in poor organisation.

- 8.7 However, students felt that in some cases support was difficult to access and identified the following barriers to support:

- **Undefined Hierarchy:** Some students felt the model was not defined and they could not identify a clear hierarchy of support; this left them confused when trying to access support. One student stated that staff turnover had caused problems because the point of call for support kept changing.
- **Unclear SpLD Service Distinction:** One student felt that having academic support and disability support left them confused about which to approach about their SpLD; however, they identified the fact that communication support between these two teams had been strong and that this allowed them to be directed easily to the correct department.

“When I first moved here I kept asking, ‘is there somewhere I can go?’ Oh no, just email this person, email this person. Oh no, it’s not her anymore, she’s changed job.” (L, SpLD Student)

- **Inaccessible Information:** One student highlighted the fact that having detailed information online about the support system was not helpful given the nature of their SpLD.

“Information being online about dyslexia and dyspraxia is not helpful for me, I cannot deal with using information on the internet; it just doesn’t work.” (M, SpLD Student)

- **Slow Assessment Process:** Where students could only receive SpLD support once diagnosed, the barrier to access was a result of a slow DSA process.
- **Too Much Proactivity from the Student:** Some students felt that it was difficult to seek out support and would have preferred institutions to reach out to them.

“This is the thing, I think at [the institution] you have to chase, you have to go out to find it. It’s hard for me to sometimes – like I won’t always remember those kind of things so for them to contact me would be a bit better. And, even just to go in and talk in person, because it’s hard for me to sometimes go through emails. It’s a bit kind of – I’m a bit

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reluctant to go through and fill things in, I prefer to talk to someone and do it that way.” (M, SpLD Student)

#### Resistance to links with academic support

- 8.8 Some students were concerned that linking SpLD support with academic support would result in non-SpLD students taking up resources.

#### Importance of screening

- 8.9 A number of students consulted highlighted the fact that the screening process in the institution had discovered their potential SpLD and felt the support received as a result had directly improved their performance.

“I got through my BA without realising I was dyspraxic. I hated it. When I got here I was picked up in screening. The support I have received has made a big difference to my confidence. I can now plan better. It has definitely improved my grades.”(H, SpLD Student)

“That everyone who failed an exam had to take a test seemed a bit full on at first but everybody is fine with it now. It makes sense. Everybody is a winner.” (M, SpLD Student)

#### Independence and resistance to assessment

- 8.10 Some students felt that they were able to manage their SpLD with very minimal support from the central team.

“I have always had slow handwriting, and now I have found out that it is dysgraphia and this means that I can get extra time in my exam. I have not had a DSA assessment, but I did complete a writing test. I have only been here a few months, but I don’t think I will need any extra help now.” (M, SpLD Student)

- 8.11 Others identified that they were aware of students who had SpLD or who were struggling that would not be formally assessed or seek support.

“In this place, there is resistance to asking for support. Everybody here was top of their class at school. They are very independent. The attitude is: if I have a problem I need to work harder.” (H, SpLD Student)

### **DSA Support**

- 8.12 Overall, most students were, generally, very positive about the quality of DSA support they received.

“I wouldn’t have survived university without the DSA funded support, but with it I came out with a first-class degree.” (M, SpLD Student)

- 8.13 Positive features included:

- **One to one Support:** Students found one to one support very helpful on the whole. The reasons for valuing this support were varied and depended on the nature of the problems that the student was facing.

“I find the one to one sessions really helpful. My dyspraxia means it is hard to organise things and they can really help me. They also helped

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me with my grammar and being able to clarify expressions, and we had reading techniques sessions.” (M, SpLD Student)

“The weekly sessions have been fantastic. I am a mature student so I had been out of writing for a while and my writing skills were awful.” (H, Mature SpLD Student)

“Well, I got a laptop, dictaphone, printer. I got most of the equipment and stuff. But I think if they’d said to me, ‘What would you rather lose?’ I would probably say the equipment rather than losing the one to one support. Because I could just use the lab computers.” (L, SpLD Student)

- **Note Taking:** A number of students felt note taking was an essential service that could not easily be replaced. In some institutions, students had faced resistance from tutors when attempting to use alternative technology in lectures; the note takers were seen as an essential service.

“The DSA funding I get is an absolute lifeline – I don’t think I would have stayed in university if I had not got the note taking help – I cannot think of an alternative to that.” (H, SpLD Student)

- **IT Equipment:** Where students have been given permission to use IT equipment in lectures, they have found the service to be very important. One student highlighted the fact that they would have preferred to have university lecture-capture as opposed to a personal recording equipment due to a lack of reliability of the recording. Students also valued the provision of a laptop and alternative hardware and software.

“My dictaphone as well: I wouldn’t have got the grades I got without my dictaphone. It absolutely saved me because I do science, so a lot of things they deliver are new words and I have to retain and go over it slowly at my own pace, taking notes. It was just absolutely invaluable.” (L, SpLD Student)

“I have had a laptop and used the Dragon software.” (M, SpLD Student)

- **Alternative Exam Arrangements (AEAs):** Students valued highly the provision of alternative exam arrangements, and the majority of students spoken to stated that they had accessed AEAs where they were available. The benefits of this are dependent on the students’ needs.

“Allowing me to sit exams in a separate room with a scribe allows me the freedom to answer in the way I want to without being restricted by my writing difficulties. I can do the exam in the way I should do.” (L, SpLD Student)

#### 8.14 Aspects of DSA support which were less positive included:

- **Assessment Process Length:** Students reported the assessment process taking as long as six months. Students felt stressed as a result of the process and in some cases felt over-assessed. A number of students highlighted the fact that this was a disincentive for many students in coming forward.

“The worst bit was having to wait ages for an assessment. The college were great in lending me stuff and getting things put in place to support me, note-takers and that....but you rely on getting a report back that can repay the college for things they’ve done in the meantime – really stressful and not what you need when you’re just starting university.” (M, SpLD Student)

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“The assessment process is a bit of a disincentive. It takes weeks and weeks to get through it. Why does it have to take so long? Is there really a need for so many assessments?” (M, SpLD Student)

“I was almost put off by the assessment. Nobody explained it to me at the time. I thought there must be something wrong with me but it turned out to be normal for my condition. Better if somebody could have sat down with me to let me know it was OK.” (L, SpLD Student)

- **Assessment Process Costs:** Some students felt that making a financial contribution toward an assessment was unfair and felt that this was also putting students off coming forward for assessment.

“We should not have to pay for the assessment. It’s free at other places. Definitely puts people off.” (L, SpLD Student)

- **General Awareness:** Students felt that many of their peers were generally unaware of the support on offer and, in some cases, were unaware of the support they could access themselves.

“Many students are unaware about what potential support there is available through disability support and DSA. If they knew they were giving £25,000 worth of support then more of them would apply for it. Many think it is just too much hassle.” (M, SpLD Student)

“I don’t know anything about an hour’s entitlement, I didn’t know this was part of my DSA: my department has no support structure at all for me.” (Chemical Engineering Student)

- **IT Training:** A number of students felt the IT training that was offered to support the use of alternative technologies was disappointing. Students commented that trainers sometimes went too quickly or that they had felt intimidated by the use of an external trainer. These students stated that, as a result, they have not been able to effectively use their DSA funded equipment.

“The DSA IT training was very disappointing. I found it a bit intimidating. It would have been better to have been supported by somebody within the university.” (L, SpLD Student)

- **Support for International Students:** In one institution, where international students do not receive any support, students felt that this was an unfair system.

“International students get nothing here, which is ridiculous as they pay the most.” (H, SpLD Student)

- **Nature of Support Packages:** Some students felt that they did not need or use the full package they were provided with.

“I’ve got the full package but don’t need it all. I used it a bit in first year but not since. To be honest, I had almost forgotten about it.” (L, SpLD Student)

“I did not need a laptop but the one they gave me was better so might as well take it. It should be based on need not entitlement.” (H, SpLD Student)

“Some SpLD students feel that they don’t need the help but if there is an exam advantage and a laptop going I’ll take it.” (H, SpLD Student)

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## Teaching Support

8.15 Approximately three quarters of students we spoke to expressed disappointment about the lack of support they received from teaching staff: Students identified a number of different problems they had experienced. These experiences varied greatly depending on the institution type and the nature of the student's SpLD.

8.16 Problems emerging from teacher support included:

- **Preparation of Materials:** A number of students identified the fact that, despite their reasonable adjustment forms specifying the advance preparation of materials, academic staff were not putting this in place. In some cases, students identified raising these issues with support teams but success in resolving the issue was variable.

“There is inconsistency of slides being put up on the website before the lectures. In some cases, lecturers put them up afterwards and some are only on request. In some cases, students noted that slides were not provided despite it being a clear requirement on their support profile.” (M, Student Union Representative)

- **Tutors not Recognising Students' SpLD:** A number of students felt their tutors were not aware of their SpLD. For many students this had not become an issue as their reasonable adjustments were being adhered to, however for others the situation was causing distress.

“One tutor argued with me as to whether I was dyslexic or not as I had only had the outline assessment. I was embarrassed as it was in front of another student and it seemed insensitive. I have never met my faculty advisor, she is off sick apparently, but I would not even know where she was based.” (H, SpLD Student)

- **Not Using Appropriate Teaching Methods:** A number of students felt academic staff were not taking account of SpLD students in the delivery of modules. Students were able to highlight where good practice existed and felt frustrated by the inconsistency across faculties and academics.

“We do not feel that teaching staff are making sufficient allowances for our learning issues. Most lecturers do not provide hand-outs, speak too fast and use too much jargon.” (H, SpLD Student)

“We recently had a student teacher who came to speak to us who was amazing. She was just so clear. She repeated everything. She summarised what she was talking about. I just got it. Why can't everybody do this?” (H, SpLD Student)

“Tutor responses vary: some good, some really not good. One tutor is introducing material that was not in the module guide and there's lots of new reading – and I only have one eye and even with an eyeglass and laptop [speech output of text] I struggle.” (H, SpLD Student)

- **Unavailable/Unclear Complaints Procedure:** Students' knowledge of complaints procedures was varied.

- Some students were clearly able to identify this and had successfully raised issues in the past. However others felt that although they were aware who they should raise complaints with, they did not feel comfortable in doing so.

“We do not feel that we are able to complain to course tutors about our problems. Everyone else in the class seems to be sorted and it would



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just be embarrassing. It is easier to speak to support tutors.” (H, SpLD Student)

- **Inappropriate Feedback/Marking Procedures:** A number of students highlighted that feedback from their lecturers was not taking into account their SpLD.
- In many cases students felt this was because the marker was not aware of their SpLD not because they were purposely ignoring it. One student had a positive experience of using a stickering system in his undergraduate years and felt it would have been beneficial in his postgraduate institution.

“When I get my feedback I get ‘brilliant arguments, but your style of writing is poor’. Stickers for essays might have helped the lecturer understand what is going on. So I cannot see why stickers are allowed in exams and not essays – what is the real difference here?” (M, SpLD Student)

“I have found this really difficult. We are supposed to get extra time, but our department won’t allow it. My disability tutor [centrally] tried to instigate support, but I still could not get the time that on paper I should have got – so myself and another student with dyslexia just gave up trying to get allowances.” (H, SpLD Student)

- **Negative Attitudes/Lack of Understanding from Tutors:** The majority of students were able to identify at least one incidence of a lack of understanding or a negative attitude from an academic. In many cases students had found this highly distressing, and felt that tutors would have benefitted from training.

“The department support was mixed, my supervisors were less than understanding and didn’t believe I should be completing a PhD. A supervisor compared my studies to a wheelchair-user being taught to ballet dance. The attitudes were upsetting and it took my head of department and the head of academic support to intervene before things were worked on.” (M, PhD SpLD Student)

“The most important thing is to get compulsory training for academics. Their lack of understanding is the biggest problem we face.” (M, SpLD Student)

8.17 A minority of students cited a more positive experience of teaching support regarding:

- **Preparation of materials in advance**

“I get enlarged print hand-outs and I also receive study skills support.” (M, SpLD Student)

“Most lecturers put their notes online beforehand so I can download them and use them as part of my learning process.” (M, SpLD Student)

- **Communication between academics and central team**

“The student-support profile is a very good idea and I am aware that this information is passed from the DDS team to my tutors.” (M, SpLD Student)

- **Use of alternative technologies**

“I also use a ‘recording pen’ which has a recorder built in and also records my handwriting on special notepads.” (M, SpLD Student)

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- **Adaptations in practical workshops**

“The university also makes adaptations within the laboratory for me. For example I can’t see through a microscope very well. Therefore, they have one laptop rigged up to a microscope that enables myself and one other visually impaired student to use this to see microscopic objects.” (M, SpLD Student)

### **Inconsistency of Support between Central Support Team and Faculties**

8.18 In some institutions there were inconsistencies between central staff and faculty staff.

“There is a real inconsistency between the centralised staff and faculty staff. The former are excellent and raise skills and expectations for me as a 59-year-old man who’s been unemployed. The faculty has treated me as an imposition and I sense that I am a distraction for them.” (H, SpLD Student)

“There is some evidence that some staff are not receiving the ‘support profile’ information for all disabled students which is a concern.” (M, Student Union Representative)

8.19 Others have found that the central support team have a positive influence on faculty support:

“Generally lecturers have been very helpful, although there was one incident where a lecturer did not seem to be understanding why I did not understand a particular concept in a seminar. I spoke to my disability tutor who I think then spoke to my lecturer. Next time I had a conversation with my lecturer he explained things much more carefully and this definitely helped me and I appreciated the whole process.” (M, SpLD Student)

### **Social Model**

8.20 Some students felt that that a mainstreamed model of support would not be effective for SpLD students.

“We feel that it is wrong that students who do not have our problems should get the same support. The support is meant to get us on a level playing field. If everybody got the support a gap would be reopened.” (H, SpLD Student)

8.21 Some SpLD students complained that the support they received was misunderstood by others in the student population. They also felt that a universal support offer would disadvantage them.

“Everybody says it is unfair that we get a free laptop. Yes I had a laptop but I couldn’t afford a Mac. A Mac has made a big difference for me.” (H, SpLD Student)

“I told my friend that I got a Mac through DSA. She is also dyslexic but didn’t want to bother with support. She applied for DSA and now has a Mac. Our friends say it is a total con.” (H, SpLD Student)

“I hate milking it, but I have got a learning difficulty compared to the person sat next to me. They have better skills than I have on memory. Because the point the DSA give us that is to make us at the same level of our fellow peers who don’t have – who have better skills, memory,

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reading, writing, than we do. But if you're offering that to everyone then we're still down here and they're still up there, it's not trying to get us as equals, it's actually keeping that difference between us." (L, SpLD Student)

8.22 However, for others the availability of adjustments to all students was a positive.

"The networked software is really valuable for me, I couldn't survive without it." (H, SpLD Student)

### **Missing Out Groups**

8.23 Some international students were very pleased with the support they had received.

"As an overseas student I have had to navigate the difficulties of the Disabled Student benefit and have not been able to get it, but the university has supported me, I guess on the belief that they want all their students to succeed. We do of course pay higher fees, and it could be argued that we compensate the university for the lack of the benefit, that we bring the money with us. Now I know from other overseas students that have moved to the UK to study, many universities don't see it that way, but [the institution], however they see it, have treated me like a local UK student and I don't feel I have had to beg for support – quite the opposite..." (H, International SpLD Student)

8.24 However other international students felt that their needs were not being addressed and felt that a lack of funding was a key issue:

"They said I am dyslexic, and I struggled with that at first. The university were very quick to tell me I had to have a test, but as an international student I was assessed first and then I was informed I wouldn't get any funding. I was led to believe the university would pay, but in the end they said they could not fund my support as an international student. It is a shame they didn't tell me that before the assessment. I did get support, but not the extent of support that I was led to believe. So that needs clarifying." (M, International SpLD Student)

### **Funding Cuts**

8.25 Most students were concerned about proposed changes to DSA. Concerns were mainly centred on the prospect of losing one to one support and assistive technology. Students were also concerned that institutions would view SpLD students as a burden, and no longer see providing strong SpLD support as a priority.

"It's definitely a concern to me, I see my Disability Support Tutor every week and I would not be able to function at the level I am now, and being aided to use technology without that support. I worry about students who are coming in a few years' time without that support." (H, SpLD Student)

"There's no way I would have survived. I have had so many learning insight and techniques that cost money but help me to move forward. From a working class background – do we want a system that simply creams the cream off?" (H, SpLD Student)

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“We worry that the universities will just end up doing the minimum and just scratching the surface on support and not priding themselves on support because of the funding cuts.” (M, SpLD Student)

- 8.26 Students were generally split 50/50 regarding whether they should contribute to the cost of a laptop. Those in favour argued that the £200 contribution would not be a burden for most students, and that financial support is available for those who need it.

“The laptop thing is not a big deal. If you offer any student a Mac for £200 they would be happy.” (H, SpLD Student)

“Most students could afford to pay £200 towards a computer. It’s still worth it. Those who can’t afford it could go to student welfare.” (L, SpLD Student)

- 8.27 Those against felt that they were entitled to a certain level of support, and that their tuition fees should be used to support the provision of assistive technology.

“The university has a legal right to meet our needs. They should meet any costs, not us.” (L, SpLD Student)

“It is terrible that the government should be cutting support for disadvantaged students. It should be an election issue. Sounds like it is going to happen though. The university will have to pay it. That’s what my £9,000 is for.” (M, SpLD Student)

### **Student Involvement in Support Design**

- 8.28 Approximately one third of students indicated that they would like to be involved in the design of SpLD support. Student union representatives highlighted the fact that SpLD support was high on their agenda, and that working groups had been collecting feedback from SpLD students on the support service.

“One of the priorities or objectives for one of the officers is to provide a feedback mechanism for the student, and that is for the end of Semester 2, coming up, about how things have been for them. At the moment, there is no feedback available. We are now seeking to ask questions of students. How was your experience with us? What changes could we make? What else can we do? Quick responses to get some feedback, and then more in depth sort of questionnaires and focus groups to kind of get more richer data about what we need to do differently moving forward.” (L, SpLD Student)

“The Student Union has a disability and dyslexia service working group which is completely independent of the disability service. This group held its first meeting recently and received lots of feedback.” (M, Student Union Representative)

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## 9 CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE PRIORITIES

- 9.1 In this final section we draw together what we consider to be some of the key conclusions from our analysis and identify some priorities for future consideration.

### Conclusions

- 9.2 The term SpLD is not widely used by either institution support staff, or students presenting with the condition. It is not felt to be a good descriptor, and is not regarded as particularly inclusive. There is however a clear understanding of the point of reference and the target student group.
- 9.3 The support processes linked to SpLD are complex and multi-faceted. As a result, it is sometimes difficult to unpick the cause and effect of the issues surrounding institutional operation. While historically SpLD support was viewed by many as a specialist domain, it is increasingly integrated within mainstream university support, and is very much in the current strategic policy spotlight. It has become part of the wider consolidation and change agenda currently being played out in most HEIs.
- 9.4 The 25 institutions consulted as part of this study have revealed a wide range of SpLD practice, expertise and ambition. As such, it has not been possible to capture the entirety of experience, or explain all of the institution-specific features that have determined particular routes of travel. It has also been difficult to classify SpLD practice by type of institution. However, as a general observation, it is perhaps fair to say that the most holistic and inclusive practice was evidenced among smaller specialist institutions, the most wide-ranging and ambitious practice among widening participating institutions and the most challenging delivery environment among HE in FE settings.
- 9.5 All institutions demonstrated a clear commitment to SpLD and a long history of practice development. All were able to cite elements of what they thought was good practice. There was however a general feeling that more could be achieved, and a desire to learn from the experience of others addressing the same challenge.
- 9.6 While we observed a wide range of practice across institutions, what was less clear was the effectiveness of the support on SpLD students. Inconsistent and partial MI generated by individual institutions gives an impression that, where support is delivered as planned, it generally has positive outcomes. What is unclear is the relative effectiveness of different types of support, on different types of students, in different types of institutions. A more robust evidence-based and systematic analysis of inputs, outputs and outcomes is needed to achieve this. Given the potential increase in institutional investment in SpLD-related support and infrastructure, it is likely that many institutions may conduct this required analysis as part of a wider SpLD business case.
- 9.7 We observed across institutions a fundamental shift in thinking relating to SpLD. This primarily concerned the distinction between universal student support and specialist disability support. Most institutions have an aspiration towards a universal or social model of SpLD support. Steps towards this are being achieved through the integration and centralisation of student services, and improvements in curriculum and technology design/delivery. The biggest barrier to achieving this appears to be the DSA funding system which is felt to perpetuate a deficit model of treating the 'problems' or 'incapacities' of presenting SpLD students.
- 9.8 The DSA funding mechanism which is specific to individual students has led to what we describe as the Core and Periphery model of SpLD support. Institutional and

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HEFCE funding supports the central support team, which essentially facilitates the DSA support service. The DSA funds the support of individual students, which in most institutions is a contracted out service. As institutions cannot use DSA to deliver universal services, the allowance itself acts as a potential barrier to closer integration and social model achievement.

- 9.9 The very few institutions who have achieved good progress in integrating their Core and Periphery model delivered DSA support themselves, often linked to DSA Assessment Centres. This can be an efficient method of delivery, enabling potential additional investment in enhanced universal support. However, few institutions follow this route because; it is a crowded market place with existing non-institutional suppliers, and an institution could become significantly exposed to any changes in DSA funding. In the contracted out model DSA funding is largely neutral to the institution in the sense that monies flow through it.
- 9.10 DSA is by far the greatest source of funding support for students with SpLD. An individual student could attract up to £25,000 per year as part of their package. It is therefore critical that institutions encourage all eligible students to claim the allowance. The activities of the central support team are designed to achieve this outcome. The individuals losing out are those students who are ineligible or are unwilling to claim DSA, most notably international students. While most institutions try to support these groups, the service and funding support they receive is generally well below that available through DSA.
- 9.11 Extending the DSA analysis, it is important to recognise that there are students within institutions who have SpLD issues but who do not identify with a disability medical support model. These include certain ethnic groups where there is a stigma associated with disability. This also includes the 'coping' students, with less severe issues, who do not necessarily feel that they require the whole assessment and support package offered through the traditional SpLD route. Currently the main avenue of support for these students is academic support. This service however is not always resourced sufficiently to meet their needs.
- 9.12 All institutions are aware of the need to close the gap between the central support hub and the operational spokes represented by the academic faculty interface. While progress towards this is variable, the challenge to achieve more consistent practice is clear. It is likely that closer integration with academic support might help this process, but there is also a need for tighter management compliance to overcome what appears to be an 'opt out' culture among some teaching staff.
- 9.13 All institutions felt they had received significant cuts in HEFCE funding over the past 12 months. In most cases the actual cuts were relatively modest. There appears to be a misunderstanding regarding the treatment of the ALF, and additional compensations to the wider SO fund. This whole area of contributory funding was generally opaque within institutions, largely due to the operation of central funding pots. It is clear however, that institutions themselves are increasingly investing significantly in their own central SpLD support models. It is felt that this cannot be sustained indefinitely, and is likely to lead to further investments being ploughed into universal services and possibly means-tested support.
- 9.14 The primary financial concern for most institutions rests with potential BIS plans to downgrade levels of DSA support for certain types of disabilities. This is expected to have a disproportionate effect on SpLD students, and require Institutions to fill any support gaps. The March 2015 BIS announcement that there are to be no immediate changes to DSA eligibility will come as welcome relief, but is likely to continue to be regarded by institutions as an area of on-going financial exposure. This will only

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reinforce a planned strategy towards increased universality of SpLD-type support services.

- 9.15 Students were largely satisfied with the support they received from the central team, but felt that academic staff were significantly less understanding and inconsistent in SpLD practice regarding adjustments. It was also noted that many students unhappy with SpLD services had not complained. In view of this, low levels of SpLD complaint should not be regarded as a positive measure of SpLD performance, as it currently is by some institutions.
- 9.16 It has not been possible to formally assess the effectiveness of SpLD support on student learning outcomes. However based on partial and anecdotal information from both support teams and students, it appears to have had a positive impact with SpLD students performing at least as well as non-disabled students.

### **Future Priorities**

- 9.17 Outlined below are aspects of SpLD support where we feel institutions would benefit from additional attention/investment:
- Separation of SpLD support from student hardship issues e.g. funding assessments and provision of laptops.
  - Systematic collection and analysis of SpLD MI.
  - Expansion of universal SpLD support.
  - Increased student feedback and greater involvement in service design.
  - Greater integration of the Hub and Spoke model needed through staff training and practice enforcement.
  - Greater integration of the Core and Periphery model through closer linkages between universal and targeted support.
  - Recognition of the heterogeneity of SpLD student need.
  - Support for students in understanding educational psychologist assessments
  - Enhanced support for international students.
  - More imaginative labelling and communication of support services.

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## APPENDIX A

### Case Study Structure

#### Sample Selection

Twenty-five institutions were selected from a sampling framework of 137 institutions to reflect both proportion of students with disabilities and type of institution.

Institutions were classified by:

- Disability Ranking
  - Low (L) (under 10% of students have a disability)
  - Medium (M) (10%-13% of students have a disability)
  - High (H) (over 13% of students have a disability)
- Institution Tariff Score
  - 1. Specialist HEI
  - 2. HEI with high average tariff score
  - 3. HEI with medium average tariff score
  - 4. HEI with low average tariff score
  - 6. Further education college (FEC)

Table 0.1 provides an overview of the distribution of the sample institutions over these two key characteristics.

**Table 0.1: Distribution of Sample**

Count ( <i>Percent</i> )	<i>Rank</i>			
<i>Tariff</i>	<i>L</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>H</i>	<i>Total</i>
<b>Type 1</b>	0 (0)	0 (0)	5 (20)	5 (20)
<b>Type 2</b>	2 (8)	2 (8)	0 (0)	4 (16)
<b>Type 3</b>	2 (8)	3 (12)	3 (12)	8 (32)
<b>Type 4</b>	3 (12)	3 (12)	0 (0)	6 (24)
<b>Type 6</b>	0 (0)	1 (4)	1 (4)	2 (8)
<b>Total</b>	7 (28)	9 (36)	9 (36)	25 (100)

Further details of the sample characteristics of all 25 institutions are set out in Table 0.2.



**Table 0.2: Institutions Sample (25) Characteristics**

Disabled Student Numbers Rank	Tariff Type	Institution Size (student numbers)	Disabled Students % Total	SpLD students % Total	% Disabled Students with SpLD	% SpLD with DSA	Rank - SpLD with DSA	SpLD numbers Change 2008-2013
H	1	Small	14.9	8.9	59.7	81	H	-4%
H	1	Small	29.5	25.7	87.5	54	L	
H	1	Large	15.4	2.4	15.3	25	L	115%
H	1	Small	30.8	27.2	87.8	88	H	-6
H	1	Small	18.4	15	81.8	82	H	86%
H	3	Medium	16	11.3	70.8	65	M	13%
H	3	Large	13.7	6.1	44.6	63	M	8%
H	3	Medium	14.5	7.8	53.9	62	M	76%
H	6	Small	16.6	5.2	30.0	63	M	
M	2	Large	11.5	6.1	52.0	61	M	40%
M	2	Large	11	4.9	44.7	66	M	13%
M	3	Medium	11.2	6.7	58.3	86	H	41%
M	3	Large	12.4	6.3	51.0	65	M	55%
M	3	Large	11.1	6.8	59.5	71	H	11%
M	4	Medium	12.6	8.5	66.7	69	H	24%
M	4	Large	10.3	5.3	51.4	51	L	21%
M	4	Large	11.8	7	59.6	67	M	48%
M	6	Small	10.1	4.2	39.7	-	L	
L	2	Large	9.7	5.4	55.0	63	M	99%
L	2	Large	9.4	4.4	46.9	64	M	33%
L	3	Large	9	5.2	58.1	64	M	23%
L	3	Large	9.3	5.4	58.5	65	M	66%
L	4	Large	9.9	6	60.4	65	M	28%
L	4	Large	8.6	4.2	49.2	54	L	17%
L	4	Large	8.7	4.4	51.0	61	M	28%

The disability figures presented in Table 0.2 and elsewhere in the report are based on the number of students disclosing their disability to the institution. This is known to be an underestimate of the likely actual number. The unknown level of disability non-disclosure needs to be taken into account when interpreting comparative data. Institution size is based on total student numbers and is calculated by splitting the population of institutions into thirds.

## Method Implementation

Our outlined methodology (Figure 1.1) was tested in two pilot case study visits. The overall approach and consultation instruments worked effectively and as a result both pilot case studies have been included in the overall analysis.

All 25 institutions selected agreed to participate and visit dates were fixed between November 2014 and January 2015.

Individuals to be consulted within institutions were selected by institutions and agreed with the researchers in advance of the visit.

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As part of each case study, consultations were held with approximately three members of teaching staff and five student representatives. These individuals were selected by institutions on advice from the researchers. It is not possible to say how representative they are of all teachers and students within the institutions.

Statistical information relating to SpLD funding and operational trends has been more difficult to source and has resulted in some comparative inconsistency across institutions.

Views expressed by institutional staff have been open and honest. There was significant interest in the subject matter.

Some institutions have expressed a wish to be introduced with other participating institutions with a view to benchmarking disability/SpLD practice.

Care has been taken in labelling quotes within the report to ensure confidentiality. Quotes have been labelled thus: (Institution Disability Rank, Position of Individual). Individual positions have been re-labelled using generic terms as some positions are unique to the institution and will enable identification.

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## **APPENDIX B**

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### **Literature Review**

#### **Introduction**

To begin the work of understanding how SpLD is supported in higher education (HE), we must first understand what diverse impairment categories (psycho-medical diagnoses) are typically understood to fit into this category. We must also consider the challenges and barriers of widening participation in (HE) to diverse groups in general- strategies and practices for the removal of barriers and consider in detail literature concerning specifically the inclusion of disabled students.

In this literature review a discussion is made of existing empirical research concerning the participation of disabled students in HE. A review of literature concerned with the participation of students with SpLD's participation in HE will then be conducted. We will then move to consider what SpLD means in an HE context, and provide a discussion of some of the diagnostic categories that it encompasses. We will consider how SpLD relates to reasonable adjustments made to disability in general, and how moves towards the development of inclusive curriculum and increased usage of e-learning, ICT and 'blended learning' relate to SpLD. The literature review will move on to consider studies that have examined how SpLD support is conceptualised in HE; the state of play in SpLD support as gleaned from pre-existing empirical studies; and further support mechanisms or strategies that are proposed in the literature or held up as good practice.

Mortimore (2013) explains how support for students with SpLD operates in a UK higher education institution (HEI):

At the level of university policy and its implementation by middle management, exemplified by the disability officer and dyslexia co-ordinator, much provision demanded by the Disability Equality Review Action Plan is in place. Student Support Services transmit information across academic departments and promote dyslexia-friendly approaches. However, Fuller's fully inclusive model demands practical provision where difficulties emerge around funding, staffing, salary differentiation and the increasing workload accompanying widening participation. (Mortimore, 2013: 41)

Universities therefore make accommodations at the level of policy, the appointment of staff, supporting the purchases of specialist equipment or software, and providing personal assistance. Mortimore (2013) argues that institutions aspiring to be inclusive have to accept additional workload and costs which come with this aspiration.

#### **Diversity and Participation in HE: The Case of Specific Learning Difficulties**

Increasing participation in HE across a wide number of groups has for many years been recognised as a social justice issue. As Fuller et al. (2004a) note:

The needs and rights of disabled students as learners in higher education have been officially recognised in many countries. Australia, the United States of America and Israel, for example, all have legislation concerning the integration of disabled students into higher education. The impact of this legislation has been the subject of a number of recent analyses. The principal points emerging from this research are that: achieving positive support for disabled students requires more than legislative change (MacLean and

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Gannon, 1997) many staff report feeling limited in terms of training to support disabled students, knowledge of resources, skills for making adjustments and unfamiliarity with disability laws (Leyser et al., 2000) physical adjustments for disabled students are easier to achieve than attitudinal change in staff (Beilke and Yssel, 1999). (Fuller et al, 2004a: 456)

Konur (2006) argues that across the globe, disabled students have been denied access to HE. Whilst access is increasing, Konur (2006) argues that it is not increasing equally across academic disciplines. Whilst disabled students, including students with SpLD, may have access to HE, that does not mean that they will not encounter barriers to their full participation – attitudinal barriers and inaccessible teaching practices may remain (Fuller et al, 2004a). As Crozier et al. (2008) note, WP is but the first step, the shifting of the practice with the institution itself is also necessary:

For all students studying is challenging, angst-ridden work, but for some it is made easier than for others. Moreover, getting students in and leaving them to it does not work for those who have no prior experience of university. Higher education not only needs to address the widening of access to university but it needs to get to grips with what goes on inside the hallowed grounds. (Crozier et al, 2008: 176)

Crozier et al.'s (2008) argument suggests that for many groups unnecessary barriers exist to their full participation in HE. A large body of literature exists considering the participation in HE of a number of diverse groups of students disadvantaged due to social factors such as: class; gender; ethnicity; sexuality and disability. Achieving the participation and success of diverse groups in HE matters as it has been shown that success in degree-level education has a critical impact on earning potential and an individual's place in the labour market (Fuller et al 2004b). Disabled students however have been shown to achieve poorer degree classifications despite having similar entry qualifications when entering this level of study (Fuller et al, 2004a; Riddell et al, 2005). This indicates that HE has a significant challenge to meet in removing barriers to disabled students' participation and success. These barriers are compounded by occasional critiques of the term dyslexia itself (Elliott and Gibbs, 2008). As students with an SpLD make up the largest impairment group in UK HEIs, this literature review does not just draw upon literature concerned with students with SpLD but also draws upon literature concerned with the participation of disabled students in HE in general. This literature and the literature on SpLD in HE provides a rich evidence base for this study.

Much of the literature on SpLD difficulties in HE considers HE students in general or is focused explicitly on undergraduates. Collinson and Penketh's (2010) paper is thus particularly useful as it focuses on the experiences of postgraduate students:

Rather than considering these learners as passive bodies to be excluded or included in learning processes, it is also possible to consider aspects of their narratives as stories of resistance. Although potentially excluded from learning, there was a degree of resistance and perseverance resulting in shifts from exclusion to inclusion in formal learning in later life. Rather than being described as stories of triumph over adversity, however, the need for an ongoing engagement in forms of resistance appears to be a necessary form of action. As younger learners the stories reflected early academic 'failure', yet individuals re-entered education as mature learners, resisting their former exclusion and gaining tertiary qualifications which might result in them being considered academically successful. (Collinson and Penketh, 2010: 14)

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This insight is important as it illustrates that often students with SpLD, particularly those taking postgraduate degrees, view HE as a chance to overcome negative self-images acquired in life before a diagnosis of SpLD had been acquired.

In the case of SpLD, the choice of which subject to study is often reflected as being driven by issues around learning characteristics associated with their impairment (Richardson and Wydell, 2003). Konur (2006) finds that once students have been accepted onto the programme the key barrier experienced by students is the accessibility of the curriculum (willingness to make reasonable adjustments could be added here). Konur (2006) then details four types of adjustments that can be made to the curriculum:

The first types of adjustments that can be made to the curriculum:

Classroom and assessment access could be further thought of in terms of reasonable adjustments that could be made for a particular type of disability based on the individual circumstances of disabled students. The first types of adjustments are concerned with access to the curriculum and could be termed as 'presentation adjustments'. This refers to the format of the curriculum presented to the student. It could be in a paper text format, signed language format, audio format, script format, or electronic format depending on the preferred 'learning modality' of a particular student. (Konur, 2006: 356)

The second type of adjustments that can be made to the curriculum:

The second type of adjustments is concerned with the format of the response made by the student. It could be in a similar format as the presentation adjustments and could be termed as 'response adjustments'. (Konur 2006: 356)

The third type of adjustments that can be made to the curriculum:

The third type of adjustments concerns the timing of access to the curriculum and is much more related to the examination and course work adjustments and could be termed 'timing adjustments'. (Konur 2006: 356)

The fourth type:

The fourth type of adjustments concerns the settings of the exams, lectures or work placements. As in the case of examinations, it would not be practical to undertake examinations in the normal examination room as the adjustments often require the use of readers, scribes and text to speech computer programs, which would distract other non-disabled examinees. Such exams are delivered at separate exam rooms and they could be termed as 'setting adjustments' (Konur 2006: 357)

All of the adjustments described above are relevant in the case of students with SpLD, some of these adjustments can be made at various levels: institutional; programme; individual teaching practice; and bespoke arrangements for individual students. To be inclusive, institutions have to make reasonable adjustments at all of these levels.

### **What is a Specific Learning Difficulty?**

SpLD has been a widely accepted term to describe a number of psycho-medical diagnoses that are often considered to be inter-related. Included within this inter-related family of diagnoses are: dyslexia, dyspraxia, dyscalculia, ADD/ADHD and auditory processing disorder, sometimes the categories are expanded to include Asperger's and the autistic

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spectrum. Students with these conditions are sometimes resistant to being considered as 'disabled people' (Denhart, 2008). But for administrative purposes this is how funding for support accommodations in HE has been administered and where the governance of services providing support for SpLD has traditionally fallen within HE providers in England.

Estimates run as high as 20% of people having some form of dyslexia (Denhart, 2008: 488). Dyslexia is generally understood to be a difficulty with reading, or more accurately a problem with the lexicon which includes some of the wider issues around language-based information that dyslexic people encounter (Campbell, 2013). Diagnostic categories have existed for dyslexic-like symptoms since the end of the nineteenth century (Campbell 2013; MacDonald, 2009). The diagnosis is however often seen (Lockley, 2002) as including a wider range of learning characteristics beyond difficulties with language including:

- Short term memory
- Concentration
- Distinguishing right from left
- Self-organisation
- Language acquisition
- Maths
- Visual perception

The characteristics of dyslexia vary in degree from mild, to moderate, to severe. They also vary from person to person, and from day to day, thus by definition each individual's experience of dyslexia is unique. (Lockley, 2002: 1)

Lockley's (2002) work is suggesting that dyslexia is best understood as a variation of particular learning characteristics. The degree of variation and consequent severity of difficulties with particular learning styles and the uniqueness of each individual's experiences, point towards the complexity of making adjustments to the HE environment. Diverse learning needs will need diverse accommodations. It is unsurprising that a diverse population of learners with different characteristics united by a shared diagnosis often identify with having a different way of thinking, a learning difference (Denhart, 2008). After all, they are united by their difference from the 'typical learner.' As Denhart's (2008) respondents explained:

"I feel like they expect me to come up with a square shape for a square hole and I, all I can do is . . . anything but a square. You know? A star, a circle, uh, some crazy shape" (B, f, p. 6, line 7-10). Porter explained, "My brain is just like a pomegranate and they want it to be like an orange" (P, f, p. 6, line 5). (Denhart, 2008: 492)

These descriptions provide a rich account of the self-image of people with SpLD. Such a self-image has led to some people with SpLD sometimes identifying as neurodiverse. Griffin and Pollak (2009) provide a helpful definition that helps with the unpacking of this concept: '*[the] concept of neurodiversity defines atypical neurological development as a normal human difference that should be tolerated and respected in the same way as other human differences*' (Griffin and Pollak, 2009: 25).

The term neurodiversity has developed to include dyslexia, dyspraxia, dyscalculia, ADHD and Asperger's syndrome (Griffin and Pollak, 2009: 25) similarly the term learning difference has gained some currency in the literature and some HE policy documents as an alternative to learning difficulty. These developments are matched by dyslexic people themselves (Denhart, 2008); self-help literature and social theorists suggesting that dyslexia is a 'gift' or

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becoming a 'comparative evolutionary advantage' as the work and educational environments shift (Marazzi, 2011). Fifty percent of Griffin and Pollak's respondents held a 'difference' view of their impairment and those students typically had a higher self-image. Such students often initially held a medical-deficit view which was challenged by joining groups or meeting people with similar impairments (Griffin and Pollak, 2009). The shifting self-image and understanding of those with SpLD towards more politicised identities such as 'neurodiverse' will put increased pressure on learning environments to accommodate a diverse array of learning styles.

### **The State of Play of Specific Learning Difficulty Support in Higher Education: Evidence from Empirical Research**

In an HE context there are different scenarios and groups where a student may have to disclose an impairment including disclosure to the administrative aspects of the institution to access support; disclosure to individual members of teaching staff; disclosure to other students in and outside of the classroom. Mortimore and Crozier (2006) point towards the stigma of dyslexia as the key issue affecting the disclosure of the impairment:

The stigma of dyslexia is a recurrent theme, which influenced the take-up of support and provoked anxieties about approaching tutors within academic departments who were not aware of the student's status. Concerns were expressed about others' preconceptions of dyslexia, and the judgements that are made about work characterized by poor presentation, organization, grammar and spelling. Students were anxious that they would be perceived as lacking in intelligence and had concerns about employability. (Mortimore and Crozier 2006: 249)

Madriaga's (2007) study of students with dyslexia pathways in HE and beyond highlights some of the difficulties of disclosing to fellow students:

With regard to revealing their disabilities to others within the classroom, two respondents expressed different approaches. When one was asked whether she was open about her dyslexia to classmates on her computing course her response was: Yes and no. I have had quite of a lot of problems when I first started. Because they do not understand what it is. That was the main thing. This leads to a lot of problems and stuff. But, I am thinking they are coming to grips of it. But, it is just better to deal with it, to yourself, do you know what I mean? It is just easier to do it that way. If people do not understand, then what is the point, trying to try. (female, dyslexia, age 19) Her response demonstrated a lack of confidence in other people understanding dyslexia. Thus, she internalized her impairment as her problem, not the problem of others. This is contrary to the second respondent's position in disclosing her disability to others on her nursing course. (Madriaga, 2007: 407)

The variation in student confidence in disclosure of impairment points towards risks to self-image and fear of dismissive attitudes as being a key barrier. Further issues around the complexity of disclosing a specific learning difficulty in an HE context are outlined by Konur (2006):

In such a study, Olney and Brockelman (2003) examined the disability disclosure by the LD (Learning Disabled) and other disabled university students in the US. Students valued their own experiences of disability as the attitudes of their fellow students and lecturers affected their decision as to whether to disclose their disability. In a similar study, disabled students in the US experienced identity confusion where they were neither disabled nor non-disabled and depended on the perceptions of others (Bentley- Towlin,

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2003). They negotiated their identities where they used disability adjustments to varying degrees. (Konur, 2006: 357)

The perceptions of students and teachers are clearly important for students with SpLD having the confidence to disclose their impairment or adopt an identity as a disabled person. Denhart (2008) points towards the reframing of SpLD as a key:

... [a] strategy some use to deconstruct internalized master status by drawing on intrapersonal intelligence (Gardner, 1983) to assess strengths as well as weaknesses. Commonly recognized strengths include unusual creativity (Reiff et al., 1994; Rodis et al., 2001), creative approaches to problem solving (Roer-Strier, 2002), a strong desire to help others (Reiff, Gerber, & Ginsberg, 1993; Shessel & Reiff, 1999), strong social skills (Reiff & Gerber, 1993), remarkable resilience (Rodis et al., 2001; Shessel & Reiff, 1999), and a keen ability to persist in the face of oppression (Greenbaum et al., 1995; Rodis et al., 2001) largely through an extraordinary capacity for hard work (Reis & Neu, 1994). After reframing LD, many informants and autobiographical authors reject the term learning disabled as a misrepresentation of their healthy difference, preferring instead the term learning difference (Gerber et al., 1996; Rodis et al., 2001). (Denhart, 2008: 486)

Mortimore and Croizer's (2006) study identifies common difficulties dyslexic students have with study skills; this being a key barrier to their full participation in HE:

Although the students with dyslexia who participated in this survey were sufficiently well qualified to obtain entry to higher education, and were meeting the academic standards of their institutions, they reported considerably more difficulties with a range of learning and study skills than did a sample of their peers without dyslexia. The difficulties reported by the group with dyslexia are most pronounced in the areas of note taking, organizing essays and expressing ideas in writing. However, all of the remaining difficulties included in the questionnaire were frequently endorsed, indicating that these students encounter widespread problems in their studying. The success of students with dyslexia is clearly hard won. (Mortimore and Croizer, 2006: 247)

We must note here that the students being discussed have achieved the same qualifications as their peers to enter HE; with the transition from FE to HE perhaps brings with it a shift in the character of study skills needed to succeed. Griffin and Pollak's (2009) study illustrated how helpful students with SpLD found the use of assistive software, but noted that it was not always available. They argued that institutions should move towards providing this software to all students as the benefits of such software and technology were not restricted purely to students with SpLD.

## **Educating Learners with Specific Learning Difficulties**

Ensuring that pedagogies lend themselves to the diverse educational needs of students with SpLD is essential for ensuring that the curricula of our HEIs are inclusive. In this section we will deal with some research into the learning experiences of students with SpLD and will consider the relative advantages and disadvantages of accommodations made for these students. Konur (2006) notes that:

Once [disabled] students are accepted into programs, curriculum access becomes a critical issue. The key issue is whether disabled students could have access to the curriculum and whether they could respond to the curriculum once they participate in the program. The curriculum access could



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also be since the 'high stake examinations' determine the class of the degrees and whether students could have proper access to employment and professions, examinations emerge as a more critical issue for all stakeholders. It is therefore not surprising that the law has developed regarding the assessment access rather than the solely classroom access since the 1970s (Doe, 1999). (Konur 2006: 356)

Assessment access and curriculum access are key areas to be considered for the meaningful participation of disabled students in HE. This is particularly pertinent to students with SpLD where the main barriers to full participation may be the learning environment itself. Madriaga et al. (2011) follow Goodley (2007) in arguing for a fundamental shift in the pedagogies deployed in HE, so that they are more hospitable to the learning needs of disabled students:

“A socially just pedagogy emphasises student desires rather than so-called deficits, dismantling barriers for marginalised learners (Goodley 2007). It is a pedagogy that addresses the desires of all students, whether disabled or non-disabled students. It resists 'over coding and subtle forms of segregation', and highlights students as 'ever-changing, ever-moving, **becoming** learners' (Goodley 2007, 324). With this in mind, fixed hierarchies based on normalcy and everyday eugenics should be marked as oppressive and cast aside. As utopian as it sounds, this way of contemplating teaching, learning and assessment in higher education offers opportunities to experiment and innovate with social justice in mind. It may also serve as a possible starting point in addressing one of the issues raised in this study, which is the lower academic achievement of disabled students who do not have institutional disability-specific support in comparison with students with no known disability. Their lack of institutional disabled student support could be by choice, as some think it may not be necessary, or it could be the result of the institution's failed efforts to raise awareness of its disability services.” (Madriaga et al., 2011: 917)

This argument rests upon the concept of 'normalcy' as pioneered by the literary critic and disability studies scholar Lennard Davis (1995) who argued that the statistical norm had become conflated with the values of middle class people leading to a moral obligation to be normal pervading most aspects of social life. The shift in pedagogy called for by Madriaga et al. (2011) necessitates an acceptance of the heterogeneity of learning styles and the designing of educational programmes that allow students some flexibility of the way they choose to learn. Some authors have noted that increased use of information and communications technology (ITC) in HE has allowed for such further variation of learning styles to be facilitated (Pino and Mortari, 2014). But this is only possible if appropriate pedagogies underpin programme and module design and technology use. Mortimore's (2013) empirical study found that a number of learners with dyslexia welcome the increased use of Virtual Learning Environments (e.g. Blackboard) as they allow learners to personalise the educational resources to their individual learning needs. Such developments are therefore often noted as not only being beneficial for students with SpLD, but indeed beneficial to all students through the development of a generally more inclusive HE learning environment. The adoption of blended learning pedagogies at many UK institutions has led to an increase in technologies such as lecture capture, ad hoc video recordings, e-portfolios and the use of tablet devices in classrooms. These technologies are often argued to facilitate the adoption of approaches to student education that emphasise more interaction between students and teachers in classroom situations. These innovations have the possibility of creating an HE learning environment that is more hospitable to the needs of students with SpLD, but only if they are underpinned by appropriate pedagogical strategies. After all a new learning environment may be enabling for some but disabling for others. Madriaga et al.'s (2011) call for socially just pedagogies necessitates moving beyond

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reasonable adjustments such as responding to a difficulty in note taking by supplying lecture hand-outs before the start of the lecture, but also engaging in more inclusive forms of teaching, learning and, crucially, assessment. They suggest that disabled students find traditional methods of assessment such as the timed, unseen examinations very difficult to negotiate even when their support needs have been met. (Madriaga et al., 2011: 915). Whilst some adjustments will always need to accommodate individual learners' needs, it is important that HEIs consider changes to their provision that make their learning environments more inclusive.

Pino and Mortari (2014) provide a summary of an article where a similar argument is made advocating a universal design for learning:

It has been argued that many obstacles to the inclusion of dyslexic students can be prevented by adopting a universal design for learning (UDL) (Dziorny, 2012); that is, designing education to simultaneously accommodate students with diverse learning needs, including students with disabilities and SpLD. In this framework, instruction is designed with an orientation towards the diversity among student needs. This reverses the traditional instructional approach in which adjustments for diverse students must be negotiated on an individual basis. In UDL, an orientation to the needs of all students is incorporated in the instructional design from the outset. This review identified three studies (4; 5; 10) that explored students' experiences of instructional interventions that were designed to simultaneously accommodate the needs of students with and without SpLD. (Pino and Mortari, 2014: 361)

Mortimore (2013) shares some of the concerns of Dziorny (2012) and Madriaga et al. (2011) recognising the extent to which accommodations aimed at all learners are departing from a 'medical model of disability' towards a social model of disability:

Adjustments to group teaching reflected awareness of the need for inclusive contexts and a move away from a purely medical model, demanding provision and resources designed exclusively for individual need, towards a social model of disability. Several respondents welcomed the increasing use of electronic or virtual learning environments, enabling students to individualise resources. Respondents requested centralised forms of study support, including academic reading and report writing. Open access study skills systems have since been initiated across the university, independent of DSA. (Mortimore, 2013: 43)

Schemes such as open-access studies skills indicate that some institutions are providing services once available to specific learners with Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) to all students, this is a positive development as it indicates that HEIs are responding to their legal responsibility to provide reasonable adjustments, at the level of the curriculum rather than on a case-by-case basis through the use of DSA. Following Madriaga et al. (2011), Dziorny (2012) and Mortimore (2013) this indicates that pedagogies that could be described as following the social rather than the medical model of disability; following principles of universal design for learning or indeed socially just pedagogies, are in some cases being deployed by teaching staff in HEIs.

In an empirical study with two students with dyslexia, Hughes et al. (2011) explore the specific software device of the e-portfolio as a way for students to personalise their learning. Their discussion is helpful for considering the utility of technological developments as a resource for making the HE environment more inclusive.

Prior to curriculum innovations/interventions such as the use of e-portfolio systems and accompanying learning practices, a wide range of technology had already been valuably

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employed by dyslexic learners in UK HE. While occasional commentaries highlighted the fact that the software had rarely been designed specifically for them, that technology was not equally suited to all dyslexic learners (Sanderson, 2000), and that the training in IT was not sufficiently student-centred and dyslexia-friendly, the overriding assumption was, as often with technology in general (Pisha and Coyne, 2001), that it was 'a good thing'.

Dyslexic learners had, for example, found personal computers and word processing software particularly helpful for writing and, given that the e-portfolio system used here included its most useful features, we could safely predict benefits for dyslexic learners. Newer developments such as voice-activated software had also been taken up (Morgan, 1995). Though collectively these elements constituted a menu for learners in HE, their use varied greatly among dyslexic learners and individual accounts of their significance provided vital evidence about their role in personalizing learning. For example, a dyslexic HE student recently noted the relative impact of visual disturbance for her between reading on screen and on paper (French & Herrington, 2008). (Hughes et al., 2011)

From the above quotation we can identify that innovation in the area of ICT has allowed for resources to be developed that facilitate the personalisation of the learning environment towards a particular student's needs. We must recognise that no technological solution can increase participation, and one solution will not be equally suited to every individual learner with SpLD needs; agile approaches to student education should therefore be encouraged that allow for personalisation and adaptation. Whilst the mainstreaming of some support services and diversification of teaching practices through increased use of digital resources are seen by many researchers as positive, as Konur (2006) notes, some writers have argued that an individual approach to meeting needs has to remain a central part of HEIs' strategies:

As the delivery of the curriculum increasingly shifts from traditional forms to electronic forms, the access to the electronic curriculum and examinations has progressively become an important access issue. Fichten et al. (2003) carried out extensive studies of such access for different Canadian disabled student groups and emphasized the importance of an individual approach to meeting their needs and the importance of the policy-making and funding in this area. (Konur, 2006: 358)

One technological solution is unlikely to serve all of the learning needs of the diverse array of students with SpLD, so whilst mainstreaming of good practice should be encouraged to benefit all students, HEIs must remain responsive to individual needs that in some cases may only be served appropriately through individual accommodations.

## **Discussion**

Throughout the literature review attitudinal changes in staff are pointed towards as a key area that needs to be improved to increase the meaningful participation of students with SpLD in HE. Other barriers to students with SpLD participation in HE found in the literature included: disablism; fear of disclosure of SpLD; perceived lack of study skills; teaching staff not fulfilling access obligations; transition from FE to HE and changing learning styles thereof; diversity of impairment categories covered under each SpLD; and diversity of learning styles covered under each SpLD. It is noteworthy that many of these barriers relate to the attitudes of staff, the values embedded into institutions or the approaches to learning and teaching adopted by educators. The attitudes of academic staff appear to be of particular importance as the values that educators hold are likely to influence the pedagogies that underpin their teaching practice. The calls for embracing pedagogies such as 'socially just pedagogies' and 'universal design in learning' reflect this. More work needs

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to consider how such pedagogies can be adopted by large scale HEIs and their suitability in serving the needs of learners with SpLD.

## **Social Model of Disability**

The politicisation of disability in the 1960s produced a radical alternative to the individual medical 'deviance' approaches which focused on the ways in which society created what today we refer to as the problem of disability. For example in 1966 the disabled activist and writer Paul Hunt produced a book of 12 essays by disabled people describing their experiences living with impairment in British society entitled: *Stigma: the Experience of Disability*. Hunt's chapter entitled 'A Critical Condition' argues that disabled people:

...are set apart from the 'ordinary' in ways which see them as posing a direct 'challenge' to commonly held social values by appearing 'unfortunate, useless, different, oppressed and sick'. Disabled people 'challenge' 'able-bodied' values because they represent everything that the 'normal world' most fears – 'tragedy, loss, dark, and the unknown'. (p.155)

The key term is that of oppression, elements of which can be seen in anthropology, capitalism and the industrial process. Paul Abberley (1987) provided the first theoretical framework for the analysis of disability as social oppression. Following the work of Finkelstein (1980) and Oliver (1990), he links disabled people's oppression to the rise of capitalism and to that of other disadvantaged groups such as women and minority ethnic communities. He also focuses on the fact that impairment is not simply always a 'natural occurrence', but the outcome of social activities including industrialisation and the activities of large drug companies.

In its purest form, the social model of disability expresses the conviction that:

...the problem is not located in the individual, but in a society (economy, culture) that fails to meet the needs of people with impairments. Impairment is the term used for an individual's condition (physical, sensory, intellectual, and behavioural). Disability, in complete contrast, is social disadvantage and discrimination. The social model message is simple and strong: if you want to make a difference to the lives of disabled people, you must change society and the way society treats people who have impairments ...[through] a commitment to removing disabling barriers that prevent disabled people's participation in society. (Stone, 1999: 2-3)

Under these terms, 'impairment' is the 'condition' whereas 'disability' is the social consequence of living with a perceived impairment in a disabling society (Barnes, 1991; Clark and Marsh, 2002).

From the perspective of disabled people themselves,

...it is society which disables ... impaired people. Disability is something imposed on top of our impairments, by the way we are unnecessarily isolated and excluded from full participation in society. Disabled people are therefore an oppressed group in society. To understand this it is necessary to grasp the distinction between the... impairment and the social situation, called 'disability', of people with such impairment. Thus we define impairment as lacking part of or all of a limb, or having a defective limb, organ or mechanism of the body; and disability as the disadvantage or restriction of activity caused by a contemporary social organisation which takes no or little account of people who have ... impairments and thus excludes them from participation in the mainstream of social activities. (UPIAS, 1976: 3-4)

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This politicisation of disability and its subsequent reframing as a social issue, places the onus on the environment to change rather than the individual. In relation to the accommodation of students with SpLD in HE the responsibility lies with universities to adapt the working environment to make it accessible.

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## APPENDIX C

### Abbreviations

<b>Abbreviation</b>	<b>Full Title</b>
AEA	Alternative Exam Arrangements
ALF	Access to Learning Fund
BIS	Department for Business, Innovation & Skills
CPD	Continuing professional development
DAST	Dyslexia Adult Screening Test
DDS	Disability and Dyslexia Service
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
DRC	Disability Rights Commission
DSA	Disabled Students' Allowance
DSA-QAG	Disabled Students Allowance Quality Assurance Group
DST	Disability Support Team
EHRC	Equality and Human Rights Commission
FE	Further education
FEC	Further education college
HE	Higher education
HEA	Higher Education Academy
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEI	Higher education institution
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
ITT	Initial Teacher Training
MI	Management information
NSS	National Student Survey
PGCE	Postgraduate Certificate in Education
PGR	Postgraduate Research (student)
PGT	Postgraduate Taught (student)
SFE	Student Finance England
SO	Student Opportunity
SpLD	Specific learning difficulty/difficulties
VLE	Virtual learning environment
WP	Widening participation



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## Glossary of Terms used in the Report

- **Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS)** – The department of UK government with ultimate responsibility for higher education in England.
- **Disability Ranking** – Ranking based on percentage of students with a declared disability in the institution.
- **Disabled Students** – Refers to students with a known disability as defined by the institution.
- **Disabled Students Allowance (DSA)** – Student Finance England funding for UK-based disabled students.
- **DSA-QAG** - DSA-QAG aims to ensure that students receive a high quality of service in the Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) process, the Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) recommend that funding bodies, Open University and local authorities use only those assessment centres and Assistive Technology Service (ATS) providers who have registered with DSA-QAG (the Disabled Students Allowance Quality Assurance Group).
- **Faculties** – Faculties are divisions within institutions usually comprising of one or several related subject areas. We will use faculties to refer to faculties, departments and schools.
- **Further Education (FE)** – Further education is for people over compulsory school age (currently 16 in England) which does not take place in a secondary school. Further education courses are generally up to the standard of GCE A-level or NVQ Level 3.
- **HE System** – The HE system refers to the entirety of higher education in England: the higher education providers, students, regulatory and sector bodies, and Government (including government agencies).
- **Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE)** – the non-departmental public statutory body that provides government funding in England for teaching, research, knowledge exchange and related activities..
- **Higher Education Institution (HEI)** – Is a term from the Further and Higher Education Act 1992. According to the Act, it means any provider which is one or more of the following: a UK university; a higher education corporation; a designated institution. HEFCE may choose to fund higher education institutions for teaching and research if they meet the conditions of grant.
- **Home Students** – These are students normally resident in Great Britain and Northern Ireland. They do not include students living in the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands.
- **Initial Teacher Training Students** - are based on the 'Standard registration population' and includes instances that are: initial or pre-service teacher training courses leading to Qualified Teacher Status or registration as a school teacher with the General Teaching Council for Scotland; other initial teacher training courses not leading to Qualified Teacher Status nor to registration as a school teacher with the General Teaching Council for Scotland; National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL) funded flexible provision (ITT), the School Direct initiative, and school-led HEI provision.
- **Institution Tariff Score** – UK institutions ranked according to their entry tariff points scores and then grouped according to their ranking.
- **Institutions** – A general term commonly used to refer to publicly funded higher education providers, and sometimes to HE providers in a more general sense.

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- **International Student** – Defined throughout the report as having entry from the rest of the world and the European Union. These students do not qualify for DSA.
  - **Integrated Model** – A fully integrated model involves the delivery of DSA in-house.
  - **Mature Students** – Students who are 21 or over when they start their course.
  - **Model of Support** – Description of the support processes, systems and relationships.
  - **National Student Survey (NSS)** – The National Student Survey gathers opinions on the quality of students' HE courses every year. Its purpose is to contribute to public accountability and help inform the choices of prospective students.
  - **Non-medical Helper (NMH)** – Personal support/helpers that students require to complete their course. Not for disability related expenditure that students would need even if they were not a student. The term Non-Medical Help covers a wide range of functions, from taking notes on behalf of a student and helping students to access libraries and laboratories to providing more specialist support e.g. British Sign Language interpreters.
  - **Non-SpLD** – Students without a specific learning disability/difference.
  - **Open or Distance Learning Students** – DSAs are available to part-time students doing open or distance learning. You will be eligible for DSAs as long as it is a designated course and you're studying at least 25% of the full-time equivalent.
  - **Postgraduate Student** – A student on a course which normally requires a first degree as a condition of entry.
  - **Reasonable Adjustments** – Reasonable adjustments reflect legal and ethical obligations to ensure disabled students are offered a 'level playing field' without lowering academic standards. According to the Equality Act 2010, once a student has notified the institution of a disability, it is incumbent upon the institution to put appropriate measures in place, therefore the way in which these measures are reflected in universities varies.
  - **Satellite Campuses** – Campuses in a separate geographical location to the main institutional campus.
  - **Specialist Institution** – A higher education institution that has 60 per cent or more of its courses in one or two subjects only, such as music or art colleges.
  - **SpLD Student** – Refers to students with a specific learning difficulty/difference. There is no absolute definition of what constitutes SpLD. For the purpose of the report SpLD covers dyslexia, dyspraxia, dyscalculia, dysgraphia, Asperger's syndrome, ADD/ADHD and Specific Language Difficulty.
  - **Student Finance England (SFE)** – Student Finance England (SFE) is a Student Loans Company service, providing financial support to students on behalf of the UK Government to students from England entering higher education in the UK.
  - **Tuition Fees** – Students have to pay tuition fees to a university or college to attend a course there. Universities and colleges are responsible for setting tuition fees for some categories of student (mostly undergraduates), although they are subject to certain limits set by the government. Most EU students (including UK students) are eligible for tuition fee loans which will cover the cost

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of these fees, and which do not need to be repaid until after the student has graduated. Some charges made by institutions are not treated as tuition fees. These include charges for accommodation.

- **Undergraduate** – Student working towards a first degree, foundation degree, higher education certificate or diploma or equivalent.