

ABSTRACT/HANDOUT .

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FINAL VERSION November 5th., 2003.

**BPS EDUCATION SECTION ANNUAL CONFERENCE
NOVEMBER 7th. – 9th 2003.**

THEME: TRANSITION AND COPING WITH CHANGE.

PAPER TITLE.

**TOWARDS AN INCLUSIVE HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM IN THE UK?
FIRST DEGREE RESULTS OF STUDENTS WITH AND WITHOUT
DISABILITIES.**

PRESENTATION DATE: Sunday November 9th., 2003.

TIME: 09:00 hrs – 09:45 hrs.

PRESENTER: PETER D. PUMFREY.

This Paper is based on selected materials drawn from specially commissioned analyses of sections of three databases held by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) based in Cheltenham. It also draws on work published by other organisations. These are listed in the attached sheet of references.

ABBREVIATIONS (Used in the full paper on which this extended abstract/handout is based).

CVCP	Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals of the Universities in the UK.
DDA	Disability Discrimination Act 1995.
DfES*	Department for Education and Science.
DfES	Department for Education and Skills.
DRC	Disability Rights Commission (Started April 25 th ., 2000).
DAS	Disabled Students' Allowances (Started 1987/8).
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England.
HEI	Higher Education Institutions.
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency.
OFFA	Office for Fair Access (2003).
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency for higher Education.
SEN	Special Educational Needs.
SENDA	Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001.
SHEFC	Scottish Higher Education Funding Council.
SKILL	National Bureau for Students with Disabilities.
SpLD	Specific Learning Difficulties (Dyslexia; Dyspraxia and Dyscalculia).
UCAS	Universities Central Admissions System.

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT/HANDOUT.

Introduction.

**OHT: 01 PERFORMANCE TARGETS RELATING TO WIDENING
PARTICIPATION.**

**OHT: 02 GROUPS WITH HISTORICALLY LOW REPRESENTATION
WITHIN THE H.E. STUDENT POPULATION .**

Tension exist concerning these H.E. Performance Targets. Tensions arise because of conflict between different value systems concerning the nature of the educational opportunities, resources and priorities most likely to secure and maintain a society that can prosper in an increasingly global economy.

Polarised positions make the point. A society based on “The greatest good for the greatest number” versus one based on “I hold nothing dear that ignores individuals” lead to differing educational agendas. “Educational Inclusion” versus “Survival of the fittest and the weakest to the wall” move in differing directions to different social destinations.

In the Audit Commission’s report *Widening participation in Higher Education in England*, they state that “Some disabilities included in the cohort involve learning difficulties that make higher education impracticable” (National Audit Office, 2002, para. 1.12; p. 7).

Government recognises the importance in a knowledge-based global economy of a highly educated and skilled population. Inclusive education and raising educational standards are top priorities. Greater opportunities for the many are considered essential. The objective of having 50% of 18-30 year olds experiencing H.E. by 2010 underlines this political aspiration. “Our priority is to reach out and include those who have been under represented in higher education, including young people from semi-skilled or unskilled family backgrounds and from disadvantaged localities, **and people with disabilities**”. (Presenter’s emphasis) (DfEE, 1998). The Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals of the Universities in the UK published *From elitism to inclusion. Good practice in widening access to higher education* (CVCP, 1998). HEI policies, provision and support in practice for all students, including those with disabilities, are being developed (National Audit Office, 2002). These themes are

reinforced in the Government's White Paper *The Future of Higher Education* (DfES, 2003a). This has been followed up by proposals for the creation of the Office for Fair Access in *Widening participation in higher education* (DfES, 2003b). How adequately is government HE policy developing in relation to students in general and to those with disabilities in particular?

In relation to access, under the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, Institutions of Higher Education are required to publish a formal Disability Statement setting out policy, practice and provision for all students with a disability. The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 was amended under the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001. HEIs must not treat disabled students less favourably than non-disabled students, and must make reasonable adjustments to ensure that they have access to HE (Disability Rights Commission, 2002; National Bureau for Students with Disabilities 2002a, 2002b).

The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 has increased the HE entitlements and expectations of disabled students and the responsibilities for such students of HEIs and staff. Consonant with government policy, the CVCP (1998) and HEFCE (1999a; 01-07-2002) have acted, and are acting, to widen access to HE for ALL students, including those with disabilities (National Audit Office, 2002). On Sunday, 1st. September, 2002, Part 4: Education of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (2001) (SENDA) came into force.

According to the Act, a person is disabled if they have "a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial, adverse and long term effect on his/her ability to carry out normal day to day activities". Responsible bodies (e.g. HEIs) must not treat a disabled person "less favourably" than a non-disabled person for reasons related to his/her disability "without justification". Responsible bodies must make "reasonable adjustments" to provision for students with a disability to ensure that a disabled student is not placed at a "substantial disadvantage". "Reasonable" means what a judge sitting in a court of law thinks is reasonable. Factors to be considered when assessing the "reasonableness" of "reasonable adjustment under the Act" include:

- the maintenance of academic standards;
- costs and resources;
- health and safety requirements; and the
- practicality and effectiveness of the adjustment.

There is a responsibility on education providers to do what they can to find out whether individuals have disability-related needs, subject to the student's confidentiality rights. Staff are required to make "reasonable adjustments" to their instructional practices to address the educational needs of disabled students.

(adapted from: National Bureau for Students with Disabilities [SKILL], 2002a)

Objectives.

To present and comment on analyses of the First degree results of students without, and with, a range of nine categories of disability recognised by the Higher Education Funding Council by:

- 1 describing changes that have taken place over time in the numbers, percentages and relative academic success of non-disabled and disabled students;

2. considering the educational significance of changes identified;
3. identifying developing promising practices; and
4. suggesting promising lines for further research.

Design.

The first two objectives involved three specially devised and commissioned cross-sectional interrogations of Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) databases on the degree results of U.K. domiciled male and female students with and without disabilities completing their First degrees in 1999, 2001 and 2002.

Students can be grouped according to the degree classification that they obtain in their First degree examinations, i.e.:

- First class honours;
- Upper second class honours;
- Lower second class honours;
- Third class / Pass;
- Unclassified (degrees not subject to a classification, e.g. medical and general degrees).

The categories of students used in the analyses are listed below.

OHT 03: CATEGORIES OF DISABILITY.

1. Dyslexia.
2. Blind/Partially sighted.
3. Deaf/Hearing impairment.
4. Wheelchair user/Mobility difficulties.
5. Personal care support.
6. Mental health difficulties.
7. An unseen disability, e.g. diabetes, epilepsy, asthma.
8. Multiple disabilities.
9. A disability NOT listed above.

Methods.

The research is based on analyses of statistical data derived from a total of 723,611 students. These comprise three cohorts successfully completing their First degrees at Higher Education Institutions (HEI) in the U.K in the academic years 1998/99 (234, 847), 2000/01 (N = 243,546) and 2002/02 (N = 245,188). Analyses include Sex differences across nine categories of disability status and first degree classifications over time.

Analyses.

The data analysed take no account of student “non-continuation” rates. Apparently the category “Failure” is not currently used, although “Drop-out” remains. Both are being replaced a broader concept of “non-continuation”. The latest publication of non-continuation rates was on December 18th, 2002. According to the Higher Education Funding Council, based on data from 1999-2000 and 2000-2001. the overall “non-continuation” rate at UK HE Institutions was approximately 17 % (HEFCE, 2002,

Table 6, para. 104). Unsurprisingly, this rate varies markedly between and within both disciplines and HEIs.

The analyses presented subsequently deliberately use only descriptive statistics (Ns & %ages) summarising successful students' First degree results cross-categorised by sex, type of disability and cohort. Alternative methods of analysis exist (Tabachnick and Fidell, 1996). What patterns appear to exist? Have they changed over time? In relation to HE "accountability", have these patterns any messages for staff and students in HE, and government?

Results.

Changes that have taken place over time in the numbers and percentages completing First degrees are presented. The relative academic success of non-disabled and disabled students is made explicit.

OHT 04: ALL QUALIFIERS V. ALL DISABLED QUALIFIERS.

**OHT 05: % AGE OF QUALIFIERS BY DISABILITY CATEGORY
(PIE DIAGRAM).**

OHT 06: ALL MALE QUALIFIERS V. ALL FEMALE QUALIFIERS.

**OHT 07: ALL MALE DISABLED QUALIFIERS V. ALL FEMALE
DISABLED QUALIFIERS.**

**OHT 08: ALL MALE DYSLEXIC QUALIFIERS V.
ALL FEMALE DYSLEXIC QUALIFIERS.**

The government's aspiration to develop a more inclusive HE system appears to be partly "on-track". To date, improvements in access to Higher Education Institutions of all students, of students with disabilities in general and of students with dyslexia in particular have taken place across time. Educational achievements of certain groups of students may have risen.

The educational significance of demographic changes identified. Tensions.

- a. In line with government policy, entry to H.E. has increased for all students and for students with disabilities.
- b. Academic standards appear to be rising but there are concerns in academia about standards.
- c. The number of Females entering H.E. is increasingly greater than Males entering H.E.
- d. There some First degree subjects where disabled students are very infrequently accepted.

- e. What are the “non-continuation” rates in each cohort? Are these increasing as entry requirements are broadened? Are these “non-continuation” rates differential across the classification of Sex and types of First degree course? Almost certainly.
- f. In relation to Dyslexia, the ratio of Male to Female students in H.E. is broadly similar. This is marked contrast with the incidence of dyslexia in earlier stages of education. Why?
- g. Concerns about the nature, incidence and identification of “Specific Learning Disabilities” when conceptualised as “Dyslexia, Dyspraxia and Dyscalculia”.

Disabled Students’ Allowances (DSA).

OHT 09: DISABLED STUDENTS ‘ ALLOWANCES.

DSA were introduced some 14 years ago in 1988/9 to provide additional resources to talented HE students with officially identified disabilities. Originally there were three separate allowances: a general Disabled Students Allowance; an allowance for non-medical helpers; and one for specialist equipment. Students may be eligible for more than one award under the scheme. The number of DAS awarded is always higher than the number of students with registered disabilities.

According to the National Audit Office (2002), in 1990/1 710 awards were made. In 1997/8 number of DSA awarded had increased to 10,766. Four years later in 2000/1 the number of DSA awards had tripled to 29,451. It is estimated that 70% of DSA are awarded to students with Specific Learning Difficulties. The category of Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLDs) is currently construed as including three disabilities, dyslexia, dyspraxia and dyscalculia. Can genetics help? (Plomin and Walker, 2003).

The indications are that the increase in the number of DSA awards is continuing to increase at an even higher rate. This is welcomed in the light of the government’s inclusion agenda.

Great uncertainties exist concerning how such disabilities are currently assessed for DSA awards. Consequently, in July 2003, the DfES established a Working Group “.. to review arrangements for identifying and assessing the specific learning difficulties of dyslexia, dyspraxia and dyscalculia” (DfES, 2003c).

The use of legally valid categorical labels applied to non-categorical constructs creates many difficulties for professionals charged with identifying and assessing a student’s eligibility for a DSA. It is analogous to the 11+ selection problem. Conditions, for example, dyslexia and autism are increasingly construed as “syndromes”; even as “variable syndromes”. For example, the “specificity” of the conditions subsumed under the umbrella term “dyslexia” is being challenged (Plomin, 2003).

Current understanding of dyslexia indicates that, dependent on how it is theoretically construed, it may manifest itself irrespective of an individual’s general intellectual ability.

CONCLUSION.

Undoubtedly, higher proportions of students in general, and students with disabilities in particular, are being admitted to H.E. to study for First degrees. The data on First degree results of three cohorts of successful students presented here also suggests that academic standards may also be rising. BUT....

Legitimate reservations have been expressed concerning the validity and thus the reliability of First degree classification over the wide range of individuals, courses and institutions that comprise H.E. in the U.K. Such concerns are unlikely to change rapidly.

The government's inclusion agenda requires that under-represented section of the population able to benefit from H.E., be identified and recruited. Students with disabilities that may, but not necessarily do, mask abilities represent one such group. The concept of individual abilities, their changing patterns of intra and inter-individual differences in quality and quantity present ongoing challenges to teachers, psychologists and colleagues in many other professions at ALL stages of education.

Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD), their nature, identification, incidence, prognosis and response to interventions present many unsolved challenges to teaching and learning. The working of the DSA scheme in relation to the support given to certain categories of disabled students is also a continuing cause for concern to all parties involved in the adventure of HE.

Both access to H.E. and First degree standards raise controversial questions concerning the development of Equal Opportunities policy, provision and practice in HEIs in the UK.

Whether obscured by a disability or not, no nation can afford to ignore the talents of all its citizens. The problems arise when putting the principle into practice.

Guidance is available to staff in HE. "Good practice", suggestions and resources are being disseminated. Inevitably, these appear to hold both professional promise - and pains. At some stage, a lecturer in HE will be required to justify in court "reasonable adjustments" they have made to meet the needs of a disabled student.

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The data summarised in OHTs 4,6,7 & 8 have been derived by the author from raw data and analyses commissioned from HESA.

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National Bureau for Students with Disabilities (SKILL): www.skill.org.uk

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(FOR INFORMATION OF EDUCATION SECTION CONFERENCE DELEGATES).

EXTENDED LIST OF REFERENCES INCLUDED IN THE FULL ARTICLE FROM WHICH THE ABSTRACT WAS TAKEN.

Asterisked references indicate key sources of current guidance and support in increasing access to, and support in, HEI).

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**TOWARDS AN INCLUSIVE HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM IN THE UK?
FIRST DEGREE RESULTS OF STUDENTS WITH AND WITHOUT
DISABILITIES.**

PRESENTATION DATE: Sunday November 9th., 2003. TIME: 09:00 hrs – 09:45 hrs.

PRESENTER: PETER D. PUMFREY.

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ABBREVIATIONS (Used in the full paper on which this extended abstract/handout is based).

CVCP	Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals of the Universities in the UK.
DDA	Disability Discrimination Act 1995.
DfES*	Department for Education and Science.
DfES	Department for Education and Skills.
DRC	Disability Rights Commission (Started April 25 ^{th.} , 2000).
DAS	Disabled Students' Allowances (Started 1987/8).
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England.
HEI	Higher Education Institutions.
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency.
OFFA	Office for Fair Access (2003).

SEN	Special Educational Needs.
SENDA	Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001.
SHEFC	Scottish Higher Education Funding Council.
SKILL	National Bureau for Students with Disabilities.
SpLD	Specific Learning Difficulties (Dyslexia; Dyspraxia and Dyscalculia).
UCAS	Universities Central Admissions System.

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REFERENCES.

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The data summarised in OHTs 4,6,7 & 8 have been derived by the author from raw data and analyses commissioned from HESA.

Sources: HESA Student Record 1998/99, 2000/2001 and 2001/2002.

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HESA cannot accept responsibility for any inferences or conclusions derived from the data by third parties.

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