

Acknowledgements

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Kathleen Grehan

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Foreword



This report from the NUS Disabled Students' Campaign is about disabled students' participation in further education. It aims to increase the number of disabled students in further education and to improve the experiences of disabled students.

Our report confirms that between 2001/02 and 2007/08 the numbers of disabled students participating in further education was fairly stable.

Participation is the key term here: most disabled students are on courses at level one and below; there are far fewer on higher level courses. This finding matches information from the Labour Force Survey published by the Office for National Statistics (ONS). In the UK there are high percentages of disabled students aged 16–24 who have as their highest qualification attainment level one or below, compared to non-disabled students.

The report also looks at those aged 16–24 not in education, employment and training (NEET). In 2006, disabled people were twice as likely to be in this group as non-disabled people! The people here are clearly not participating and might benefit from further education if the current provision were adapted to remove the barriers that at present put them off.

We are listening more to disabled students' voices by increasing representation on decision-making bodies in further education. The aim is to ensure that decisions on the future direction of further education are made democratically and accurately reflect disabled students' aspirations.

Disabled people have contributed a wealth of information here. In the rights-based model, empowerment and accountability are paramount, both of which show the need for society to accept disabled people as active and equal citizens. Public bodies have a duty to ensure that rights are never compromised.

NUS Disabled Students' Campaign believes that it is crucial that disabled people receive the support they need to succeed. We hope that this report will encourage efforts by government, institutions and students' unions alike to enhance the experience of disabled students in further education.

Adam Hyland

National Disabled Students' Officer

Executive summary and recommendations

Despite considerable research and changes in government legislation, inequality persists for disabled people who want to pursue further education. The main barriers are money, prejudice and access.

The report describes the background to government legislation and policy that was designed to remove the hurdles facing disabled people who want to be students in further education. It then presents findings across three areas: current participation of disabled students, financial considerations and disabled students' experience in further education.

Although the findings are about England, the recommendations can more widely be seen as a general UK-wide agenda for change.

The research

This research was carried out between February 2008 and February 2009. It consisted of a literature review, four focus groups, five interviews as well information collected from the online discussion forum at BBC Ouch!. Finally the NUS carried out an online survey, to which almost 400 disabled people responded.

Disabled people aged 16–24 in the UK

- Disabled people aged 16–24 experience inequality in the education system.

The Labour Force Survey (2006) shows that in the UK there are disproportionately high percentages of disabled students whose highest qualification is at level one or below. At higher levels of qualification the numbers of disabled students falls away sharply.

(Level one is the term used to describe qualifications such as basic skills and ESOL; an undergraduate degree is known as level four.)

With level two as the highest level of qualification there is similar data for disabled people and non-disabled people. From level three and beyond, however, disabled people are underrepresented.

While 23 per cent of non-disabled people aged 16–24 are not in education, training or employment (NEET), the comparable percentage for disabled 16–24-year-olds is 56 per cent. Many of these could take part in further education if the barriers that at present deter them were removed.

Disabled students' participation in further education

- While overall numbers of disabled students taking part in further education may be rising, in some parts of further education numbers are dropping significantly.

The Individualised Learner Record (ILR) data shows that year on year numbers of disabled students in further education are increasing. This may be due to more students in further education declaring their disability rather than the result of a change in the student population.

The disproportionate numbers of disabled students on level one and entry courses and not at higher levels suggests that these students are either moving to become NEET or are repeating the same courses, since the numbers participating in further education at level two and above fall very dramatically. This suggests barriers to further attainments.

In the academic year 2005/6, five per cent fewer disabled students were in further education studying courses at level one and entry

level, compared to 2003/4. Courses at these levels (basic skills, ESOL) help disabled students to improve their aspirations and progress. However, these are the very courses that face cuts to provision. Disabled students may be unable to take the first step towards learning and employment.

The greatest fall was in the number of disabled students in sixth-form colleges studying at level three; in 2005/6 there was an almost 28 per cent drop on the 2003/4 figures. Some of this fall may be due to changes in recording methods.

Financial support

- Financial support for disabled students in further education is inadequate as is the funding available for further education institutions to support disabled students.

Disabled students in higher education levels can claim Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA), but there is nothing comparable for disabled students in further education studying courses up to level 4.

Financial support in the form of Additional Learning Support (ALS) is only available to further education institutions, who are responsible for administering it and thus can control disabled students' access to courses; individual disabled students cannot use it to purchase support. They are not directly involved in the process of getting the funding and have no influence on how the money is spent. In some colleges and institutions students do not get enough information about Additional Learning Support.

Where ALS is provided effectively, disabled students achieve at higher than the average levels for the student whole population as a

whole. Disabled students who do not receive it have results that are below the group average.

Disabled students' experiences

- Disabled students' aspirations vary widely, but many still face barriers to their participation in further education; these barriers can harm students' self-esteem and determination

The aspirations of disabled students in further education vary widely. The aspirations of students on level one and entry level courses are much less ambitious, in comparison with those of students on level three courses.

There are many barriers in further education that make it a struggle for disabled students to participate on an equal footing with their peers. Positive staff attitudes, however, make a difference.

Identification of disability is important in fostering self-esteem and students' aspirations are inextricably linked to their self-confidence. Participants in the NUS focus groups expressed a feeling of being empowered by disclosure, fighting for accessibility and reskilling.

Students given a late or wrong identification of disability may benefit from the parliamentary select committee report, *Re-skilling for recovery*. This is especially pertinent to dyslexic students who were failed by the school system.

Several participants in the focus groups, studying level one and below, expressed a desire to remain at college where they were happy. The lack of aspiration, which may be influenced by a range of factors, itself limits further development.

In certain situations it seems that further education, rather than ensuring disabled students to progress, appears to be acting as a

form of social care, where the same students repeat courses year after year.

Students on level two and three courses showed a different attitude to college life. While some students had few aspirations (other research confirms that this is prevalent among disabled students) others had high ambitions but had encountered many obstacles to their continued development and these experiences had shaped their aspirations. These barriers often made them feel isolated and powerless.

As a result of their experiences several focus group members said they would like to try to work to get the difficulties removed so that future generations of disabled students did not have to undergo the same negative experiences; the oppression they had lived through had shaped their aspirations.

Recommendations

Disabled students should be seen as active citizens with rights and responsibilities and public institutions and structures have a duty to uphold these rights.

NUS believes that placing the duty to provide high-quality support and access for disabled students and colleges with institutions is a reasonable step. Measures must be put in place, however, to ensure that these students have the same level of access to the same range of opportunities as all other students.

Two key areas that NUS has identified as needing to be improved in further education are:

- the complexity of student funding systems
- the inconsistency of information, advice and guidance.

Removing financial barriers and providing more positive information, advice and guidance will encourage disabled students' to raise their aspirations and increase their participation at all levels of further education.

Policymakers and colleges need to take a strategic and holistic approach to access. Initiatives, such as the Office for Disability Issues and the National Forum of Disabled People need to be monitored to ensure they are enhancing the experiences of disabled students and to assess how far they go to instigate a holistic approach to access.

Funding for disabled students

Further education institutions should be more open and accountable to disabled students about how they spend Additional Learning Support (ALS).

NUS believes that individual budgets for support, similar to Disabled Students' Allowance, should be set up in further education. It should give individual students the right to control their funding.

Individual budgets should not be an alternative to ALS, rather a combination of the two should be established. One option could be for disabled further education students' funding to be incorporated into the current legislation about the right to control.

Department of Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), institutions, colleges and students' unions should adopt a holistic approach to disabled students' lives. This would acknowledge that there is a need for funding to support the students' wider college life, not just help with the course.

More needs to be done to ensure that disabled students themselves are aware of all the transport options open to them. Transport

partnership and planning schemes should ensure that disabled people are represented fully when making decisions about future transport plans. Consideration should also be given to disabled students over 25 years old.

Information, advice and guidance

Disabled students should be entitled to attend courses without facing any barriers.

NUS believe there is a need for a new cross-departmental unit (BIS and DCSF) to improve information, advice and guidance to disabled students. The unit should be advised by a broad group of stakeholders interested in information, advice and guidance, including disabled students. The unit should:

- make information about funding a priority
- work with the perspective of the social model of disability
- remove many of the socially constructed barriers and allow people to develop unhindered
- explore the potential for advocacy support; it could be provided by a dedicated resource within colleges and be promoted by the Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA), Skills Funding Agency (SFA), DCSF and BIS.

NUS believe that it is important for students who repeat courses to be encouraged to progress. Choosing not to do so should be a positive choice. Staff giving information, advice and guidance should be trained about the opportunities and entitlements of disabled students, using the social of model of disability.

Information, advice and guidance given to disabled students in further education should be influenced directly by the positive experiences of disabled students achieving great things.

Specialist colleges should be an equal choice between these and mainstream colleges rather than a final choice, made because resources are unavailable in mainstream colleges. YPLA, SFA, DCSF and BIS should support this statement.

Staff at job centres should be trained about the support available for disabled people at work. This would promote bridges to employment and avoid disabled people dropping out of education, training and employment.

Further action

More specific further education statistics are needed to see whether there has been a reduction or increase in inequalities for disabled students. We recommend that the ONS gathers evidence showing the qualifications disabled people hold, with separate categories for employed people, those who are not in education, employment and training, and students.

A useful project for the Young People's Learning Agency would be a study on disabled students' transition from school to college.

Further research is needed on disabled students' applications to charities for educational grants. This would highlight the gaps in statutory provision.

CHAPTER 1

Background

1.1 National Union of Students' Disabled Students' Campaign

Despite considerable research into the inequality disabled students' experience in further education and changes in government legislation, barriers persist.

National Union of Students' (NUS) Disabled Students' Campaign believes that lobbying for disability rights should be at the forefront of the political agenda in the UK. We work to ensure that disabled students' voices are influential in improving both policy and practice.

NUS Disabled Students' Conference February 2007 voted to undertake a research project into disabled students' participation in further education with a view to identifying barriers to participation in the current system. The following report, based on research carried out between February 2008 and February 2009, is the result.

The report begins with the background to government legislation and policy and then presents findings about the current participation of disabled students in further education, financial considerations and disabled students' experience of further education. Appendix 1 outlines the research methods.

The research shows that despite government schemes, disabled students are still underrepresented in the higher levels of further education. The experiences of those who do take part in further education show that the current provision is far from perfect.

1.2 Disabled students' voices need to be heard

NUS Disabled Students' Campaign wants to encourage more disabled students' voices be heard by increasing their representation on decision-making bodies in further education. This will help make sure that decisions on the future direction of further education reflect the views of disabled students. As a forum involving disabled students puts it:¹

'...the way disabled people have been brought up... [in itself] can become a barrier. Their aspiration may have been blocked and also their ability to express their views and challenge non-disabled people have been blocked ... many of them have been told to conform and accept.'

When disabled people are empowered to express their own views this can yield a wealth of information. Sometimes disabled people have to challenge the perspectives of the non-disabled people who claim to speak for them.

Existing information and research about disabled peoples' experience of further education shows the need for changes to pave the way for more inclusion and participation.

1.3 Models of disability

Historically, some models of disability, such as the 'medical model', have bolstered inequality and discrimination against disabled people, with prejudiced assumptions about their abilities, a lack of consideration in the design of buildings and facilities, and an unwillingness to spend any extra money to accommodate disabled

¹ National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) (due 2009) *Securing a voice: forums for involving learners with impairments, mental health difficulties and learning difficulties* (SAV development project). NIACE

people's needs. It has taken many years for society to even begin to view disabled people in a different way.

The two theories that have most influenced disabled people's struggle for equality and are most relevant to addressing disabled people's participation in further education are the social and the rights-based models.

Social model of disability

The 'social model' of disability was developed in the 1960s and 1970s.² Over the last 30 years it has been used by disabled people to oppose the negative attitudes that had arisen from the 'medical model' of disability.

Using a social model approach, disability is seen as a product of social structures and the perceptions and attitudes of others, which create barriers to disabled people's full participation in society. The social model:

'... freed up disabled people's hearts and minds by offering an alternative conceptualisation of the problem. Liberated the direction of disabled people's personal energies turned outwards to building a force for changing society'.³

Rights-based model

This model uses two key terms – empowerment and accountability:

'It focused on the fulfilment of human rights, for example the right to equal opportunities and participation in society...The two main

² Oliver, M and Sapey M (2006) *Social Work with Disabled People* 3rd edition, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillian

³ Campbell J and Oliver M, (1996) *Disability politics: understanding our past, changing our future*. London: Routledge, p 20

*elements of the right-based approach are empowerment and accountability.*⁴

This theory can be seen in the Disability Equality Duty (2006), which is enshrined in the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA). This emphasises that disabled people should be seen as active citizens, with rights and responsibilities, and that public institutions and structures have a duty to *'implement these rights'*⁵ as well as to *'justify the quality and quantity of their implementation.'*⁶

Using the social model and the rights-based model gives students access to equality and therefore may be instrumental in increasing their aspirations.

This desire to change how disabled people are viewed has heavily influenced campaigning in recent years and has led the NUS Students with Disabilities Campaign to be renamed the Disabled Students Campaign. This report uses the term 'disabled students' to refer to all learners who are disabled by society's attitudes to impairment.

1.4 Legislation

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA) was a watershed in the official view of disabled people. Despite the fact that it defined disabled people using the medical model, it began offering protection from discrimination in employment, and placed a duty on employers to make reasonable adjustments to the workplace, in accordance with the social model.

⁴ Heumann, J. (2005) Chapter 6 'Disability' in 'Making PRSP ['Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper and Disability'] inclusive'. - www.making-prsp-inclusive.org/en/6-disability/61-what-is-disability/611-the-four-models

⁵ ibid

⁶ ibid

The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 (SENDA) extended these provisions to further and higher education institutions. In 2006 a Disability Equality Duty (DED) was introduced, requiring public bodies to actively promote equality of opportunity for disabled people and placing the responsibility for disabled people's inclusion firmly on public organisations. In education, the learning establishment concerned is the responsible body.

Other laws besides the DDA and the DED can protect disabled students' rights in education. The Human Rights Act (1998) has a role to play and increasingly professionals are realising there is a need to be more creative in the use of the Human Rights Act and the DDA:

*'If disabled person studying education wishes to have a fair hearing, one may argue that he should have more time and more provision should be made in order to allow the person to have the appropriate amount of time.'*⁷

There are many positive developments in the pipeline concerning disabled students' participation in higher and further education. In December 2008 the government promised two new pieces of legislation: a Welfare Reform Bill and an Equality Bill.

The Welfare Reform Bill, which at the time of writing – June 2009 – Parliament is debating, introduces a right for disabled people to control the public funding allocated to them as individual budgets. The bill will improve equality and human rights for disabled students in both further and higher education.

⁷ http://resource.nusonline.co.uk/media/resource/disabled_Jas_Gill.doc

1.5 Legislation – does it work?

There is much debate about the effectiveness of legislation because there is no solid evidence to show that it has helped achieve the government's objectives for disabled children and young people.⁸ It in fact appears that the equality agenda is continuing to fail to reach its targets in education.

Many disabled students do not fall within the narrow parameters of special educational needs (SEN) under the 2001 Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (England and Wales) and as a result, do not receive the support they require and continue to experience barriers to learning. Worryingly, these issues are not addressed in the Green Paper on the Single Equality Bill.⁹

1.6 Forthcoming legislation

The Equality Bill announced in April 2009 is currently going through Parliament. The intention is that it will replace the DDA and equivalent legislation relating to gender and race.

1.7 Government reports and policies

In addition to legislation several policy initiatives have affected disabled students in further education. In January 2005 a report from the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit entitled *Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People* made two key recommendations: to

⁸ There is a *Brief history of special educational needs* within: House of Commons Education and Skills Select Committee (2006) *Education and Skills - Third Report* London: The Stationery Office, available at <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200506/cmselect/cmmeduski/478/47802.htm>

⁹ DRC, (2007) *A Framework for Fairness Response - DRC response to the Discrimination Law Review Green Paper*

establish an office for disability issues and create a national forum of disabled people. The report said:

*'Disability should be distinguished from impairments and ill-health' and is defined as poverty, disadvantage, social exclusion and environmental and educational/employment barriers...Disabled young people's needs are often not met by current further education provision.*¹⁰

The Office for Disability Issues

The Office for Disability Issues (ODI), launched in December 2005, is a cross-departmental government office. Its current priorities include supporting the new legislation outlined above, implementing the Independent Living Strategy, and initiating the use of individual budgets.

National Forum of Disabled People

The forum is an advisory group of 12 disabled people; their aim has been to set up a national forum that represents disabled people and ensures that policy issues and services incorporate the personal experiences and aspirations of disabled people.

Both the ODI and the National Forum of Disabled people are trying to incorporate more of the views and experiences of disabled people. Ensuring that disabled students are consulted within colleges and universities would be a positive development.

Disability Agenda and National Learner Panel

The Disability Agenda, involving a wide variety of individuals and organisations, was launched in 2007; it is another sign of

¹⁰ Prime Minister's Strategy Unit (2005) *Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People: Final report*, London: Cabinet Office

government efforts to increase disabled people's input into the debate, especially in further and higher education.

Also in 2007 the National Learner Panel of further education students was created with the objective of increasing students' influence over the policies that affect them.¹¹ And in January 2009, the government responded positively to recommendations by the National Students' Forum Report by NUS (November 2008) to improve disabled students' experiences of higher education.

Although these developments are welcome there remains a question as to whether such developments go far enough or if it would be more appropriate to strengthen and develop legislation to ensure disabled people are at the heart of any policymaking that affects them.

1.8 Policy developments in further education

There have been several reports relevant to disabled peoples' participation in further education.

14–19 curriculum and qualifications reform

In 2004 the final report of the working group, chaired by Mike Tomlinson, proposed reforming the curriculum and qualification system for 14–19-year-olds.¹²

The report identified weaknesses in the structure of further education and also highlighted the educational causes of inequality

¹¹ DfES, (2006) *Further Education: Raising Skills, Improving Life Chances* London: The Stationery Office

¹² DfES (2004) *14-19 Curriculum and Qualifications Reform: Final report of the Working Group on 14–19 reform* (The Mike Tomlinson Report)

such as disengagement, underachievement and low post-16 participation in further education.

Foster Review

In 2005 the Foster Review on the future role of further education colleges considered how to implement the government's commitment to ensuring equality for disabled people by 2025.

One recommendation was for the 'learner voice', which allows disabled students to be involved in decision-making in colleges and beyond. The review identified a need for more representation, training and resources and proposed that every college should have a learner involvement strategy.¹³ This stance reflects DRC's argument for action to prevent disabled students entering a 'revolving door' situation, in which they spend years repeating courses in further education and living on benefits.¹⁴

In response to Tomlinson and Foster, in November 2005 the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) addressed the 'revolving door' situation by publishing a report calling for a strategic review of funding and provision for disabled learners across the whole learning and skills sector. It said that there had been a continual improvement in the funding for disabled students in further education.¹⁵ This is an area of contention that will be discussed in more depth later.

¹³ Foster, A (2005) *Realising the potential – a review on the future role of further education colleges* London: DfES

¹⁴ Prime Minister's Strategy Unit, (2005) *Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People: Final report*, London: Cabinet Office p 147

¹⁵ LSC (2005) *Through inclusion to excellence* Coventry: LSC

Leitch and 'After Leitch'

The government is concerned about the level of skills in the UK and has commissioned various reports on this, such as the 2006 Leitch Implementation report on UK Skills levels; a parliamentary select committee has also addressed the issues, in *Re-skilling for recovery: After Leitch, implementing skills and training policies* (2009).

The 2006 Leitch report called for 'upskilling' in the UK to prevent the UK lagging behind the rest of the world by 2020. This proposal focused on further education and also stated that disabled people must have access to appropriate opportunities and support to improve their skills.¹⁶

Research for the Social Market Foundation found that even if all non-disabled people gain a level two qualification the aim of 95 per cent of population having at least this level of qualification by 2020 would not be achieved and there would be a shortfall of 800,000 people.¹⁷ Disabled people account for 9 per cent of the population; unless there is improvement in the skills of disabled people, the Leitch target cannot be achieved. The future educational setting for disabled people clearly needs to change.

Leitch's proposals were made during a period of economic optimism. In 2009, however, with the country facing economic recession, Leitch's upskilling has been superseded by a report with a single priority: *Reskilling for Recovery* (England only). This

¹⁶ H M Treasury (2006) *Prosperity for all in the global economy: World class skills* [Leitch Review of skills] London: HMSO

¹⁷ Evans, S (2007) *Disability, Skills and Work – Raising our ambitions* The Social Market Foundation

suggests that what matters is reskilling the population, giving people skills they need to access the labour market.¹⁸ Again, further education will have an important role to play.

Raising the participation age

In 2013 the compulsory education and training leaving age in England will rise to 18. LSC will be replaced with two organisations: the Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA), for students up to 19 years old and the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) for those over the age of 19. Local authorities will fund and organise education for 16–19-year-olds.

The 2008 White Paper about raising the age for leaving education/training, by DCSF and DIUS (Department of Innovation, Universities and Skills) jointly, says that local authorities will be able to eradicate the weakness of financial provision and there will be a promise of robust intervention if students underperform for any reason.

1.9 Conclusion

With the hard work of various campaigning organisations public awareness has grown and the focus on disability has come increasingly into the mainstream debate. Government and society has shifted towards the social model of disability. The establishment of the ODI shows that the government realises that more needs to be done.

¹⁸ House of Commons Innovation, Universities, Science and Skills Committee, (2009) *Re-skilling for recovery: After Leitch, implementing skills and training policies* HC 48-I, First Report of Session 2008-09 Volume I: Report, Together with Formal Minutes

The reports into further education also show how attitudes are beginning to change concerning the importance of disabled students' participation and engagement and increasing disabled students' voices. Their recommendations are in line with the 2005 Prime Minister's Strategy Unit report.

Chapter 2

Disabled people aged 16–24 in the UK

2.1 The UK Labour Force Survey

The UK Labour Force Survey for 2006 shows that there are disproportionately high percentages of disabled students whose highest qualification is at level one or below and there is a clear drop in the numbers progressing onwards. The percentage of disabled people whose highest level of qualification is level two is comparable with those for non-disabled people. However, from level three and beyond, disabled people are underrepresented.

Level one is the term used to describe qualifications such as ESOL and basic skills. Level two qualifications include NVQ Level 2. A-Levels are typical level three qualifications. An undergraduate degree is level four.

While 23 per cent of non-disabled people aged 16–24 in the UK are not in education, training or employment, the comparable percentage for disabled 16–24-year-olds is 56 per cent. Many of these could take part in further education if the barriers that at present deter them were removed.

2.2 Disabled people's level of achievement

The Office of National Statistics' Labour Force Survey can help us compare disabled and non-disabled people aged 16–24 in the UK in terms of the highest level of qualification they hold and the relative numbers in each group who are not in employment, education and training (NEET).

Level of highest qualification

According to the Labour Force Survey published in 2007 there are 634,777 disabled people in Britain aged 16–24 – around 9 per cent of the whole population aged 16–24.¹⁹

Figure 1 – Level of highest qualification

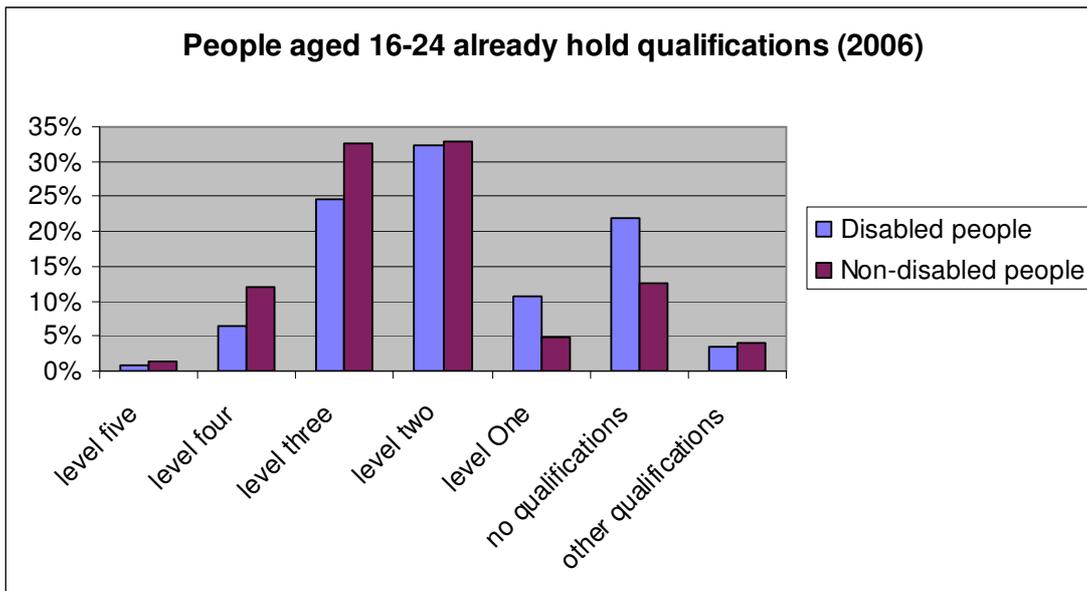


Figure 1 shows the highest level of qualification held by people aged 16–24 in 2006. Disabled people aged 16–24 continuing through the education system beyond level two (GCSE, NVQ2) are underrepresented. Also:

- disabled people aged 16–24 are nearly twice as likely to have no qualifications than non-disabled people
- disabled people aged 16–24 are more than twice as likely to have level one (basic skills, ESOL) as their highest attainment than non-disabled people
- non-disabled people aged 16–24 are roughly 50 per cent more likely to hold a degree.

¹⁹ Office of National Statistics (2007),

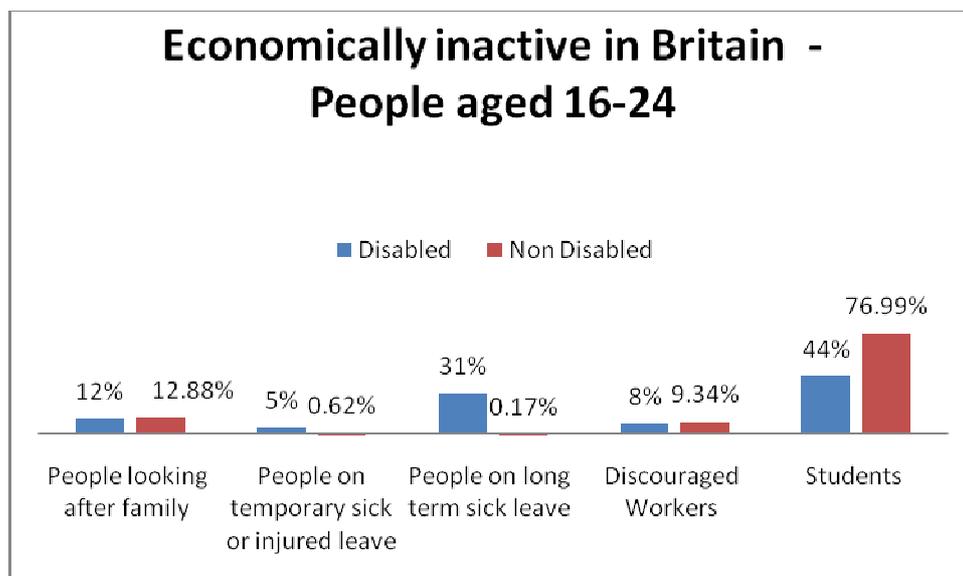
Despite all this, the same percentage of both disabled and non-disabled go on to achieve at postgraduate – level five – studies possibly indicating the high calibre of disabled person it takes to progress through the education system.

2.3 Not in education, employment and training

With 56 per cent of all disabled people aged 16–24 not in education, employment and training (NEET) in 2006, the figure for non-disabled people in the UK was 23 per cent. Figure 2 shows the numbers of disabled and non-disabled people aged 16–24 who are classed as economically inactive

We have merged the information on the economically inactive group of people aged 16–24 in UK (Figure 2) into Figure 3, showing students and people who are not in employment, education, and training (NEET).

Figure 2 – Economically inactive people aged 16–24 in Britain (2006)



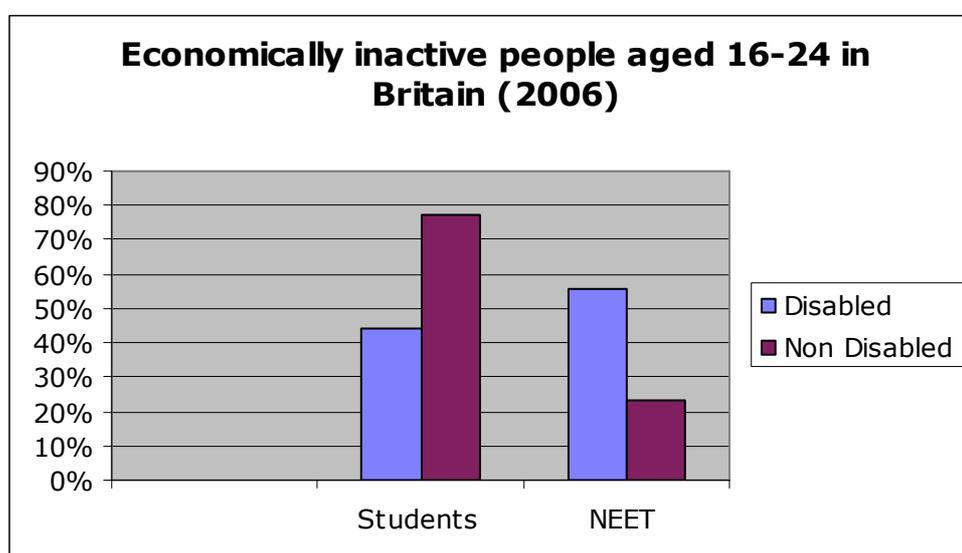
The figure shows how many disabled people are classed as being on long-term sick leave; it is important that colleges are aware of the

needs of disabled students, whose attendance may be affected by health issues.

2.4 Students and people who are NEET aged 16-24 in UK

Figure 3 shows that 56 per cent of all disabled people aged 16–24 are not in education, employment and training: more than double the same statistic for non-disabled people.

Figure 3 – Students and people aged 16–24 who are NEET



Our statistical analysis lends weight to 2004 DRC research findings of a '*pattern of inequality that has not changed since 1998*' and low participation of disabled students in both further and higher education.²⁰ In 2002 DRC published a survey of disabled people aged 16–24, which found, '*that of those who had not gone to FE or HE institutions, nearly one third had been discouraged because of*

²⁰ DRC (December 2004) Disability Briefing December 2004 (The Briefing was a compendium of official statistics on disability, produced by the DRC twice a year)

*their impairments, and a lack of support, transport and accommodation.*²¹

Furthermore, the Labour Force Survey²² found in 2006 that approximately: *'one third of disabled people with no qualifications have mobility impairments, a third have long-term health conditions, approximately 15 per cent have mental health conditions and around 6 per cent have a learning disability.'*²³

Evidence points to a worsening situation as the DfES Youth Cohort study (2005) reported that the proportion of young disabled people who were classified as NEET increased from 11 per cent to 15 per cent between 2000 and 2004.²⁴

Government's recognition of the problem

The Prime Minister's Strategy Unit commented in 2005 on the difficulties that disabled young people face, such as:

*'the lack of support that they receive on leaving compulsory education [which] has been raised as a factor in the high proportion of people with less severe impairments coming into contact with the Youth Justice System, experiencing homelessness, teenage pregnancy, drug and alcohol misuse and becoming NEET.'*²⁵

However, the government did not comment on people who are on 'sick leave' and the many barriers facing disabled students who

²¹ NOP, (2002) *Young disabled people: A survey of the views and experiences of young disabled people in Great Britain*, DRC

²² Office of National Statistics (2007),

²³ Office of National Statistics (2007)

²⁴ DfES, (2005) *Youth Cohort Study*

<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000560/index.shtml>

²⁵ Prime Minister's Strategy Unit (2005) *Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People: Final report* London: Cabinet Office

want to study. This group has been described as invisible students.²⁶

2.5 Disabled students in higher education

Estimates of the number of disabled students in education vary. HESA's research counts disabled students in higher education by using figures for those claiming Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) or those identifying as disabled on their UCAS application form. Of all students in higher education, HESA counts six per cent as disabled.²⁷ It notes that this includes a large proportion of students with dyslexia. The six per cent is based on those who self identify and declare themselves to be disabled, thus the actual figure may be greater. This may point to a lack of accurate information, lack of awareness of rights and the options available.

²⁶ Penny, S (2007) [Out of sight, out of mind A report by the Welsh Association of ME & CFS on post 16 education of housebound students](#)

²⁷ Jacklin A, et al (2007) *Improving the experience of disabled students in higher education* HESA

Chapter 3

Disabled students' participation in further education

3.1 Trend analysis of disabled students' participation in further education

Data from the Individualised Learner Record (ILR)²⁸, which is gathered by the LSC, shows that numbers of disabled students in further education are increasing. This may be due to more students in further education declaring their disability rather than the result of a change in the student population.

The 1996 Tomlinson Committee

Much has changed over the last decade in terms of the number of disabled people studying. In 1996 a committee chaired by John Tomlinson on behalf of the Further Education Funding Council found an estimated 13,000 disabled students in further education and another 13,000 potential students who had tried to enrol or faced barriers to participation for various reasons, such as a lack of accommodation and lack of expertise.²⁹ By 2003/4, the numbers of disabled students identified as being funded by the LSC was 579,000. It seems likely that both more students are disclosing disabilities or learning difficulties and more disabled students are enrolling.

²⁸ The data service: better information for further education (2009) - www.thedataservice.org.uk

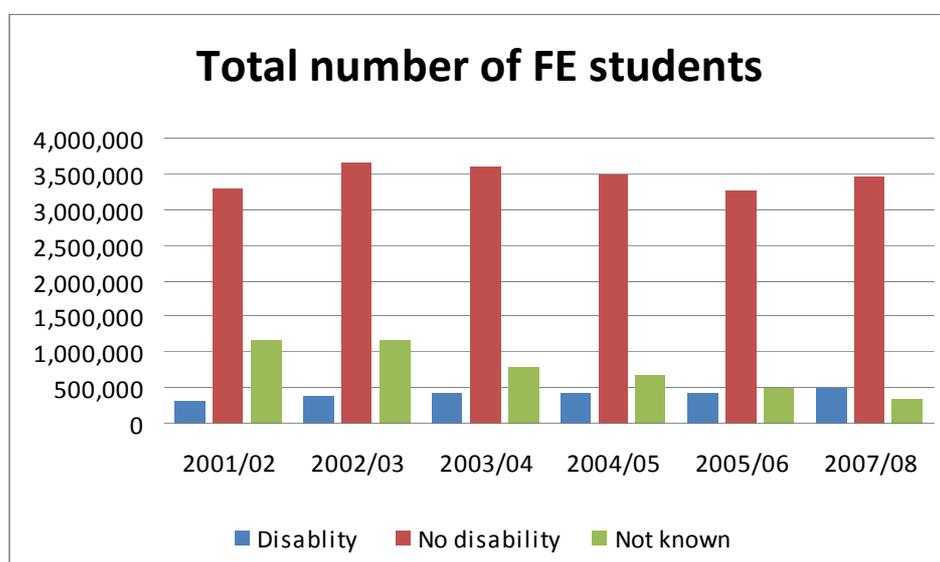
²⁹ Further Education Funding Council (1996), *Inclusive Learning: the Report of the Committee of Enquiry into the postschool education of those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, in England*, [Tomlinson Committee Report] FEFC

Trends between 2001/02 and 2007/08

The statistics analysed in figure 4 were sourced from the ILR database between 2001/02 and 2007/8.

The figure shows that a decline in overall numbers of students in further education. The figures for disabled students are increasing, however, this may be due to more students declaring their disability rather than the result of a change in the student population.

Figure 4 – Total number of students in further education



The numbers of those who did not declare whether they were disabled or not (Not known) show a decrease of over 70 per cent between 2001/2 and 2007/09; these non-declarations may have been from non-disabled people, but they may show that increasing numbers of students are identifying themselves as disabled.

Confidentiality concerns

Despite the apparent willingness of more students to declare themselves as disabled, NUS Disabled Students' Campaign has strong concerns that this could lead to further discrimination. Individualised learner records contain information gathered about

students in a database held by MIAP (Managing Information Across Partners). MIAP was established in 2006 to improve information, advice and guidance and the transition and flow of information between partners (schools, further education institutions, university authorities and employers).

Colleges can access individualised learner records but there is no opportunity for explaining anything on the record. Employers can ask the student to be allowed to access his/her record, however, this could encourage discrimination between those happy to give permission and those for whom this presents difficulty given events relating to their being disabled. When students become more aware of these confidentiality issues some may be unwilling to identify themselves as disabled.

3.2 Disabled students' levels of study

Most disabled students study courses in further education at level one and entry level, (basic skills, ESOL) according ILR data. This tallies with the ONS data, which shows high levels of disabled students holding a low-level qualification. As the numbers going on to level two courses drop significantly this suggests barriers to further attainments

In the academic year 2005/6 five per cent fewer disabled students were in further education studying courses at level one and entry level, compared to 2003/4. Courses at these levels help disabled students to improve their aspirations and progress to higher levels. However, these are the very courses that face cuts to provision – see more below about this. Hence young disabled people may be unable to take the first step towards learning and employment.

Figure 5 – Disabled students’ levels of study in further education between 2003/04 and 2005/06 (figures not broken down by age)³⁰

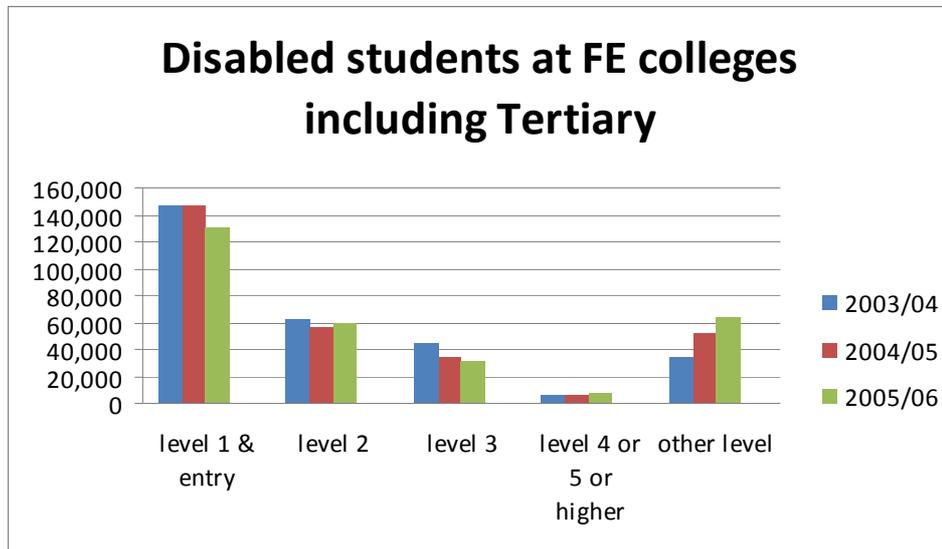
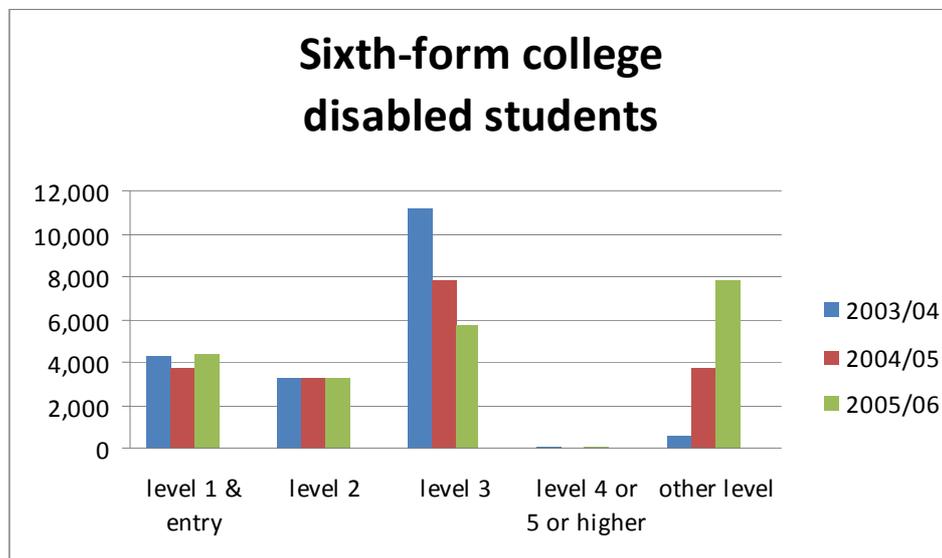


Figure 6 – Sixth-form disabled students’ levels of study between 2003/04 and 2005/06



³⁰ Fletcher, M, Munoz, S, Faraday, S (2007) *Learning difficulty, disability and additional learning support in further education* The Learning and Skills Network www.lsneducation.org.uk

	2003/04		2004/05		2005/06	
	General FE (incl Tertiary)	Sixth form college	General FE (incl Tertiary)	Sixth form college	General FE (incl Tertiary)	Sixth form college
Level 1 & Entry	147,129	4,263	146,120	3,683	131,082	4,384
Level 2	62,921	3,212	55,827	3,263	59,790	3,298
Level 3	44,053	11,198	34,513	7,855	31,697	5,733
Level 4 or 5 or	6,349	59	5,461	36	6,736	114
Other Level	33,474	517	52,349	3,733	64,112	7,779
Total	293,926	19,249	294,270	18,570	293,417	21,308
GFE + SFC		313,175		312,840		314,725

Research by Skill, the National Bureau for Students with Disabilities, found that for many disabled students, '*courses at Level 1 and below give them a first step on the ladder to progressive learning and employment.*'³¹ These may also be the types of students who are those most in danger of finding themselves excluded from education, employment and training. The decline in courses at this level may account for the drop in numbers of disabled students studying level one courses.

Cuts in course provision can create more barriers for those disabled people who have no qualification or hold only a level one qualification. A survey in 2005 by National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) found four colleges intending to cut their level one courses completely and a further 13 cutting completely the level of support to disabled students for these courses. According to one large further education college in north-east England the reintroduction of fees for some areas of work had caused a 15 per cent reduction in participation of disabled students.³²

³¹ Skill: National Bureau for Students with Disabilities, (2005) *Further Education: Raising Skills, Improving Life Chances* responding to questions on the 2006 White Paper about further education

³² Hughes, C (2005) *Eight in ten: Adult learners in further education, Report of the state of adult learning in colleges of further education in England* for National Institute of Adult Continuing Education

3.3 Disabled students in sixth-form colleges

The greatest fall was in the number of disabled students in sixth-form colleges studying at level three; in 2005/6 there was an almost 28 per cent drop on the 2003/4 figures. Some of this fall may be due to changes in recording methods, as a jump of over 90 per cent is recorded in those studying courses at 'other level'.

A study published in 2001 showed that disabled school pupils tended to underachieve, which affected their progress in later life. The range of choices open to disabled students was restricted and the students' own relatively low aspirations created further barriers.³³ These findings may explain the decrease in numbers.

3.4 Conclusion

There are still many stumbling blocks for the disabled student to overcome in further education and underrepresentation of disabled people among students in further and higher education is officially recognised.³⁴ The inequality in further education for disabled students is especially significant in their levels of attainment rather than in the numbers who attend college. Disabled students are underrepresented at the higher levels of further education and there are potentially a group of people who could benefit from becoming involved in education.

³³ Hendeby, N and Pascall, G (2001) *Disability and Transition to Adulthood: Achieving independent living*

³⁴ Barer, R (2007) *Disabled students in London: A review of higher and further education, including students with learning difficulties*, London: Greater London Authority

CHAPTER 4

Financial support

4.1 Funding for disabled students in further education

In higher education, disabled students are entitled to claim a Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA). In 2008 funding for non-medical personal help in the DSA was increased to £20,000 for full time undergraduates. Students can use it to purchase equipment, and also to pay for support such as sign language interpreters

There is no equivalent for disabled students studying courses up to and including level three in further education.

'I was under the impression that colleges had to make education accessible, whether further or higher. This would be considered under the DDA. There is normally a disability adviser at each institution.' (BBC Ouch! member, November 2008)

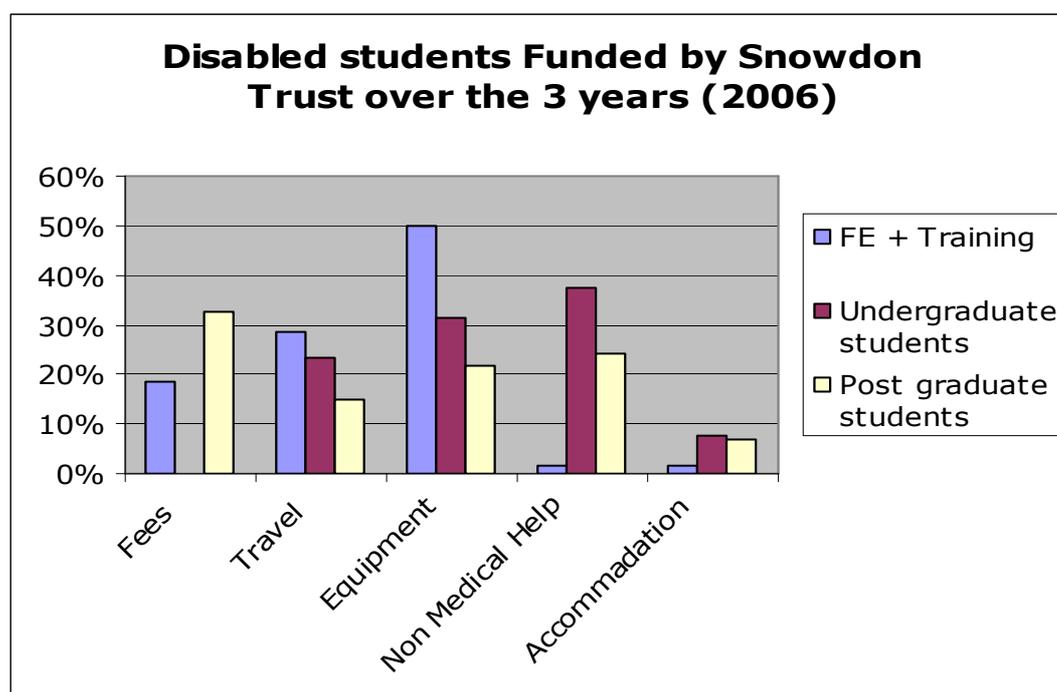
A respondent to the message wrote:

'Sadly, but predictably, what counts as "accessible" varies from college to college. Last year I worked as a disability support worker in a further education college. I tried extremely hard to get equipment allowances for several students. I was repeatedly told that this was not what the discretionary fund was for. If colleges have reasonable physical access (and in many cases even if they don't), they're rarely interested in doing more than to make courses accessible to disabled students.' (BBC Ouch! member, November 2008)

Snowdon Award Scheme for disabled students

In 2006, the Snowdon Trust (2006), a charity that provides grants to help disabled students complete further or higher education or training, published information about its grants in the three years up to 2006.³⁵

Figure 7 – Grants to disabled students by the Snowdon Award Scheme (2003–2006)



Half the further education students' applications for grants were to cover equipment costs; only 30 per cent of the grants to undergraduates were for equipment. This reflects disabled students' experiences:

'[There was] no adequate funding for equipment or PAs or travel. It took me several extra years because of this, and I had to apply to a charity for essential equipment.' (NUS focus group participant, 2009)

³⁵ Tozer, N (2006) *The Snowdon Survey 2006*,

A similar picture emerges of further education students' need for help with travel costs and course fees, again reflected in our focus groups:

'I was also discriminated against because I was not able to access free transport like the students in the special needs section of the further education college, because I was deemed to not need this support because I was following a mainstream course. This meant I had to rely on parental support to get me back and forth to college or when this was unavailable it cost me 500 per cent more than my peers on the same course to enable me to attend.' (NUS focus group participant, 2008)

'[I] cannot use normal college transport and so have to use the taxis provided by the council.' (NUS focus group participant, 2009)

Disabled students in both further and higher education require additional funding to cover travelling to college or university and this problem appears to be worse for further education students.

The Snowdon Award Scheme's pattern of grants also shows that some further education disabled student have to pay for their course fees, while undergraduate students receiving Disabled Student Allowance (DSA) have their course fees covered. This may mean that disabled students in further education incur higher costs due to the time it takes for them to complete their course – due to extended time in hospital, for example. Skill, the National Bureau for Students with Disabilities, has identified this as an important concern since if funding is cut off before disabled students finish their studies this severely affects their success rates.

'..it is important to "fund by time", which enables disabled learners to obtain "planned length of stay" at the same time as to

*"determine the funding of provision" but it is not a "time-served programme" – it is "average length of stay".*³⁶

This relates directly to what disabled students in further education told NUS in the focus groups. One participant commented that in order to study successfully, he *'needed a twelve-month course on dealing with dyslexia prior to commencing the course'* (NUS focus group participant, 2008).

Skill believes that funding criteria work against some disabled students, who may have needed to have extra time for their study or had their learning disrupted. The Snowdon Survey backs this up.

*Students whose circumstances have forced them to undertake further education at a later stage in their lives should not be penalised with course fees.*³⁷

Many of the participants in the focus groups felt an additional time allowance would help them.

'I want to be able to do my courses in the same time as my friends, but instead, to make sure that I can complete them, I have to take them over an extra year' (NUS focus group participant, 2008).

The rules about what constitutes attendance also affect disabled students. One disabled student studying in Wales wrote:

'I receive no support at all. There are no grants or anything available to somebody like me who is housebound. All grants and bursaries require you to attend an educational establishment for a set number of hours. I am unable to attend an educational

³⁶ Skill: National Bureau for Students with Disabilities (2007) *Consultation response to 'Delivering world-class skills in a demand-led system'*

³⁷ Tozer, N (2006) *The Snowdon Survey 2006*

establishment and I am not able to study for the minimum length of time required due to the severity of my condition' (NUS focus group participant, 2008).

Some participants in the focus groups told NUS that they had lost their entitlement to Education Maintenance Allowance because they had been absent from colleges due to their disability.

4.2 Additional learning support

Financial support is available to further education institutions to enable them to purchase Additional Learning Support (ALS) for students who require it. ALS is not exclusively aimed at disabled students; it is intended to help anyone who requires additional learning support (whatever their personal income).

According to the LSC report the total annual spending on ALS in England in 2005/06 was around £350 million. 80 per cent of ALS money is spent on support from teaching staff and 15 per cent on learning assistants. The fact that most of the spending is on teaching staff and learning assistants may imply that it is more difficult to get ALS for things such as equipment.³⁸

Most claims per individual are below £5,500; only 2.3 per cent are over this amount. However, 19 per cent of the total spend is accounted for by claims that are more than £5,500 each.³⁹

There are, in addition to provision in further education, approximately 3,000 placements in specialist colleges, such as National Star College, which caters for learners with physical

³⁸ Fletcher, M, Munoz, S, Faraday, S (2007) *Learning difficulty, disability and additional learning support in further education*. The Learning and Skills Network see <www.lsneducation.org.uk>

³⁹ Ibid

disabilities and associated learning difficulties. Providing support in these institutions is expensive.⁴⁰

There is little provision of ALS in either adult and community learning or work-based learning institutions. The reasons for this are unclear.⁴¹

Individual disabled students in further education have no opportunity to control a budget for the support they need, thus robbing them of choice and responsibility.

4.3 Information, advice and guidance

Our research found that disabled students in further education lack information, advice and guidance about ALS, how it works and how they can get it.

Information, advice and guidance (IAG) about ALS appears to be all over place due to the complex process involved in transition planning between staff in colleges giving IAG and other agencies.⁴² The information about where to get funding for various aspects of their courses is complicated and often very confusing.

Nobody in the focus groups specifically mentioned Additional Learning Support; although a few people did discuss learning support when referring to the support they received from their colleges, they were not aware how it was funded.

NUS posted the question, 'Would DSA or an equivalent be a good system to use in further education?' to the discussion group on BBC

⁴⁰ Ibid

⁴¹ Ibid

⁴² Lewis, A et al, (2007) [*My school, my family, my life: Telling it like it is. A study drawing on the experiences of disabled children, young people and their families in Great Britain in 2006*](#)

Ouch! The responses again showed that while disabled students – like those in the NUS focus groups – were aware of DSA, they had no knowledge of ALS.

'All the benefits you listed might make it possible to both study and, you know, eat. But none of them cover disability-related study costs in the way that DSA does – eg, a note-taker, a BSL interpreter, costly equipment, etc.' (BBC Ouch! member, 2008)

'It's just stupid. If you can get into uni the DSA support is there for you. But how are you supposed to get your A Levels when there's no further education equivalent of DSA?' (BBC Ouch! Member, 2008)

'And with their being no DSA type funding for further education students, it can prevent disabled students from being 'normal', which is just not on.' (BBC Ouch! member, 2008)

As well as being unaware of how to obtain ALS, most disabled students have no idea that colleges apply for ALS from the LSC.

4.4 How ALS fails disabled students

The funding available for further education institutions to support further education students is inadequate.

LSC data about disabled students' participation in further education shows how colleges are, or rather are not, channelling ALS to support disabled students. The information in figures 9 and 10 includes both disabled students *and non-disabled* students who benefit from ALS.

Figure 8 –All students receiving ALS and disabled students in sixth-form colleges (2003/04-2005/06)⁴³

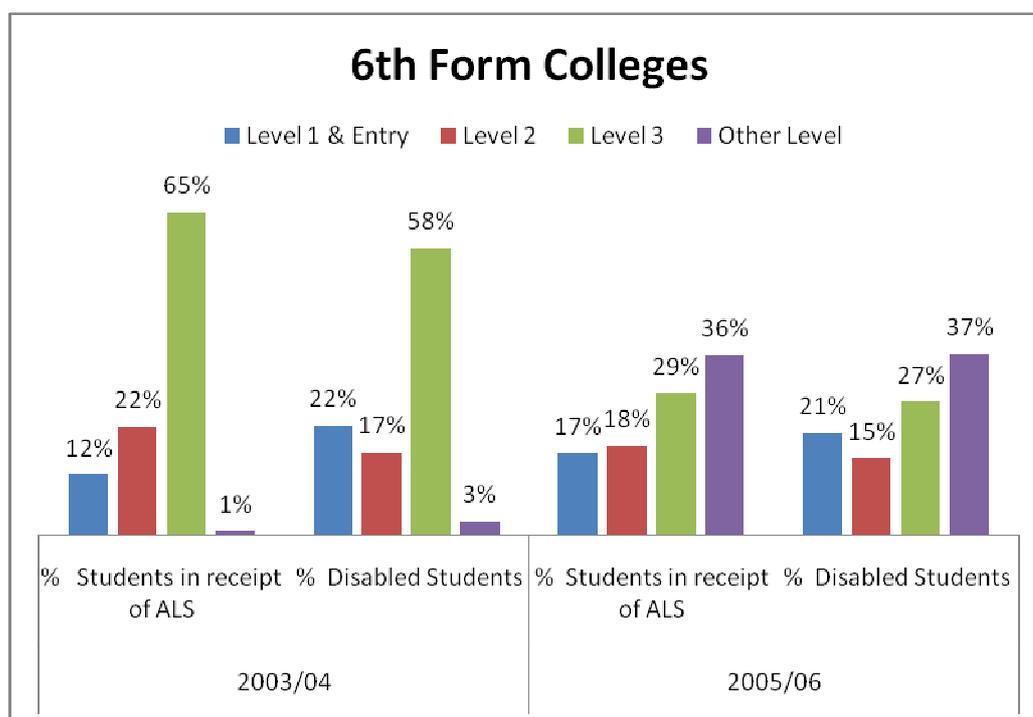


Figure 9 shows the shortfall, especially stark at some levels, between the numbers of disabled students and the distribution of ALS. For example in 2005/06 Level one and entry 4,384 students in sixth-form colleges who are disabled have been identified; however only 2,749 students (and remember these may not all be disabled students) were receiving ALS.⁴⁴

We cannot tell how many of the students who did attract funding were disabled. A lot of people in sixth-form colleges would seem to be missing out because among the 2005/06 figures for disabled students studying at level three in sixth-form colleges we find 5,733

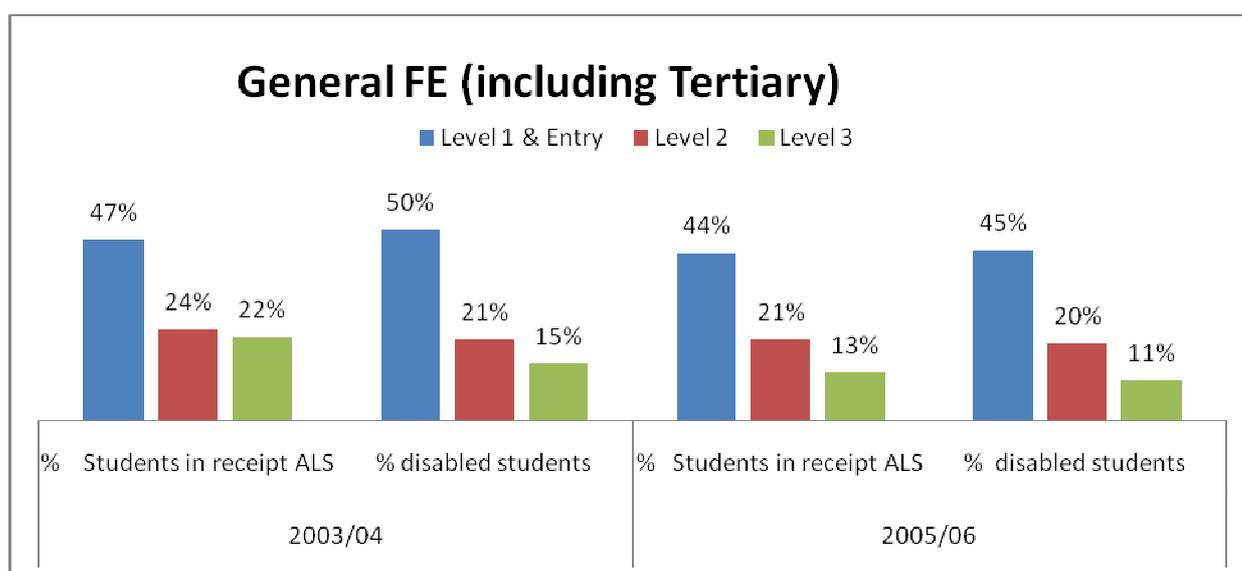
⁴³ Fletcher, M, Munoz, S, Faraday, S (2007) *Learning difficulty, disability and additional learning support in further education*. The Learning and Skills Network see <www.lsneducation.org.uk>

⁴⁴ Ibid

attracting ALS with only 4,757 disabled students identified as studying at this level.⁴⁵

This does not necessarily imply that at level three most disabled students are benefiting from additional funding.

Figure 9 – All students receiving ALS and disabled students in general further education including tertiary (2003/04–2005/06)



The data shows that there were 131,082 disabled students studying level one and entry level in general further education colleges including tertiary in 2005/06 but that the number of further education college students receiving ALS was 82,053.⁴⁶ At least a quarter of the disabled students did not receive support for their courses.

The LSC data on funding does not give a clear picture of where ALS is being spent. It is also being used to support non-disabled students and as can be inferred from Skill's contention that ALS is a private agreement between the funding body and the colleges,

⁴⁵ Ibid

⁴⁶ Ibid

disabled students do not get clear IAG, let alone support, about how ALS might be available to them.⁴⁷

Disabled students would benefit from a more transparent system. Additionally, data to be needs to be collected separately on the funding for disabled and disadvantaged students.

At entry level and level one courses there seems to be a decline in the percentages between 2003/04 to 2005/06. This underlines the findings of Skill's research⁴⁸ in 2004 that showed the importance of funding for disabled students at this level, to ensure they are successful and are given the opportunity to develop their aspirations.

4.5 How ALS can help

Where Additional Learning Support is provided effectively, disabled students achieve at higher than the average levels for this group. Disabled students who do not receive it have results that are below the group average.

A participant in the NUS focus groups stated that the learning support he had received had helped his confidence and had enabled him to pass his course. He used the analogy of a three-legged milking stool, saying that the course was one leg, he was another and learning support was the third; '*Without any one leg*' he said, '*the whole thing would collapse.*'

⁴⁷ Skill: National Bureau for Students with Disabilities (2006) *Further Education: Raising Skills, Improving Life Chances* – a response to the further education White Paper *Further Education: Raising Skills, Improving Life Chances* [DfES (2006)] available at <www.skill.org.uk/uploads/media/Further_Education_White_Paper_Final.doc>

⁴⁸ Ibid

ALS is a crucial resource for disabled students and also allows for the curriculum to be adapted to meet individual needs. It can be shown to be the crucial factor in boosting disabled students to above the overall average.

Skill, when discussing Harrison & Fletcher's research⁴⁹, states: '*In 2002/03, around 89 per cent of [disabled students] who received ALS completed their course, compared to the sector average of 84 per cent (non-disabled learners) and to 82 per cent of [disabled students] who did not receive ALS.*'⁵⁰

In other research (in the LSC review *Through Inclusion to Excellence* [2005]) many students mentioned examples of ALS that had improved their self-esteem and confidence and also enriched their educational experience.

Harrison and Fletcher (2006)⁵¹ found that 82 per cent of disabled students who did not receive ALS did not pass their course. There is not much research in this area and more evidence about this group needs to be gathered in order for their voices to be heard. The importance of this is highlighted in the fact that in the NUS online survey 41 per cent of the respondents said that they needed more support than they had received.

⁴⁹ Harrison and Fletcher (2006) *Additional Learning Support: Monitoring Provision – Results from a Pilot Survey*, LSDA

⁵⁰ Skill: National Bureau for Students with Disabilities (2006) *Further Education: Raising Skills, Improving Life Chances* – a response to the further education White Paper *Further Education: Raising Skills, Improving Life Chances* [DfES (2006)] available at <www.skill.org.uk/uploads/media/Further_Education_White_Paper_Final.doc>

⁵¹ Harrison and Fletcher (2006) *Additional Learning Support: Monitoring Provision – Results from a Pilot Survey*, LSDA

4.6 Administration of ALS

Colleges are responsible for administering ALS and thus can control disabled students' access to certain courses. The colleges apply to LSC for ALS; disabled students are not directly involved in the process of getting the funding and have no influence on how the money is spent. Disabled students tend to assume that the college is administering the funding in the best way possible.

Students in the NUS focus groups who did not know about ALS were very surprised to discover that their colleges could receive funding to provide them with support. While ALS has enabled many colleges overcome the financial restrictions that they face in meeting the learning needs of individual students it would be better if the emphasis was on enabling individual students to overcome barriers and make choices, rather than the college doing it for them.⁵²

One participant in the focus groups felt that deaf people should feel empowered and get any necessary support automatically:

'...if a hearing person books a course then they can begin straight away but if a deaf person books onto a course they have to jump over hurdles to actually participate on that course.' (NUS focus group participant, 2008)

He argued that while the government was right to encourage disabled people to gain a qualification and to go to work the necessary access and support was not there for them: *'...the government needs to sort out the further education system first before it can move on.'*

⁵² Skill: National Bureau for Students with Disabilities (2007) *Consultation response to 'Delivering world-class skills in a demand-led system'*

A study in Scotland in 2002 found that disabled students were often passively accepting of the support they received and did not consider it right to challenge an adult's decision for them.⁵³ A comment from one focus group member exemplifies this lack of choice:

'...at university if you are not happy with the interpreter you are provided [with] then you have a power to change them as you are in control of your DSA. However, in further education the LA [local authority] are in charge of your budget and they say whether you can or cannot change your interpreter. This rule definitely needs to be changed.' (NUS focus group participant, 2008)

A focus group participant who is dyslexic said that his psychology textbooks were very difficult for a dyslexic student to comprehend. When he had had access to an audio textbook he found studying much more manageable, but since he was not registered blind, he was denied this resource. Another student told NUS that the college had denied access to a note-taker, saying that they were only for severely disabled students; the college, once again is the arbiter of the rules for ALS.

Independent research backs up this evidence. In 2002 the study in Scotland found that disabled people were seldom given choices, because either there were only a few available options or others that made decision for them.⁵⁴ Skill pointed out that colleges do not see providing access, ALS and equipment for disabled students as an important issue or priority: *'colleges do not appear to have a*

⁵³ Stalker, K (2002) Young disabled people moving into adulthood in Scotland, York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation

⁵⁴ Ibid

strategic approach to ALS'.⁵⁵ This in itself may create avoidable financial barriers for disabled students.

A focus group participant described the impact of this situation:

'I agree completely ...(about DSA)... I've had to fight for reasonable adjustments, handouts in large print on coloured paper and a large-screen monitor, and am seriously considering quitting because of the way I've been treated and them generally acting as though they know more about my needs than what I or my consultant do.' (NUS focus group participant, 2008)

Under the current system there is a danger that ALS is used for courses and support that the colleges deem appropriate rather than resources that allow individual students to achieve their aspirations in their chosen sphere alongside their non-disabled peers. It is also possible that colleges will divert funding intended for disabled students to assist with basic skills training for other student groups.

4.7 Individual budgets

There is a clear case for making individual budgets available to disabled students in further education and replacing some aspects of ALS.

The LSC is keen to develop a funding stream similar to DSA that it hopes can be established by 2010⁵⁶, giving disabled students in

⁵⁵Skill: National Bureau for Students with Disabilities (2006) *Further Education: Raising Skills, Improving Life Chances* – a response to the further education White Paper *Further Education: Raising Skills, Improving Life Chances* [DfES (2006)] available at www.skill.org.uk/uploads/media/Further_Education_White_Paper_Final.doc

⁵⁶Easter Region LSC (2007) *Making Sense of the Money*: Eastern Region LSC's introduction to the resource allocation system - <http://www.in-control.org.uk/DocumentDownload.axd?documentresourceid=221>

further education control over their budgets and enabling them to purchase their own support. The right to control legislation has completed its passage through the House of Commons. It will go before the House of Lords shortly.⁵⁷ When this package is available it will need careful monitoring to ensure it is enhancing disabled peoples' experience of education. All of these advancements are under the remit of the Strategy Unit, which is committed to developing policy on improving disabled people's life chance by 2025. NUS and other campaigning groups need to ensure they are involved in shaping these and any future policies in order to guarantee that disabled people's voices are heard.

⁵⁶ See Office for Disability Issues (2009) *Right to Control* www.officefordisability.gov.uk/working/right-to-control.php accessed on 1 June

CHAPTER 5

Disabled students' experiences

5.1 Telling it like it is

Why is further education not working for disabled students? To answer this question the NUS held four focus groups to enhance our appreciation of disabled students' experiences in further education. We also collected comments from our online survey, such as this:

“Further education didn't work out for me. They just wanted to shove me on a computer course because it was easier. I spent about three months or so fighting with the board of education to do a special effects make-up course. So I'm quite unimpressed with the whole thing, and sadly it has never made me want to further my education so I got bored and tired of having to fight for my right to do courses I wanted to do.” (BBC Ouch! member, November 2008)

Research has identified various reasons for the underrepresentation of disabled students in further education, such as:

- inadequate access to buildings, equipment, and information
- lack of information from schools relating to transition
- lack of coordinated support at the crucial stage in school
- lower qualifications at ages 16–19
- reduced range of options
- inadequate provision (financial, personal and procedural)
- negative attitudes of some academic staff.

The NUS online survey found that for 44 per cent of respondents the transition to further education had not been smooth and 58 per cent did not start their course straight after school.

Furthermore, 29 per cent indicated that they had dropped out of further education and identified the reasons as follows:

- access
- learning
- IAG
- travel
- attitudes
- money
- others

The NUS focus groups highlighted key issues that affected the participants' continuation in the education system, showing that a disabled person's learning experience can be affected by barriers that have nothing to do with the quality of the courses themselves.

5.2 Disabled students' aspirations

NUS focus group participants were asked what 'aspiration' conveyed to them. Many saw their aspirations as being more about achieving a sense of belonging than as hopes for the future. Others felt that aspirations were what they wanted for their future. A wide range of aspirations emerged:

'want to gain further qualifications ... to become a freelance adviser on access issues'

'want to see the public transport in the area is accessible to wheelchair users... travel and tourism'

'to find my voice.... will not settle for a "token job"'

'want to raise awareness about disabilities'

'would like disabled people to be more involved in matters alongside non-disabled people'

'would like non-disabled to have more information about disabled people so they are not excluded...non-disabled people should be educated and made more aware'

A student on a level one course described another disabled student:

'I know of a girl who was in a wheelchair but wanted to become a ballerina and she achieved it ... you cannot stop people's dreams. If you feel strongly enough about your dreams then you can achieve them.'

Students on level one and entry level courses had much lower aspirations compared with those studying level three courses. Students on level three courses are on the threshold of gaining entrance to university whereas those studying at level one may feel studying at degree level is a remote possibility for them.

Almost four out of ten (39 per cent) of the disabled students who responded to the NUS online survey were worried about moving on:

'Not a clue what to do with myself after university'

'...the pressure involved'

'...because of my disability, I have a stammer. I doubt people want to employ me'

'I feel as though I sometimes lack the confidence and drive to further and better myself'

Some focus participants recognised that there were barriers to them achieving their aspirations:

'...want to become a computer system builder. After the foundation course I will seek advice on where to go next.....there will be barriers but I will advance through them.'

'...aspire to do creative writing at university. I recognise there will be barriers and I will deal with them as they arrive.'

'[In] a perfect world there would be no disability'

'I would advise people to break down the barriers and work hard'.

5.3 Raising aspirations: how colleges can help

The Strategy Unit's reforms need to be carefully monitored to ensure that they are enhancing the experiences of disabled students and also to assess how far they succeed in putting in place a holistic approach to access.

Participants in NUS focus groups, nevertheless expressed concern about the spin-offs from too much reliance on government targets at the expense of listening to what disabled students are saying they need:

'Statistics are more important than people ... people are being pushed into courses for statistical reasons, rather than for their benefit.'

'Students are considered as large groups, not individuals...the system sidelines students who are likely to fail, so as not affect the statistics.'

'A focus on statistics actually creates failures and stops people reaching their potential.'

Several participants said that colleges should take a holistic approach to eradicating barriers to participation rather than addressing individual matters as and when they arise. They believed that such an approach to tackling access issues would also benefit students' sense of worth and their ability to develop higher aspirations; constant personal struggles to overcome barriers are demoralising.

One NUS online survey participant described access to his college building:

'... fire doors too heavy to open – windows on doors too high to see through from wheelchair – automatic buttons for door opening positioned at top of slope – inaccessible classrooms – accessible toilets not big enough – lifts too small – doorways too narrow.'

Physical inaccessibility is only one of the barriers for disabled students, as another participant observed:

'...if a hearing person books a course, they can begin straight away but if a deaf person books, they then have to jump through hoops to actually participate on that course.'

Points raised in the focus groups are in line with the research evidence about disabled students and further education. The LSC report confirms its commitment to improving the quality of provision for disabled students by focusing on the areas of disengagement, underachievement and low post-16 participation.

Policymakers need to keep a focus on ensuring that disabled people:

*'...enjoy the same choices, freedom, dignity, control and ... opportunities as non-disabled people at home, at work, in education and as members of the community.'*⁵⁸

Relevant to achieving a holistic approach is the LSC's recognition that they need to offer disabled students positive outcomes and appropriate pathways to progression in order to allow disabled students' aspiration-raising activities within further education colleges.

5.4 Identifying disability

The focus groups showed that diagnosis and identification of disability at college is important in fostering self-esteem and students' aspirations are inextricably linked to their self-confidence. Participants of the focus groups expressed a feeling of being empowered by disclosure, fighting for accessibility and reskilling.

Pride in disclosure?

Most participants in NUS focus groups, however, said they had been worried about their personal identity when they were first identified as disabled:

'It took me a long time to get my diagnosis and it explains a lot to me about who I am'

'...because [my diagnosis] is part of who I am'

'...struggling to get a diagnosis for my disability, which makes it very difficult to disclose'

Research published in 2006 confirms that this is an area of anxiety: whereas some disabled students felt they had a strong identity and

⁵⁸ Clements L (2007) *The need for new legislation*. A briefing paper, available at www.lukeclements.co.uk/downloads/PDF_Sep08_04.pdf

were empowered by disclosure, there were also those for whom the idea of being thought of as disabled was anathema and hence the means for ensuring access became more complicated and precarious.⁵⁹ In NUS online survey 28 per cent of respondents reported having a sense of pride about being disabled and some of focus group participants used the term 'pride' about themselves.

Some NUS survey respondents disagreed about 'pride':

'Pride is not the right word, but I do have a sense of belonging to a wider community, we are all in the same boat.'

This sense of belonging is all the more significant because:

*'We [disabled people] receive so many messages from the non-disabled world that we are not wanted, that we are considered less than human.'*⁶⁰

Disabled people have to challenge these negative messages, as a focus group participant reported: *'People said I could not go to university but I proved them wrong'*.

Students given a late or wrong identification of disability may well benefit from the Select Committee's report, *Re-skilling for recovery*.⁶¹ This is especially pertinent to dyslexic students who were failed by the school system. Some participants in NUS focus

⁵⁹ Lewis, A et al, (2007) [*My school, my family, my life: Telling it like it is. A study drawing on the experiences of disabled children, young people and their families in Great Britain in 2006*](#)

⁶⁰ French, S (1994) *On equal terms: working with disabled people* London: Butterworth Heinemann

⁶¹ House of Commons Innovation, Universities, Science and Skills Committee (2009) *Re-skilling for recovery: After Leitch, implementing skills and training policies* HC 48-I First Report of Session 2008–09 Volume I: Report, Together with Formal Minutes.

groups had been treated as 'thick' and several of them had been bullied, unable to challenge the taunt until they were diagnosed as dyslexic.

Armed eventually with an identification of disability an NUS focus group participant said:

'At last I could let go of the "thick" label. I have now done two-and-a-half years of my four-year course and have achieved two qualifications in counselling along the way. When I started the course I said I would quit when I reached the first essay. But before that point, I became diagnosed as dyslexic.'

At school the teachers had perceived this student as a no-hoper academically; he learnt to conceal his problems, and was therefore unprepared for the real world. He said that when he was 'thick' he would hide it, now he is 'dyslexic' he has something to work with. Instead of stepping out of education he could now work to achieve his ambitions.

Another focus group participant, whose late identification of disability had also transformed her outlook, observed that it is essential that *'...dyslexia is picked up at an early stage in schools, so the appropriate support can be given to the students at the correct time. This will help them to build up their confidence.'*

Research confirms these experiences: one study found that the late identification of dyslexia in over 50 per cent of the disabled students had led to bullying and negative labelling. Students subjected to this felt that they lacked the ability to pursue any form of further education.⁶²

⁶² Metcalf, H (2005) 'Paying for university: The impact of increasing costs on student employment, debt and satisfaction', *National Institute Economic Review*, no 191

The Select Committee's report calls for reskilling, rather than upskilling, and this idea is gaining favour for people who receive a late identification of disability; government targets and allocation of resources must reflect this change. (see Leitch and After Leitch section of chapter 1). Students who failed courses due to inadequate support may be able to apply for funding to retake courses, a tremendous help to people who are given a late identification and want to 'have another go'.

A participant in the NUS focus groups wanted to repeat courses, following a late diagnosis of dyslexia:

'After my diagnosis I believed that I could have done better at a business course. I am thinking about repeating my GCSEs. I received no help until the end of my GCSE course'.

Many of the disabled students who helped with this research reported feeling a strong sense of identity after identification of disability and more self-confidence.

5.5 Participants studying level one and entry level courses

The largest group of disabled students in further education are taking courses at level one and entry level. Several focus group participants studying such courses said that their 'aspiration' was to stay at their colleges where they were happy. This wish seemed to arise from a sense of belonging and in feeling comfortable. This reflects a lack of aspirations and suggests there is a block to thinking beyond. Fear of leaving their college could be a factor which limits their aspirations, or:

- having been bullied at mainstream schools

- wanting to stay where they feel safe
- worry about practical arrangements such as travel and accommodation, which are more difficult to alter for disabled students
- recognition of the barriers that they will encounter on their path through education.

Some focus group participants studying at level one and below said:

'I would probably like to participate in more work experience, so it would give me of an idea of what the working world was like'

'My work experience was coming to an end and I would like more opportunity to carry on work experience as I have really enjoyed it'

'I really like college and would not change anything. I like the gym.'

The last comment came from a participant who, asked if he would ever leave college, replied: *'I would do eventually when I am fed up'*.

Possibly the students truly want nothing beyond being happy with what they know. Some of them showed determination to be successful in their studies and were proud of their achievements.

One participant in NUS focus groups was on a life skills course, designed to prepare her for working life, but wanted to get better results in order to move onto a fashion course and her 'dream job'. She was aware of possible barriers ahead: *'Fashion and design courses are not available for me to do.'*

The revolving door

Many of the students did not seem to be looking to the future and were not keen to leave college. In 2007 Gareth Parry, Remploi's Head of Learning, observed that:

*'It is not uncommon for disabled learners to drift into the further education system, generally in mainstream colleges, and stay there for 5, 10 or even 20 years ... Most are not moving on to higher level learning year on year, and in some cases learners have even repeated courses.'*⁶³

NUS research found that most of focus group participants studying at level one and lower lacked confidence about leaving college or being independent. Worries about making new arrangements for travel and housing sometimes cause them to repeat courses and the DRC has called for action to prevent such students getting stuck in a 'revolving door', dependent on a life in further education while gaining few qualifications and living on benefits.

NUS focus group participants said:

'I do not want to move as I like where I live'

'I could not move because I am in care. I am not able to transfer care as there was no home care in Doncaster'

'I would like to move but feel I would not get the support that my mum and dad give me anywhere else'

'I could not cope on my own as I am not good at handling money'
(Student was on a life skills course)

'I wanted to stay with my mum until I am 25–26. I hope she would teach me to become more independent.'

⁶³ Remploy (2007) *Skills envoy Sir Digby Jones urges further education colleges to equip disabled students for the job*. Press release, Remploy, 30 May.

Colleges can be seen to inadvertently encourage the 'revolving door' scenario, taking on a 'social care' role rather than encouraging students to move up to higher levels of education or employment.⁶⁴

The risk of being bullied

Many of the focus group participants' fears about leaving college stemmed from previous experience of bullying:

'I was bullied through school and in the end my mother had to come into the school to sort it out.'

'[At school] I was bullied and felt stereotyped. I had objects thrown at me and my books were ripped up...I believe that people in the college expected me to be able to do tasks and achieve grades but people in my old school did not expect this from me.'

The comment above stresses the college's positive attitude towards the student.

When away from the environment in which they were bullied the students' confidence grew, but they did not want to risk it happening again.

While many disabled students studying courses at entry level and level one appreciate their learning and involvement in colleges and some have ambitions to move on with their studies, others were happy repeating the same level of course. Being at college may allow some people to develop socially and NUS believes that learning for learning's sake is a valid activity; it also wants to ensure, however, that that staying in college should be a positive

⁶⁴ Prime Minister's Strategy Unit, (2005) *Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People: Final report*, London: Cabinet Office

choice and that all students should get support to progress where this is right for them.

5.6 Participants studying level two/three courses

While some students on level two and three courses in our research had only low-level aspirations (other research confirms that this is prevalent among disabled students) others had high ambitions.

Some, however, had faced many obstacles to their continued development often making them feel isolated and powerless. These barriers included:

- difficulties in obtaining financial support
- access to further courses being controlled by the professionals around them
- prejudice and negative attitudes of staff
- a lack of well coordinated IAG
- a lack of positive role models in further education.

Several participants in NUS focus groups were determined to become involved in ensuring that future generations did not have to undergo the same negative experiences. Their aspirations have been shaped by the oppression they have had to live through.

The NUS online survey found that 84 per cent of respondents hoped to move on to higher education; 49 per cent of these students were on level three courses, 21 per cent were on level two courses, 2 per cent were on level one courses, 3.2 per cent were not in education and the rest were already undertaking higher education.

Financial support

Many disabled students suffer financial hardship: *'access is not properly funded'* and *'there is no adequate funding for equipment for PAs or travel'*. Funding problems meant for one student that finishing his studies required not only several extra years, but also applying to a charity for essential equipment.

Access to further courses blocked

In the NUS online survey 30 per cent of respondents said that they were on a course that had been selected for them by someone else. This situation is backed up by the National Bureau for Students with Disabilities (Skill), which has voiced concern that disabled students are *'being discouraged from making choices based on their preferences and encouraged to make [ones linked] to where learning will be quickest, easiest and cheapest.'*⁶⁵

In the NUS focus groups most of the participants had been denied access to their first preference of course. One had been denied access to a level three course in travel and tourism – after completing the level 2 – for funding reasons, and is now doing music level 3. He was not interested in music; his ambition to get qualifications to work in the travel and tourism industry has been thwarted.

The experience of being unable to do the courses that they would have chosen was widespread and is totally consistent with independent research⁶⁶, which found that disabled students' voices

⁶⁵ Skill: National Bureau for Students with Disabilities (2007) *Consultation response to 'Delivering world-class skills in a demand-led system'*

⁶⁶ Dee, L (2006) *Improving transition planning for young people with special educational needs*, Open University Press

and their choices about their futures are overruled by the non-disabled people involved in the process.⁶⁷

Several students reported feelings of isolation that created further barriers for them. One potential student wanted to move on but felt isolated and could see: *'my aspiration vanishing into thin air'*. He wanted to take a legal course to help him to take part in a campaign for the rights of Deaf people. Because he felt that most university legal courses would be too advanced for him, he had enrolled on a course in basic legal skills; The college refused to employ an interpreter to translate the course, so he was excluded from it:

'I felt trapped and had nowhere to go. I was put off the course and found it very hard to explain this to someone who did not understand the situation. This occurred two weeks ago and at the moment I do not know how to proceed. I feel like it is a waste of time and no one will listen to me.' (NUS focus group participant, 2008)

He believed he had a legal right to challenge the institution's decision but did not feel able to do this without support.

Another participant said

'Great promises are held out about opportunity and access, then not fulfilled....this is playing with people's emotions and aspirations.' (NUS focus group participant, 2008)

These experiences show how far policies concerning disabled students in further education have to go. Information on legislation such as the DDA is now widely available. Academic professionals

⁶⁷ Anderson, V, et al (2003) *Count me in FE* London: Learning and Skills Development Agency

and others should know by now what sort of behaviour is discriminatory and it should be unacceptable for them to claim that they 'didn't know their responsibilities'.

Prejudice and negative staff attitudes

In the NUS online survey 82 per cent of respondents claimed that support from their tutors enabled them to progress successfully in their studies and 62 per cent reported having raised difficulties with staff. Positive staff attitudes make a difference.

In NUS focus groups participants identified prejudice as one of the biggest barriers that affects students' aspiration. This theme was also identified in a recent poll:

*'...the majority of people (75 per cent) felt there was prejudice against disabled people in Britain today.'*⁶⁸

Focus group participants had been the subject of prejudice:

'It was not until I repeated the course that I was provided with the assistance I needed. I was never included as part of the IEP [Individual Education Plans] and IBP [Individual Budget Plans] meetings... my needs were not understood fully which meant that I was treated as an "unteachable" and "naughty" rather than a person with complex needs and disabilities.' (NUS survey participant, 2009)

'I wasn't wanted in my school as they didn't think I was safe.' (NUS survey participant, 2009)

'I was ill and then I wasn't allowed back.' (NUS survey participant, 2009)

⁶⁸ Rigg, J (2007) 'Disabling attitudes? Public perspectives on disabled people' in Park, A, Curtice, J (eds) *British Social Attitudes: the 23rd Report – Perspectives on a changing society*, Sage for NatCen

Disabled students' learning experience is affected by unhelpful or hostile staff attitudes.

'I was told that further education was not suitable to my complex needs and therefore was not provided with the information that I desired to access further education.' (NUS survey participant, 2008)

In independent research disabled people were often found to have little choice either because there were few available options or because others made decisions for them.⁶⁹ As one focus group participant had found:

'Teachers in further education told me that "You will not pass this course" so I transferred.' (NUS survey participant, 2008)

However, it appeared from the focus groups that often students were passively accepting of the support they received and did not consider it right, or were unable, to challenge a staff's decision for them.

A participant in NUS focus groups said that had been told at the job centre that he was virtually unemployable, an assessment he entirely disagreed with. This experience left him furious, as he believed it was not the right of a non-disabled person to tell him what he could and could not do. He had also had a problem gaining access to further education because of what he felt was the career adviser's attitude towards him. 'Paperwork' experts, he said, did not understand the needs of disabled people and their attitudes had left him lacking in formal qualifications. He wanted to take part in campaigning for the rights of disabled students because of the way his own aspirations had been frustrated.

⁶⁹ Stalker, K (2002) *Young disabled people moving into adulthood in Scotland*, York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation

Focus group participants said they experienced social barriers:

'People do not understand my disability issues and being comfortable around me.' (NUS focus group participant, 2008)

'At further education the staff didn't understand my needs and considered me a "trouble maker" rather than a person who needed additional support.' (NUS survey participant, 2009)

Disabled students in the focus groups could see positive solutions to remove prejudice:

'Prejudice is just a fear of the unknown. It's all about integrating people. Everyone has a sense of humour.' (NUS focus group participant, 2008)

In the NUS online survey 80 per cent of respondents believed interaction with non-disabled peers at college would help them achieve their study goals. However, almost two-thirds (59 per cent) did not feel it was easy for them to get involved in all aspects of college life.

Positive role models

In the NUS online survey more than nine out of ten (91 per cent) of respondents thought that having disabled people as role models was important. One participant in NUS focus groups described how passing a management course, attaining his aspirations, gave him a confidence to challenge what had happened to him; he became more politically active and now sees himself as a role model for other disabled students:

'I found my voice. I see it as my role to speak up for those less able to. I was able to speak for those less able... got my fight back and have become more political' (NUS focus group participant, 2008).

Another participant said:

'I have proved a number of points since first studying law some five years ago. This has put me in good stead for life' (NUS survey participant, 2009).

Another said:

'I became disabled student representative within student union hoping to be able to make some changes' (NUS survey participant, 2009).

By achieving their own aspirations disabled people can become positive role models for the next generation of students. Hence the importance of NUS involving more disabled students in future campaigns to remove the barriers to participation in further education. This will help disabled students challenge prejudice and so raise aspirations.

There is widespread evidence that: *'it is clear that supportive and understanding attitudes towards disability are still patchy and unpredictable.'*⁷⁰ While disabled students want to achieve high their ambitions are often barred by non-disabled adults' stigmatising attitudes towards disability.

While successful role models have a part to play in inspiring disabled students, the NUS has reservations about this. The concept of promoting role models is patronising; it encourages professionals who work with disabled people to rely on the medical model of disability. What needs to be acknowledged is that disabled students face a wide variety of barriers, which for individual students often translate into low aspirations.

⁷⁰ Lewis, A, et al (2007) [*My school, my family, my life: Telling it like it is. A study drawing on the experiences of disabled children, young people and their families in Great Britain in 2006.*](#) London: Disability Rights Commission/Birmingham: University of Birmingham, School of Education: p 187

If information advice and guidance was firmly imbued with the perspective of the social model of disability this would remove many of the hurdles with which disabled students are presented and would allow them to develop unhindered. NUS believes IAG is crucial; disabled students cannot say what they want to do in three years time if they do not know the options.

Students on level two/three courses have often had to fight to get to where they are and often their aspirations are shaped by this struggle. Non-disabled people do not share the same experiences and do not have the same limitations placed on them. Hence aspirations may be developed from the experience of oppression rather than the desire for future prosperity.

5.7 Information, advice and guidance

NUS believes the provision of clear information, advice and guidance (IAG) is important in order to remove barriers to education for disabled students and allow them to use the social model of disability and develop their aspirations on a par with non-disabled people.

Negative attitudes can affect IAG:

'When I left school, the careers adviser said I was too "thick" to pursue my ambition of being a mechanic. Instead I was told I would have to sweep floors. So I did, until eventually I did some literacy and numeracy courses. I learned to read and write, working my way up to a managerial role in Boots.' (NUS focus group participant, 2008)

Having been made redundant this student was revisiting education:

'An adviser at Mencap suggested I explored counselling. Despite having never previously considered the subject, I became hooked.'

Through positive guidance the prejudice recedes and is replaced by positive influences that help people aspire to greater things. This is also shown in the findings of an, as yet, unpublished report, *Aspiration – 'the role of chance'*⁷¹ about how disabled people can gain more by revisiting education.

NUS online survey confirms that 58 per cent of the respondents did not start their course straight after school. The transition experience of disabled students is important area for our attention, given that the low take-up of higher education places speaks to a lack of widespread participation in further education. Several research projects⁷² have discovered inadequate (IAG) throughout further education. At best it is patchy and almost certainly insufficient to meet the needs of disabled students.

In 2006, in order to address this problem the DfES called for a consultation on IAG issues in order to glean views on how schools and colleges can provide '*excellent and impartial*' advice and to develop '*rigorous quality standards and measures of post-16 progression*'.⁷³

⁷¹ Pennington, A., Maudslay, I., Waters, B. '*The aspirations of learners with learning difficulties and disabilities*' (unpublished research) commissioned by the Learning and Skills Development Agency (now the Learning and Skills Network).

⁷² Lewis, A et al (2007) [*My school, my family, my life: Telling it like it is. A study drawing on the experiences of disabled children, young people and their families in Great Britain in 2006.*](#)

⁷³ Department for Education and Skills (2006) *Youth Matters: Next Steps Something to do, somewhere to go, someone to talk to* London: DfES

Appendix 1

How the report was produced

Literature review

The existing literature was analysed, including:

- research conducted by disability organisations, government departments and academics on aspects of disabled students' participation in further education
- government and sector policy concerning disabled students in further education.

Statistics have been taken from three main sources: Office for National Statistics (ONS) – Labour Force Survey, 2006; The Snowdon Award Scheme (2006); and Learning and Skills Council (2002/03–2005/06)

Each has defined disability differently, which affects the interpretation of their results. ONS' definition of disability includes dyslexia, dyscalculia and those with learning difficulties, whereas LSC's definition separates these groups. Research by HESA⁷⁴ identifies disabled students by counting those claiming Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) or those identifying as disabled on their UCAS application form.

Whereas there is much useful information that may be gleaned from these figures, the different definitions and collection methods suggest a need for a more cohesive approach across government departments and agencies.

⁷⁴ HESA, 2007 *Improving the experience of disabled students in higher education* - www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/York/documents/ourwork/research/jacklin.pdf

Analysis of statistics

Data was collected from three main sources:

Office of National Statistics (ONS)

The ONS Labour Force Survey 2006 raw data on the whole population in Britain was filtered to obtain information on disabled/non-disabled people in the 16–24 age range. It was analysed in relation to numbers of disabled people and the level of their highest qualification. Information about the relative situations of non-disabled and disabled people were examined to obtain figures for people who are described as not in education, employment and training (NEET).

Learning and Skills Council (LSC)

Information from the LSC (2001/02-2005/06) about the further education disabled students' participation in colleges (England and Wales) and on the general student population (that is, not broken down to give separate figures for disabled students) was examined.

The Snowdon Award Scheme

The report draws on figures from the Snowdon Award Scheme about disabled people who applied to them for grants in the three years to 2006.

Fieldwork

Personal quotes in the report come from focus groups and interviews, as well as quotes from NUS online survey and the website BBC Ouch! (see below).

NUS held four focus groups (two in London and two in Nottinghamshire) and five one-to-one interviews throughout November and December 2008. In total, 40 participants were

involved in the groups/interviews. All focus groups and interviews were facilitated by one NUS researcher and a note-taker who recorded information.

Discussions at the focus groups/interviews were analysed thematically and responses to the NUS online survey (see below) were then compared with the findings from the focus groups/interviews.

Other strategies for collecting the views of disabled students included noting comments made by:

Online discussion forum – November 2008 – NUS put information onto the website *BBC Ouch!*

Respondents to the NUS online survey for disabled people between December 2008 and March 2009

NUS online survey

There were 382 disabled people who responded to the NUS online survey; 53 per cent (204) completed all questions. With this relatively low response rate findings cannot be said to be nationally representative. Individual quotes, however, have been used in the report to illustrate the disabled students' experiences.

Of the 382 survey respondents 62 per cent were 16–25 years old and 85 per cent were attending college at the time they completed the questionnaire. Most respondents said that they were studying at levels two and three.

The information from the statistics was then compared with information gathered in different ways, helping to identify barriers to disabled students' participation in further education.

Focus group analysis

Discussions at the focus groups/interviews have been analysed thematically. During this process the following themes emerged:

- the range of disabled students' aspirations
- holistic approach to access and its effect on aspiration
- the importance of identification of disability in promoting confidence
- aspirations of participants studying at level one and below
- aspirations of participants studying on level two/three courses

Responses to NUS online survey were then compared with the findings from the focus groups/interviews.

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The full report and executive summary can be downloaded from the NUS website at

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