

Chapter in Transforming Higher Education Through Universal Design For Learning

Chapter 2: From national policy to university practice

Developing an inclusive learning environment within and beyond the United Kingdom

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Case Study

Sam studied three subjects for her A-level examinations (these are national examinations at the end of the secondary level/high school in the UK) and, because she had diagnosed specific learning difficulties, she had received some additional support. This support was in the form of a group teaching assistant supplied by her school. When she applied to university, she disclosed this learning difficulty but when she arrived at University to study for a BA (Hons) Business Studies degree, a disability coordinator explained to her that the support she had received at school was not available in higher education.

Sam was taught in a lecture with 200 other students and was in a seminar group with 20 others. She found it difficult to keep up in the lectures as she took longer to take notes as a result of her disability. Sam was a quiet student and found engaging in discussion in the seminar group difficult and took longer to make friends than some of her peers. So, unlike at school, she did not have people to talk to about her work.

Sam had to buy extra software for her laptop and, when she could not keep up in classes, she had to borrow notes from her classmates. She was however given additional time in her exams. Sam found university to be a real struggle but she was determined to succeed.

Sam found the assessment tasks that students were given confusing, as she had not had to do anything like this before.

Sam was wondering whether she belonged in higher education.

This is a real example of how a student felt about their life at university. Sam had received comprehensive information in the induction process and she had a personal tutor, but she was struggling to adapt. This case study could be in many universities in the UK and demonstrates the need to address not only the individual student, but the policy environment for supporting all students.

Introduction

This chapter seeks to explain how universities have changed, the need to continue that process of evolution towards a more student-centered environment and how the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) can be used to create a more inclusive learning environment, in which everyone is supported to achieve.

Such an environment would not only support Sam, but would enhance the experience for all students. The detailed explanation of UDL is found elsewhere in this book; this chapter focuses on how universities are beginning to adapt to provide UDL in a seamless and applicable way to all students and learning situations. They are not there yet, but we need to understand how much they have changed and how much more change is needed to achieve greater inclusivity.

Universities and higher education (HE) have developed over the years in respect of their role, purpose and function. Within the UK, these developments have been driven by a combination of national policy drives but, more importantly, by the response of universities to different economic and social environments. This chapter looks briefly at: how universities have changed; the impact of those changes on disabled students; and the issues that have emerged in respect of differential outcomes for students. It then considers how the agenda has moved to one of greater inclusivity, incorporating some of the key aspects of UDL.

Throughout their history, universities have been perceived as the bastions of the establishment and the elite. The challenge has always been to make them more accessible and today's challenges simply move the debate forward. Higher education has responded by demonstrating a significant capacity to be able to develop and to cater for an increasingly diverse group of students. The opportunity to embed a more inclusive approach to education is one that needs to be taken.

The concept of a university has its roots in medieval times with the development of universities in Morocco and Bologna. Of course invention, discovery and the pursuit of knowledge began well before then and did not require universities as we know them today. Socrates, Aristotle and Plato did not require universities and their facilities in order to develop their philosophies. In the UK, an early university developed through an ecclesiastical route in Durham, with the Venerable Bede (672-735) being key to the later development of the University of Durham. It was in this era that we saw the development of "seats of learning" based around the concept of a community of scholars. These were the early universities focused on the pursuit of knowledge and the sharing of that knowledge. It was not about the modern form of Credentialism, which is where a student is simply concerned with gaining the qualification as a means of moving a career forward. Here the key outcome is simply the achievement of the qualification and not the desire to learn, or the discovery of a subject and the pursuit of ideas. The next phase of development came in the mid-nineteenth century with Cardinal Newman and the view that the model of a university was essentially about broadening the mind and preparing people for the future. The Industrial Revolution highlighted the need for a more highly skilled workforce and the establishment of universities in the industrial towns and cities, focusing on a more utilitarian approach with the needs of the local economy in mind; for example, Sheffield with metallurgy, Leeds with textiles.

It is important to understand the history of higher education to both appreciate the challenges it has faced and the changes it has been through. These have created the opportunity to drive forward inclusive learning and UDL. Universities are now more open and receptive to developing their curricula and pedagogy in order to improve the experience and outcomes for all of their students. Such openness to change is critical to the case made in later chapters for the need to adopt UDL.

The Background to Change

The change that I focus on in this chapter is from the idea of a university as a "seat of learning" and "community of scholars" with a focus on the development of knowledge of the subject, to one whereby they focus on student learning, student experience and qualifications. This has been a rapid and significant period of change. Within the UK, the catalyst for this change was the Robbins report in 1963, which stated that "university places should be available to all who were qualified by ability and attainment" (Robbins, 1963). Robbins though was addressing the issue of who should be able to participate through the expansion

of existing access, whereby the step change could only occur with the development of new provision and, whilst the Robbins philosophy created the culture for the expansion of higher education from 4% of the age group in 1962, it was through Wilson's "White Heat of Technology" (Wilson, 1963), Crosland's development of Polytechnics (Crosland, 1966), Blair's mantra of "education, education, education" (Blair, 1996) and the continuing development of new universities and other HEIs that has led to a participation rate of approximately 43% within the UK today (Willetts, 2013).

Within this shift was the gradual process of the massification of higher education, as explored by Martin Trow (Trow, 1989). Trow developed an analysis of the growth in HEIs relating to social purpose. He referred to three stages of massification, in which he defined the stages of moving to mass higher education as starting at an "Elite" level in which up to 15% of the age group engage in higher education, as a system developed for what Trow refers to as the "ruling class", to prepare them for elite roles.

As the participation level increases, then we move to a "Mass" system in which we see HEIs looking more at skill development and the preparation for a broader range of technical and economic elite roles, with participation rising towards 50%. After that, Trow states, comes the "Universal" system, which enables society to adapt to rapid social and technological change.

The approach to massification in the UK, and many other countries, came without major and strategic investment but through a process of both incremental and significant growth happening without the planned changes needed in student support and pedagogical approaches. At the same time, there was the desire to ensure greater social mobility through access to higher education. In Australia, this was to be found in "Fair Chance for All" (Department of Employment, Education and Training, 1990), in the USA through affirmative action, in South Africa through free tuition and in the UK through widening participation. Interestingly, both in Australia and the UK, the initiatives had a focus on increasing participation in HE of disabled students. The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) funded its first set of disability initiatives in 1993/94 (Higher Education Funding Council for England, 1995).

Now the crucial aspect of Trow's analysis is how the universities responded to such expansion. Simply fitting in more students to the same pedagogical and support model provides not a mass approach but "crowded" higher education as the learning and teaching approach was designed for a smaller and more homogenous group. This means that universities needed to fundamentally address how they shift their curriculum approach. HEFCE sought to catalyze change through a focus on enabling and empowering developments in pedagogical approaches and student support, in order to enable universities to become more student focused and to open up the curriculum.

Initially, HEFCE funded a range of projects focusing on developing learning and teaching, enabling disabled students and widening participation. There was a focus on seeking to establish innovative practice. Then, in 2001, HEFCE addressed the bigger issue of seeking to encourage universities to develop a holistic approach to widening participation, disability, and learning and teaching, by requiring comprehensive institutional strategies that linked these key issues together for effective enhancement, as shown in Figure 2.1.

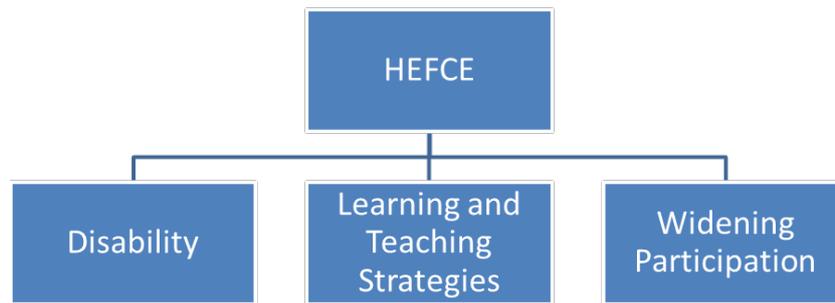


Figure 2.1 A holistic approach to widening participation

This has been built on by the National Strategy for Access and Student Success, published by the government in 2014, ‘Working in Partnership: Enabling Social Mobility in Higher Education’, the final report of the Social Mobility Advisory Group published in 2016 and the more recent Access and Participation Plan Guidance from the Office for Students (OfS) published in 2018.

Such change takes time and universities are still working towards this goal, but progress has been significant. For example, there has been notable investment by HEFCE and this sparked a curriculum revolution involving a range of agencies and culminating in Centers for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETLs), with a £315 million investment from HEFCE between 2005-06 and 2009-10. Alongside this was further major investment in higher education by HEFCE to enhance both access and participation through what became the Student Opportunity Fund which, at its peak, led to £380m (GBP) per annum supporting this part of the HE mission (Higher Education Funding Council for England, 2017).

Reflection

- How has the evolution of HE led to opportunities for pedagogical developments and innovation?
- How would you suggest that regulators better provide for positive change in terms of widening participation in your national or university context?
- What might the next phase of development for HE look like when considering current global challenges?

It is important to note how relatively quickly this shift to a focus on the student has taken place, given that the concept of the university is 1,100 years old, but the drive for change only started in 1963 at a relatively pedestrian rate. However, the drive to enhance the student experience has been quicker and it is now at the heart of the Higher Education and Research Act 2017, which established the Office for Students.

As universities began to consider the impact of mass higher education and widening access, there was a plethora of national developments seeking to develop appropriate responses. HEFCE, alongside the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) in Northern Ireland, funded significant developments in pedagogy through the Fund for the Development of Teaching and Learning (FDTL), which was established in 1995. This was followed by the Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund (TQEF), which was initiated in 1999

and which subsumed the FDTL and established the Learning and Teaching Support Network and it included the ground-breaking recognition that universities require Learning and Teaching Strategies and that these should be inextricably linked with strategies for Widening Participation (Higher Education Funding Council for England, 2001b). Currently, a key driver has been the National Student Survey (NSS), which is an independent survey of all final year undergraduate students in the UK and was introduced in 2005, with a 70% participation rate amongst students giving clear feedback over a sustained period of time. This has helped inform the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), which is a national mechanism that rates universities against a mix of formulaic proxy metrics and which also considers contextual factors that influence student learning experiences and outcomes.

Students with disabilities

When we look at how disabled students have been supported in the UK over the last 30 years, the position is one that clearly necessitates a change in approach. The numbers of students declaring a disability has risen exponentially with a recent major increase in the numbers declaring a mental health issue. The data in Figures 2.2 and 2.3 comes from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA, 2018), which covers all student enrolments across higher education.

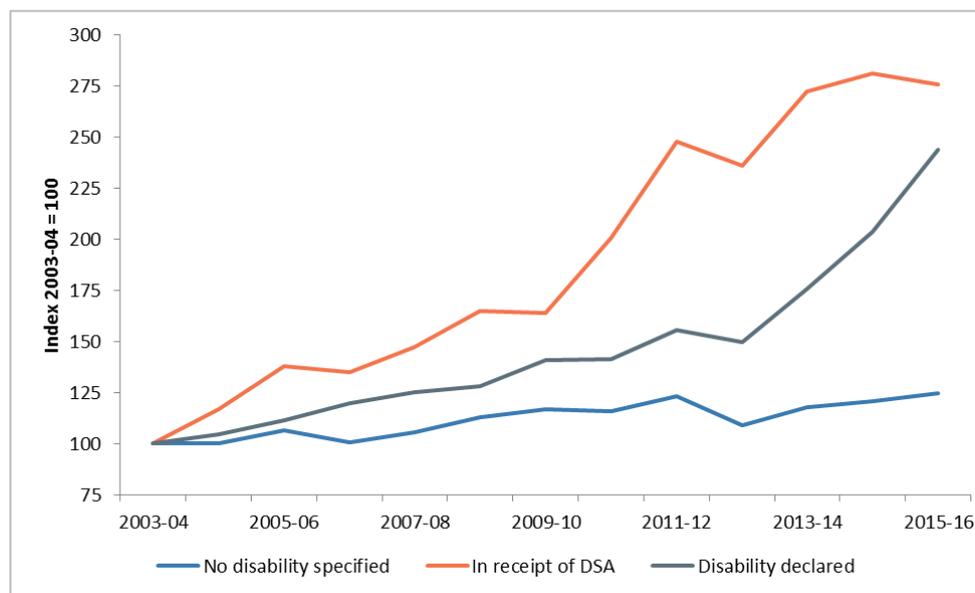


Figure 2.2 Change in HEFCE-funded HEI student numbers by disability, 2003/04 to 2015/16

Source: Taken from Williams et al. (2017)

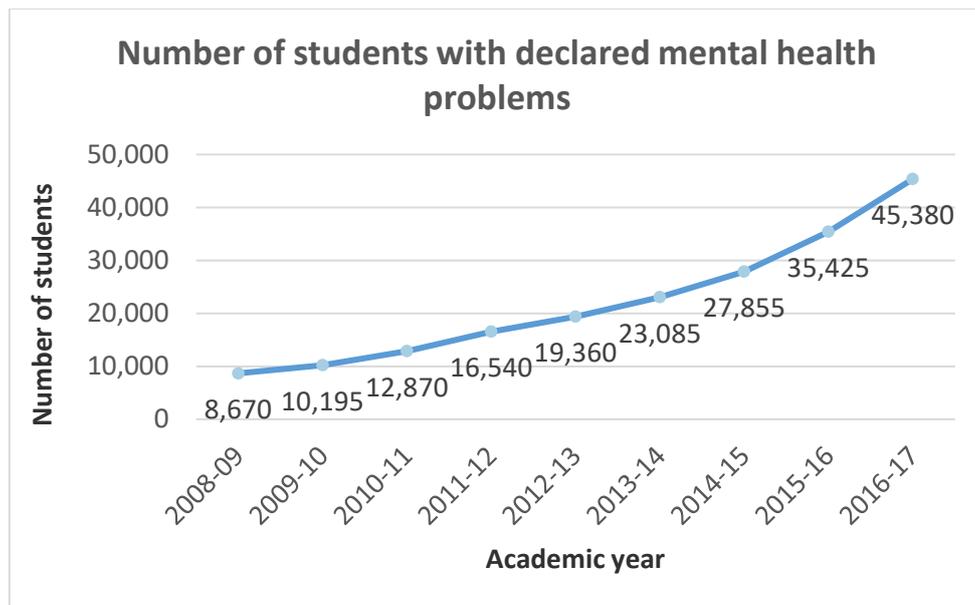


Figure 2.3 EU or UK-domiciled students at HEFCE-funded HEIs

Source: Taken from HESA student record, 2008-2017

The university sector has always responded to the need to support students with disabilities but this was typically developed on the basis of a need to support an individual student, through making a form of intervention in support systems. Interventions would vary from the physical adjustment of residential facilities to allowing extra time in examinations. Often, interventions would be coordinated from a specialist support team who would liaise with faculty staff over learning contracts for students, which would include commitments to the students, such as distributing lecture notes in advance for example. These reasonable adjustments have become part of everyday life in higher education and many of them were funded through additional support that the student receives from the Government’s Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) scheme. The DSA covered additional costs up to maximum levels, following an individual assessment of need, and this had a significant positive impact for many students. This is a very different approach to other parts of the education system as, under this model, it is the individual student that receives the funding and not the institution.

The key issue for ensuring that we have an education system in which everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed is to consider how all students are supported in order to achieve the attainment and progression outcomes that they are capable of. If the outcomes for some groups are different than others and those differences cannot be explained by entry qualifications, subject studied or other factors known to affect attainment and progression, then it raises serious questions around how universities need to change what they do to ensure that all students are able to maximize their potential. This is where institutions can make an important connection to the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework, where institutions proactively plan for and eliminate barriers to learning as opposed to merely responding to them.

HEFCE undertook a detailed analysis on differential outcomes in degree level attainment for certain groups within HE. The analysis took into account factors that impact on attainment, such as those outlined previously, and then looked at achievement. It is clear from this analysis that students from different backgrounds achieve at differential levels. The research (Higher Education Funding Council for England, 2015) shows that:

- Part time students do less well than full time students;
- White graduates are more likely to achieve better degrees than Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) students;
- Graduates from the highest participation areas have the highest degree outcomes compared with graduates from other areas;
- State school graduates tend to achieve higher than independent school graduates with the same prior educational attainment;
- Graduates with disabilities tend to achieve slightly less well than those without reported disabilities.

It is the case that disabled students that are in receipt of DSA do better than those without, but that in itself does not necessarily mean that the DSA is the reason for their comparative success; it may be linked to a number of issues. It is also clear that if the key outcome is one of employability to enable greater social mobility, then again there are differential outcomes. In this instance, the situation is reversed with disabled students not in receipt of DSA doing better than those with it (Figure 2.4).

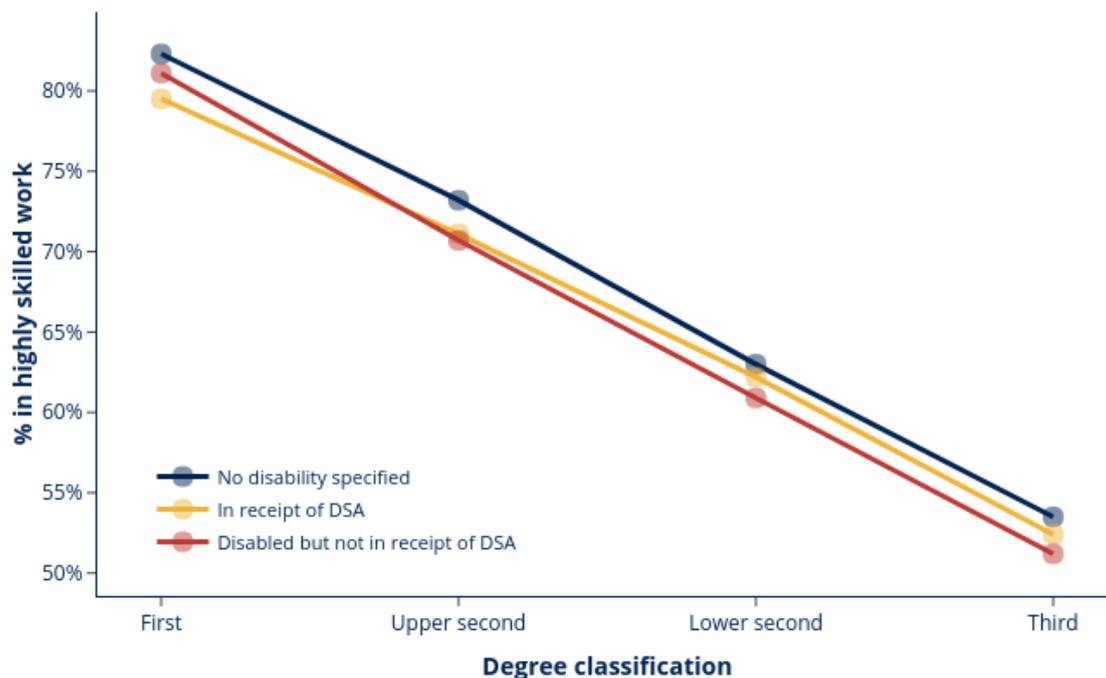


Figure 2.4 Employment outcomes six months after leaving HE, by disability status and degree classification

Source: Taken from Office for Students (2018)

Similarly there are differences with respect to student satisfaction, with disabled students being less satisfied, particularly with course organization and management. The 2017 National Student Survey shows an average overall NSS satisfaction rate for those with a disability of 75.8%, compared to 84.2% for all students (Ipsos Mori, Office for Students, 2017).

The evidence is showing how the HE system is replicating rather than transforming society. It suggests that rather than universities acting as the catalysts for change and agents of social mobility in respect of disability, they instead mirror society. Irrespective of the legislative duty on universities through the Equality Act 2010, their role in our society requires them to address the moral and social demand for a more inclusive society. Put bluntly, disabled students with the same qualification base on entry to the degree course were not performing as well as students without a disability, were less satisfied and were less likely to achieve high quality employability outcomes. This raises key questions both about the current support models and the approach of universities to learning and teaching. The evidence of differential outcomes across the sector makes a compelling case for change and highlights the need for urgent review of approaches and practice.

Reflection

- Consider how, at a national level, the focus on Student Voice (as exemplified for instance in the UK's National Student Survey) has impacted wider policy developments in access and participation.
- Consider the possible reasons for the significant increase in declarations of mental health problems between 2008/09 and 2016/17. What might the implications be for learning and teaching?

From medical to social models

The analysis of degree outcomes suggests that the DSA has a positive impact for those students in receipt of it. However, it has essentially become a deficit model within higher education as it provides support to be added on for the student according to their particular needs. This is effectively saying that in order for a disabled student to succeed, universities have to provide extra support, rather than simply ensuring that the curriculum and pedagogical approach enables success. The greater the focus on empowering learners as part of the process, the greater the engagement and achievement will be for all. In respect of disabled students, this was explicitly recognised in the Tomlinson Report (1997) into Special Educational Needs in the further education sector, when Tomlinson defined inclusive learning as 'the greatest degree of fit between the learner's requirements and the provision that is made for them'.

Although Tomlinson was reviewing provision for disabled students, it is clear that his model of inclusive education is one that can equally apply to all students in higher education. This is the basis of the social model and where UDL can be applied. It requires a shift from the deficit (or medical) model, wherein the student is regarded as requiring extra support to fit with the system, to the social model which values inclusivity and understands that the system needs to change to fit with the diversity of the student body.

Universities in the United Kingdom have a statutory responsibility under the Equality Act (2010) to comply with legislation on the public sector duty:

Having due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to [...] take steps to meet the needs of

persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it.

(Legislation.gov.uk, 2010)

This built on earlier provision, the Disability Discrimination Act (1995), and the new position is that the legal duty is anticipatory by nature which makes it an invaluable tool for planning. As such, Universities need to be able to support all students and, for many of the support issues, they can make anticipatory adjustments in advance. It is this change that creates the next catalyst for change in respect of inclusive education and is where UDL comes into play. While disabled student support centers fulfilled a really positive role in terms of the support they provided to students, they typically were not in a strategic position to influence culture change more broadly within the university. So, while they would be able to ensure that note-takers were available for students or that assessments were re-worded to make them more understandable for a particular student, they were not in a position to influence general practice around learning and teaching. It was in this way that the DSA, through its focus on specific needs of individuals, unintentionally contributed to a deficit model of provision and support for disabled students. It did not enable or encourage the development of inclusive practice but, rather, allowed for the provision of services to individuals. It often takes a shock to the system to generate change and, whilst that change may or may not be beneficial, it will take time to fully understand. Change though will also bring opportunity and it is important that we focus both on changes and also any opportunity that arises from it.

In 2015/16, the English Government announced a review of the DSA. From the Government perspective, it had become a blank check with escalating payments to individuals and institutions with legitimate claims for financial support. Institutions had generally established disabled student support centers in departments of Student Services, who would coordinate claims, negotiate support “contracts” with faculty staff and estates, as well as providing support. Often the budget for such work came from the DSA claims and the disabled student support center managed this whole process. So, when a consultation (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2015) came out from the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) proposing radical change and a reduction in what could be claimed, there was an outcry. It was seen as an attack on disabled students and as a challenge to inclusivity.

It was only after the initial outcry that the university sector was able to reflect and focus on the nature of the proposals. The new DSA guidance and regulation continued to support specific types of disabled student support but moved the agenda of inclusive education to, where it fundamentally belongs, within universities. The social model of disability suggests that someone’s “disability” is caused by the way society is organized, rather than by an individual’s difference, and it looks at ways of removing barriers that restrict life choices for all. This model finds that when barriers are removed, disabled people can be independent and equal in society, with choice and control over their own lives (Oliver, 2013). It does raise questions about the DSA approach. The social model refers to the barriers that we as a society have put in place that make life more difficult for disabled students, ranging from stairs, height of door handles, print font size, etc. Essentially, like Tomlinson before it, the new DSA position challenges universities within the UK.

The reliance on the DSA for funded individual support means that we have not really addressed changes in pedagogy, curriculum design and teaching approaches in order to address the diversity of our students. Universities have simply relied on the DSA to support students through our model. If we broadened the social model away from a focus on disability to being generally more inclusive, we can see opportunities for more accessible

higher education and to bring UDL to the forefront of curriculum change. The argument for inclusivity can be likened to a choice: either a student joins “our club”, or we seek to make the club more appropriate to include everyone. The consequences of the former can be seen from the case study at the outset of this chapter.

Significant research has been undertaken into the reasons behind differential outcomes for students and this has led to the development of curriculum and learner support frameworks in Figure 2.5. One major model was constructed by Cousins and Cureton following their research into the BAME attainment gap (Cousins & Cureton, 2012). This model was then adapted through further work commissioned by HEFCE.

Although Cousins and Cureton’s work focused on the BAME attainment gap, the issues are much more widely applicable. The key to this argument is that it shifts the agenda from supporting an individual student through a process to one that enhances the support for all students. Table 2.1 lists and comments on specific initiatives that can be achieved as a way of moving towards greater inclusivity. By adopting some of the approaches included, the bottom segment in the HE ‘Triangle Model’ for supporting disabled students (shown later in this chapter) will change as universities will be more inclusive.

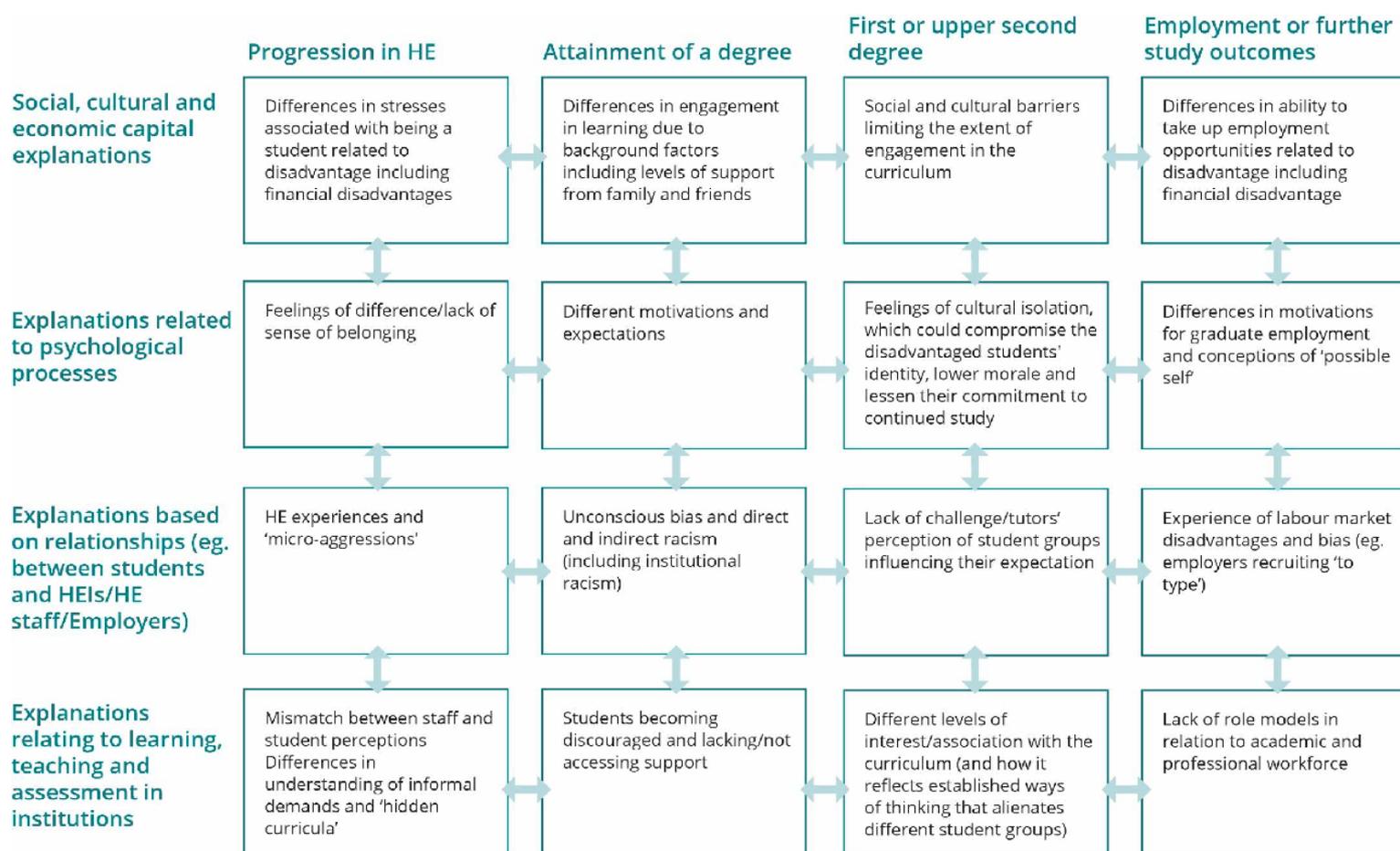


Figure 2.5 Differential Outcomes Critical Review

Source: Taken from Mountford-Zimdars et al. (2015, p. 29)

Table 2.1 Key institutional strategies for widening participation

Current	Issue	Task	Benefits
For British Sign Language (BSL) users, assessment briefs are looked at on an individual basis for clarity.	Specialist intervention, which benefits the individual.	Staff development for all teaching staff on designing accessible, clear assessment briefs; Working with Deaf students; Using effective teaching and learning software.	All students.

For Specific Learning Difficulty (SpLD) students, laptops with specialist software are provided.	Specialist intervention, which benefits the individual and individual learning.	Place the software on open access PCs; Encourage students to tell staff what helps/hinders and adjust practice accordingly.	Students can work anywhere on-campus and more easily in group work; Students have agency in their own learning.
Feedback on assessment is generally variable.	Standardized and structured feedback.	Develop format with students; Create staff development program; Ensure students know they can influence assessment.	All students.
Students could perform better in assessments.	Develop a curriculum that enables negotiated assessment activities.	Liaise with teaching staff and Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs); Encourage use of negotiated assessments.	All students.
Depending on the disability, a student can record taught content using a Dictaphone recording app.	Specialist intervention that benefits an individual.	Embed lecture capture using agreed recording principles for staff and students.	All students have greater access to materials.

Addressing learner needs

There will still be a need for certain specialist support, British Sign Language interpreters, Braille materials, etc. but the focus for students shifts and is more about encouraging the success of all students, whether or not they are disabled. Or, if we look at it from a slightly different perspective, we can focus on the institution and how it needs to address the issue of students having a disability. Figure 2.6 seeks to show a pyramid of how universities need to address the issue of reasonable adjustment, with an indication of the scale of the progress towards greater inclusivity.

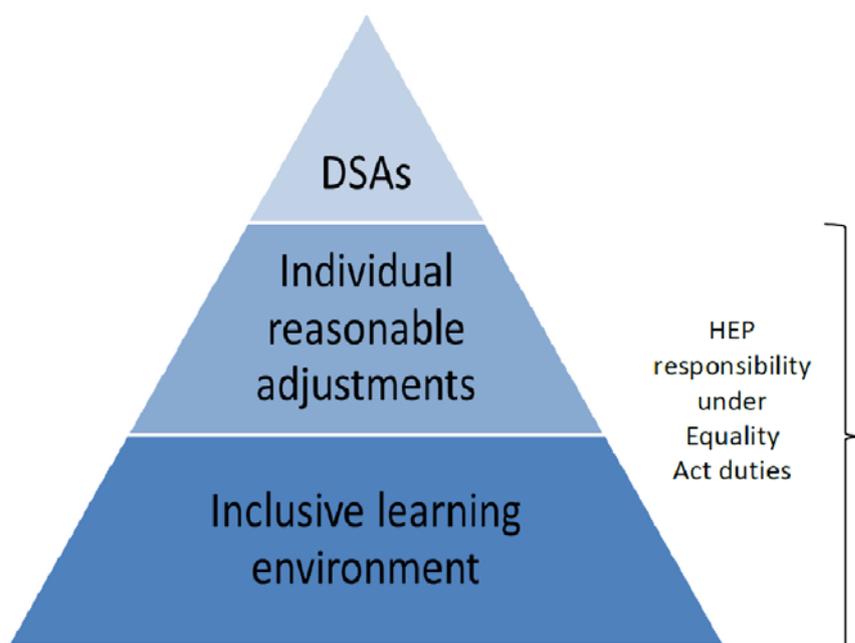


Figure 2.6 The HE ‘Triangle Model’ for supporting disabled students

Source: Taken from Department for Education (2017, p. 16)

In this approach, the issue of inclusivity is addressed and, by strategically seeking to position the university within the broad inclusive approach, there is a reduced need to invest in specialist support as it seeks to address the needs of all students. The intention would be to grow the size of the bottom section which then demonstrates how the university is changing. In respect of disabled students, it is reasonably easy to predict that a number of students will have a Specific Learning Difference (SpLD) and that, instead of purchasing specific software for them, it is better for all simply to install that software on a range of open access PCs. The same principle applies to lecture capture technology. Rather than introducing only specific individual support, the university could invest in lecture capture so that all students have access to a recording of the lecture. Lecture capture often doesn’t need to be interpreted and, in today’s digital society, it is readily accessible; however more still needs to be done to produce text-based versions of the “lecture” as well as aural. Another example is the impact of the development of virtual learning environments (VLEs). Hardly in common usage 20 years ago, today they are the norm and students heavily rely on them for access to materials, chatrooms and support groups, etc. The impact that this approach has is that the bottom segment of the pyramid will increase in size as more needs are being met and the top segment will get smaller.

So, if we return to the Tomlinson perspective, we see that inclusive practice recognizes the diversity of students and enables all students to access content, participate fully and demonstrate their knowledge and strengths. This is where UDL comes to the forefront. It enables curriculum teams to focus on the needs of the learner, whatever their background, and to open up both the curriculum and the learning experience and opportunity. This requires building on some of the excellent innovative practice and rolling it out in a holistic manner across the institution. It is about re-thinking teaching, learning and assessment in terms of widening participation, rather than only additional support.

In respect of disabled students, there will always be a need to embed anticipatory reasonable adjustments and to ensure that some students receive additional support. The key however will be the development of a more independent learner. UDL principles then come into play with the design of the whole learning experience.

Reflection

- How can universities seek to change pedagogical culture through collaborative inter-departmental working practices?
- Consider how the social model of disability can be applied to the university sector to implement UDL effectively.
- What measures can be taken to introduce UDL for the benefit of all students, in addition to those suggested in the 'Addressing Learner Needs' table?

Conclusion and key concepts

By adapting the principles of inclusivity and implementing UDL, universities will change as will society. We should see increased staff awareness and training on how to support all learners with whatever issues they present. There may be a decrease in the number of students declaring a disability as the inclusive approach changes the need for support. It is important to recognize that the support needs will still be there but the inclusive UDL approach has minimized the need for specific individual support interventions. So conversely, success will be measured by reducing the numbers of students who are having additional support because it has been primarily mainstreamed.

This chapter has looked at a number of concepts. It has explained the historical base of university education, in which the individual has a major responsibility for their own learning. This is what is meant by the old adage of "reading for a degree" and, whilst the philosophy has moved on, often the services and approaches have not fully caught up with the change.

A second key concept is the importance to society of the issue of social mobility and that opening up higher education to individuals from differing backgrounds and moving away from homogeneity raises challenges. This means that university education has to change to reflect the needs of the learner.

A third key concept is the impact that a sudden change can have to create opportunity. The restructure and refocusing of the Disabled Student Allowance created shockwaves but that change has created the framework in which universities can look to change and provide the impetus for that change. Finally, this chapter has explained the concept of inclusive education and how it aligns with UDL as a framework in which the individual is able to be supported and to succeed.

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