WIDER ACCESS FOR DISABLED STUDENTS?

Disabled Students and Multiple Policy Initiatives in Higher Education: Working Paper 1

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The findings reported in this paper come from an ESRC-funded research project, being carried out jointly at the Universities of Edinburgh and Glasgow. The project is examining how multiple policy innovations in higher education interact with policies aimed at wider access for disabled students, and assess the impact of both sets of policies on the participation and experiences of disabled students with different impairments. It is comparing developments in Scotland and England and in different types of institution, examining ways in which institutions have interpreted and implemented national policies.

Introduction

Higher education has been through a period of major change since the late 1980's. The massive expansion in the number of places and policies aimed at widening access for socially disadvantaged groups have, to some extent, increased the diversity of the student population, although disabled people and other groups remain under-represented. The introduction of teaching and research assessments has fostered competition between institutions and applied new pressures to staff. In addition, there have been moves to encourage innovations in teaching, learning and assessment.

The wider access or widening participation agenda, which is aimed at increasing the participation of under-represented groups in higher education has, so far, not been aimed at disabled students, even though they were considered to be an under-represented group by key informants to our research project. Instead, wider access initiatives have been aimed at increasing the number of students from social classes IIIm, IV and V. This is true in both Scotland and England.

Using Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data for academic year 1999-2000, this paper attempts to incorporate disabled students into the wider access agenda. It compares patterns of participation in higher education of disabled students with those of non-disabled students, and investigates whether their 'social profile', in terms of gender, age, ethnicity and socio-economic status is similar or different to that of non-disabled students. It also assesses whether different parts of the higher education sector are better or worse at attracting disabled students.

Specifically, the paper addresses five questions.

1. Are different types of higher education institution better or worse at attracting disabled students, and does this vary in England and Scotland?
2. Do disabled students with different impairments tend to study in different parts of the higher education sector?
3. What proportion of disabled students receive the Disabled Students Allowance and is this related to type of impairment? Does this vary by type of institution or country?

4. What is the profile of disabled students in terms of gender, age, ethnicity, socio-economic status and highest qualification on entry, and how does this compare with the profile of non-disabled students?
5. How do disabled students' choices of subject area, level and mode of study compare with those of non-disabled students?

Data and definitions

The dataset used for this analysis was supplied by HESA. It covers all enrolments in higher education institutions as at 1 December 1999. Because a student can enrol on more than one programme of study, the number of enrolments exceeds the actual number of students. The total number of enrolments (henceforward referred to as students) in the dataset for Scottish and English institutions was 1,895,775.

The dataset does not cover students enrolled on higher education courses in colleges of further education. It would have been interesting to have incorporated these students into the analysis, in particular because FE in Scotland provides a greater share of higher education than in England, and because they have a better record on access for those from under-represented social class groups. However, we have been informed that data available on enrolments in FE do not include accurate information on disability, because a significant number of colleges do not return information on numbers of disabled students.

It should be borne in mind that the HESA data on disabled students will not provide a complete picture of the numbers of disabled students. This is because only those students declaring a disability on the UCAS form or at registration are recorded. Anyone declaring a disability after these points, or who chooses not to declare a disability to their institutions will not be recorded.

In this paper, higher education institutions have been divided into three categories: pre-1992 institutions, post-1992 institutions and non-university HEIs. The decision to divide up universities in this way was based on the notion that new and old universities have different histories in terms of governance, funding and degree-awarding powers. The number of institutions in each category in the dataset used in this paper were as follows.

	Pre-1992 institutions	**Post-1992 institutions**	**Non-university HEIs**
England	51	36	45
Scotland	8	5	5

Non-university HEIs perhaps comprise the most diverse category, as they include colleges teaching specialist subjects, such as art, nursing and music, as well as more general colleges of higher education. They will be referred to as NUs throughout the rest of the paper.

The Open University (OU) has been excluded from the main analysis reported in this paper, because they have a significantly higher proportion of disabled undergraduates compared with other institutions (5.9%, compared with approximately 4% in other institutions). In the HESA data, the OU is classified as an English institution, in spite of the fact that the OU has a sizeable base in Scotland. This skews the analysis by country, inflating the English figures upwards. For this reason, the OU has been excluded from the main analysis. However, where appropriate, separate figures are included for the OU, to illustrate their unique position in the sector.

All analyses reported are based on cross-tabulations, using chi-squared tests to ascertain whether differences between groups were significantly different. Only those that were significant at the $p<0.05$ level (ie there was less than a 5% likelihood that they occurred by chance) are reported in the text.

1. Are different types of higher education institution better or worse at attracting disabled students, and does this vary in England and Scotland?

Overall, a higher proportion of undergraduates disclosed a disability compared with postgraduates (see Table 1). This could be because postgraduates do not complete a UCAS form and may not be asked about their disability status. Postgraduates may also be less aware of support available, including the DSA and therefore have less incentive to disclose a disability. For this reason, subsequent sections of this paper refer mainly to undergraduates because the numbers of known disabled students are more reliable.

For undergraduates, all types of institution in England had significantly higher proportions of known disabled students than Scottish institutions. However, the differences were not that great, particularly among old and new universities, with the percentage of disabled students being fairly close to 4% in both sectors. NUs had higher proportions of disabled students than universities (6.1% in England and 5.3% in Scotland). This was largely due to the fact that they had more students with dyslexia and unseen disabilities than universities.

Table 1 Known disabled students by level of study, type of institution and country of institution

	Pre-1992 universities	**Post-1992 universities**	**NUs**
Undergraduates			
England	19579 (4.4%)	22597 (4.4%)	6768 (6.1%)
Scotland	3532 (4.2%)	1580 (3.8%)	464 (5.3%)
Postgraduates			
England	4114 (2.2%)	2691 (2.7%)	661 (2.8%)
Scotland	567 (2.0%)	197 (2.7%)	65 (2.4%)

2. Do disabled students with different impairments tend to study in different parts of the higher education sector?

In all types of institution, students with unseen disabilities formed the largest group, with dyslexic students forming the second largest group, except in English NUs, where the proportions were roughly similar (Table 2). Students with unseen disabilities comprised between 36% and 51% of known disabled undergraduates, and students with dyslexia made up between 25% and 41%. In England, NUs had attracted a higher proportion of students with dyslexia than universities had, while in Scotland new universities lagged behind both old universities and NUs in this respect, although this was accounted for by their unusually high proportion of students with unseen disabilities.

A separate analysis of the Open University revealed that they had, by far, the highest proportion of students with multiple disabilities (59.2%, compared with between 2% and 5% in other institutions), and the lowest proportion of students with dyslexia (7.7%), confirming their unique position in the higher education sector, in respect of provision for disabled students.

Table 2 Percentage of known disabled students with different impairments by type of institution and country (undergraduates only)

	England			Scotland		
	Pre-1992 universities (N=19579)	Post-1992 universities (N=22597)	NUs (N=6768)	Pre-1992 universities (N=3532)	Post-1992 universities (N=1580)	NUs (N=464)
Dyslexia	27.8	33.1	40.1	29	25.7	29.7
Blind, partially sighted	3.9	3.2	2.4	2.8	3	-
Deaf, hard of hearing	6.3	5.3	3.9	5.3	4.9	-
Wheelchair user, mobility difficulties	4.3	4	3.1	3.2	3.2	-
Personal care support	0.2	0.3	- *	-	-	-
Mental health difficulties	2.2	1.9	1.6	2.5	-	-
Unseen eg diabetes, epilepsy, asthma	40.5	36.5	36.2	42.7	50.8	47.6
Multiple disabilities	3.1	4.4	3.4	2.1	2.7	-
Other disability	11.6	11.3	9.3	12.1	8.6	9.3

* Cells with fewer than 20 cases are represented with a '-'.

3. What proportion of disabled students receive the Disabled Students Allowance and is this related to type of impairment? Does this vary by type of institution or country?

Approximately one-quarter of known disabled undergraduates in England and one-fifth in Scotland were known to be in receipt of the Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) (Table 3), and only a small fraction of postgraduates (3.7% overall). There are issues about the accuracy of the data on DSA, however, which were highlighted by the recent introduction of premium funding for disabled students in Scotland, based on number of students in receipt of DSA. Figures supplied to HESA on DSA were shown to provide a poor proxy for the actual number of disabled students in some institutions, because they had failed to supply accurate information. If premium funding continues to be awarded on this basis, we anticipate that the accuracy of the data will improve, however, for the purposes of this analysis, the figures should be treated with some caution.

In England, NUs had the highest proportion of students receiving the DSA: students with most types of impairment were more likely to be in receipt of the DSA at NUs compared those studying at universities. In Scotland, old universities had by far the highest proportion of DSAs, with NUs reporting fewer than 20 DSAs in total.

Table 3 Known disabled undergraduates in receipt of the DSA by type of institution and country

	Pre-1992 universities	Post-1992 universities	NUs
England	2219 (23.4%)	2901 (21.6%)	1370 (34.7%)
Scotland	424 (25.7%)	65 (12%)	- *

* Cells with fewer than 20 cases are represented with a '-'.

A separate analysis of the relationship between impairment and DSA (not shown) revealed that, in England, students with dyslexia, those with sensory impairments, mobility difficulties and multiple disabilities were most likely to receive the DSA in all sectors (between 20% and 51% received it). A breakdown was not possible in Scotland, because of the small numbers in each cell.

4. What is the profile of disabled students in terms of gender, age, ethnicity, socio-economic status and highest qualification on entry, and how does this compare with the profile of non-disabled students?

This section examines the characteristics and pre-entry qualifications of undergraduates, comparing disabled and non-disabled students. Because the analysis includes ethnicity, overseas students were excluded from the analysis, enabling an examination of patterns of participation by home students from different ethnic backgrounds. Overseas students are excluded from all analyses in this section.

Gender

There was a higher proportion of males among those with a known disability, compared with other undergraduates. This was true in all sectors (Table 4a). A further analysis by type of impairment revealed that this was accounted for (in all types of institution except Scottish new universities) by the fact that more males than females had dyslexia. Table 4b details the gender breakdown by type of impairment, showing that, in addition, a higher proportion of male students were blind or partially sighted and that more female students had unseen disabilities.

Table 4a Gender of students by disability, type of institution and country (undergraduates only)

	England			Scotland		
	Pre-1992 universities	Post-1992 universities	NUs	Pre-1992 universities	Post-1992 universities	NUs
Of those with a known disability: % male	47.7	48.4	40.7	48.5	49	32.7
Of those with no known disability: % male	44.3	44.2	34.4	43.9	40.9	28.4

Table 4b Percentage of students who were male by type of impairment, type of institution and country (undergraduates only)

	England			Scotland		
% male	Pre-1992 universities	Post-1992 universities	NUs	Pre-1992 universities	Post-1992 universities	NUs
All undergrads	44.4	44.4	34.8	44.1	41.2	28.6
Dyslexia	56.1	56.2	49	58.5	62.4	45.7
Blind, partially sighted	51.7	59.2	43.4	63.5	74.4	-
Deaf, hard of hearing	42	46.9	36.1	50.9	43.4	-
Wheelchair user, mobility difficulties	37.2	48.1	35.4	30.6	41.2	-
Personal care support	-	46.2	-	-	-	-
Mental health difficulties	46.8	48.8	44.2	52.8	-	-
Unseen eg diabetes, epilepsy, asthma	44	40.6	32	43.3	40.6	27.8
Multiple disabilities	48	48.4	47.1	54.9	51.2	-
Other disability	46.6	48.5	38.2	41.5	53.8	-

Ethnicity

Information on ethnicity was available for over 92% of the undergraduates in the dataset. It was not possible to break students down into all the ethnic groupings in Scotland, because the

numbers were too small for analysis (see Table 4c). However, a broader brush analysis (not shown) which compared percentages of white and non-white students in England and Scotland, revealed that disabled students were less likely to come from minority ethnic groups, than students with no known disability. This was true in all sectors except for NUs in Scotland. Overall, there were more non-white students (both disabled and non-disabled) in English institutions than in Scottish ones, with the percentage of non-white students ranging from 5.8% to 19.3% in England, compared with 1.7% to 4.1% in Scotland.

Table 4c Ethnicity of students by disability, type of institution and country (undergraduates only)

England

	Pre-1992 universities		Post-1992 universities		NUs	
%	No known disability (N=340010)	Known disability (N=17550)	No known disability (N=404156)	Known disability (N=20714)	No known disability (N=94272)	Known disability (N=6375)
White	86.1	90.2	80.7	85.5	93.5	94.2
Black Caribbean	0.9	0.9	2	2.5	0.8	0.9
Black African	1.4	0.9	3.2	2	0.8	0.5
Black other	0.4	0.5	0.9	1	0.4	0.7
Indian	4	2.5	5.4	3.4	1.6	1.2
Pakistani	1.8	1.1	2.8	1.7	0.8	0.6
Bangladeshi	0.6	0.3	0.8	0.4	0.2	-
Chinese	1.2	0.6	1	0.5	0.4	0.3
Asian other	1.6	1	1.3	1	0.5	0.4
Other	2	2	2	2	1.1	1

Scotland

	Pre-1992 universities		Post-1992 universities		NUs	
%	No known disability (N=64548)	Known disability (N=3136)	No known disability (N=36551)	Known disability (N=1499)	No known disability (N=6374)	Known disability (N=414)
White	95.9	97.4	96.4	97.3	98.3	98.3
Black Caribbean	-	-	-	0	-	-
Black African	0.2	-	0.3	-	-	-
Black other	0.1	-	0.1	-	-	-
Indian	0.9	-	0.5	-	-	-
Pakistani	1	-	1.4	-	-	-
Bangladeshi	0.1	-	0.1	-	-	-
Chinese	0.7	-	0.6	-	0.5	-
Asian other	0.5	-	0.2	-	-	-
Other	0.6	0.7	0.3	-	-	-

Age

In all sectors disabled students were less likely to enter higher education at the earliest opportunity (18 years or less) and more likely to go in slightly older (between the ages of 19-24) (see Table 4d). Also they were generally less likely to enter as mature students (over the age of 25).

Table 4d Age of students by disability, type of institution and country (undergraduates only)

England

%	Pre-1992 universities		Post-1992 universities		NUs	
	No known disability (N=368513)	Known disability (N=18581)	No known disability (N=437219)	Known disability (N=21739)	No known disability (N=97569)	Known disability (N=6519)
18 and under	15.4	11.5	10.6	8.5	11.4	8.6
19-24	58.4	60.3	54.5	59.2	55	64.9
25-39	13.4	11.9	25	22.2	21.8	16.8
Over 40	12.8	16.4	9.9	10	11.9	9.6

Scotland

	Pre-1992 universities		Post-1992 universities		NUs	
	No known disability (N=72804)	Known disability (N=3328)	No known disability (N=37242)	Known disability (N=1532)	No known disability (N=7380)	Known disability (N=440)
18 and under	22.1	18.4	19	17.8	17.7	19.8
19-24	56.3	62.1	49.3	57.1	55.3	60.7
25-39	11.8	10.1	24	17.6	18.7	13.6
Over 40	9.8	9.4	7.7	7.5	8.4	5.9

Table 4e Highest pre-entry qualifications by disability, type of institution and country (undergraduates only)

England

%	Pre-1992 universities		Post-1992 universities		NUs	
	No known disability (N=374058)	Known disability (N=1441)	No known disability (N=438566)	Known disability (N=21764)	No known disability (N=97919)	Known disability (N=6530)
Postgraduate	2	2.1	0.9	0.6	0.7	0.4
Other HE	11.5	10.8	18.8	14.2	20.2	10.7
Alevel/Highers	69	68.2	50.8	55.3	60.5	66.8
Access course	1.9	3.2	3.6	6.2	4.4	6.6
Other	4.1	4.4	8	8.6	7.8	10.2
No formal qualification	3	3.5	3.2	3.4	2.8	3.1
No info	8.6	7.7	14.7	11.6	3.6	2.3

Scotland

	Pre-1992 universities		Post-1992 universities		NUs	
	No known disability (N=72936)	Known disability (N=3329)	No known disability (N=37252)	Known disability (N=1532)	No known disability (N=7382)	Known disability (N=440)
Postgraduate	1.2	1.2	0.6	-	0.5	-
Other HE	10.1	10.8	27.3	21.1	25.1	21.6
Alevel/Highers	70.9	75.3	55.3	62.1	64.3	68.4
Access course	2.5	3.8	1.2	1.4	2	-
Other	1.7	1.6	2.9	2.3	3.4	5.2
No formal qualification	2.6	1.4	2.5	3.1	-	-
No information	11	5.9	10.2	10.1	4.6	-

Pre-entry qualifications

The majority of undergraduate students in all types of institution had entered with A levels or Highers (Table 4e). However, new universities and NUs also had a sizeable number of

students with 'other HE' qualifications (eg HNCs/HNDs). Where this was the case, disabled students were more likely than non-disabled students to have A levels/equivalent than 'other HE' qualifications. Those entering via Access courses formed a small minority overall (between 1.9% and 6.6%), with disabled students more likely to enter via this route than non-disabled students in England, but not Scotland.

Socio-economic status

Data on the socio-economic status of students was problematic, because information was missing for 66.3% of students. The following analysis can only serve as a guideline, therefore. Information is requested on the UCAS form about the occupation of the applicant's parent/guardian or, where entrants are aged 21 or over, the occupation of the person contributing the highest income to the household. This information is then coded by HESA into a social class grouping using the OPCS 1990 standard occupational classification.

In old universities, there were no marked differences in participation of disabled and non-disabled students by social class (Table 4f). In new universities and English NUs disabled students were slightly more likely to have come from the more advantaged end of the spectrum than non-disabled students. In addition, further analysis (table not shown) revealed that students with dyslexia and those with unseen disabilities were slightly more likely to have come from the upper end of the spectrum than non-disabled students. There were no marked patterns for students with other impairments.

Table 4f Social class of students by disability, type of institution and country (undergraduates only)

England

	Pre-1992 universities		Post-1992 universities		NUs	
	No known disability (N=159888)	Known disability (N=7886)	No known disability (N=103352)	Known disability (N=6515)	No known disability (N=36760)	Known disability (N=2674)
Professional	21.9	22.2	11.2	13.7	11.3	13.7
Managerial, technical	47.2	47.6	40.9	41.7	42.5	42.9
Skilled-non manual	11.7	11.7	14.5	14.6	14.6	14.5
Skilled-manual	12	11.9	20	17.1	19.2	17.6
Partly skilled	6	5.6	10	9.4	10	8.9
Unskilled	1.2	1.2	3.3	3.5	2.4	2.4

Scotland

	Pre-1992 universities		Post-1992 universities		NUs	
	No known disability (N=30325)	Known disability (N=1484)	No known disability (N=10520)	Known disability (N=643)	No known disability (N=3246)	Known disability (N=268)
Professional	20.2	21.4	11	12	14.2	16.4
Managerial, technical	45.7	45.5	39.7	43.4	47.4	50.7
Skilled-non manual	11.8	11.9	15	13.2	12.8	10.4
Skilled-manual	14.5	13.3	21.1	16.8	14.1	15.3
Partly skilled	6.6	7.3	10.8	12.6	9.8	-
Unskilled	1.1	-	2.4	-	1.5	-

5. How do disabled students' choices of subject area, level and mode of study compare with those of non-disabled students?

Subject area

Table 5a Subject studied by type of disability (undergraduates only)

	No known disability	Dyslex-ia	Blind, partially sighted	Deaf, hard of hearing	Mobility difficulty	Mental health	Unseen	Mult. disabilities	Other disability
Medic/dentist.	2.3	1.1	1.6	1.2	-	-	2	-	1.2
Allied to medicine	13.4	7.6	6.4	10	4.3	4.6	10.2	5.6	7
Biological sciences	5.3	6	4.5	4.2	4.7	5.8	6.9	5.5	5.8
Veterinary sciences	0.3	0.2	-	-	0	0	0.1	0	-
Agric. & related	0.8	2	-	0.7	0.9	-	1.4	-	0.9
Phys. sciences	4	5.5	4.4	4.2	2.6	3.6	5.2	4.8	4.6
Mathematical	1.2	0.7	1.3	1.1	-	-	1.5	-	1.1
Comp. science	5.6	6.3	7.6	6.1	7.9	5.1	5.2	7.3	5.8
Eng & technol.	7.3	9.2	6.7	5.6	3.5	5	6.8	7.3	5.9
Architecture, building and planning	2.4	3.1	1.6	1.8	1.7	-	2.2	1.6	2.2
Social, eco., political	7.3	8.5	10	8.4	12.1	7.5	7.5	11.1	9.7
Law	3.2	1.3	3.7	2.4	4.2	2.9	3.6	4	3.7
Business and admin	11.8	8.9	10.4	7.5	6.7	3.8	9.7	9.5	9.3
Librarianship and info sciences	1.4	1.4	1.2	1.2	1.7	-	1.9	2.3	1.7
Languages	5.8	2.2	5.7	5.6	6.1	9.1	5.9	3.7	5.6
Humanities	3.4	4.4	4	5.6	6.1	8.3	3.9	6	5.9
Creative arts and design	6.6	17.6	6.5	8.7	7.2	11.8	8.8	10.6	8.9
Education	4.6	3.5	3.5	4.2	2.7	-	4.8	2.5	3.4
Combined/ invalid code	13.2	10.3	20.3	21.3	26.1	25.8	12.5	16.4	17.2

It was not possible to analyse subject studied by type of institution and country, because the numbers in each cell were too small. So a combined analysis was carried out looking at the relationship between type of impairment and subject studied, comparing the participation of disabled students with that of non-disabled students (Table 5a). Personal care support is excluded because there were too few students per subject area to do a meaningful analysis.

What stands out from this table is the high proportion of dyslexic students on creative art and design courses. Also a high proportion of students with sensory impairments, mobility difficulties and mental health difficulties were studying combined courses or had an invalid course code in the data. Disabled students were generally under-represented on subjects allied to medicine, although this was not the case for medicine/dentistry itself.

Level of study

Disabled students were more likely than non-disabled students to be studying for a first degree rather than an 'other undergraduate' qualification (Table 5b). This was true across the board.

Table 5b Level of study by disability, type of institution and country (undergraduates only)

England

	Pre-1992 universities		Post-1992 universities		NUs	
	No known disability (N=423531)	Known disability (N=19579)	No known disability (N=485797)	Known disability (N=22597)	No known disability (N=104591)	Known disability (N=6768)
First degree	76.8	79.8	73.5	81.8	74.5	85.2
Other undergraduate	23.2	20.2	26.5	18.2	25.5	14.8

Scotland

	Pre-1992 universities		Post-1992 universities		NUs	
	No known disability (N=81206)	Known disability (N=3532)	No known disability (N=39975)	Known disability (N=1580)	No known disability (N=8235)	Known disability (N=464)
First degree	83	89.7	76.5	85	86.5	91.8
Other undergraduate	17	10.3	23.5	15	13.5	8.2

Mode of study

Disabled students were more likely to study full time and less likely to study part time than other students, in all sectors except old universities in England, where the proportions were fairly similar (Table 5c).

Table 5c Mode of study by disability, type of institution and country (undergraduates only)

England

	Pre-1992 universities		Post-1992 universities		NUs	
	No known disability (N=423531)	Known disability (N=19579)	No known disability (N=485797)	Known disability (N=22597)	No known disability (N=104591)	Known disability (N=6768)
Full time	74.5	74	59.6	66.9	73	83.8
Sandwich	5.5	6.5	14.8	17.3	4	5.7
Part time	20	19.4	25.6	15.8	23	10.5
Other	0.1	-	-	-	-	-

Scotland

	Pre-1992 universities		Post-1992 universities		NUs	
	No known disability (N=81206)	Known disability (N=3532)	No known disability (N=39975)	Known disability (N=1580)	No known disability (N=8235)	Known disability (N=464)
Full time	84.8	88.7	69.5	77.6	81.3	89.7
Sandwich	0.8	1.1	9.8	11.4	5.5	5
Part time	14.3	10.1	20.4	11	13.2	5.4
Other	-	0	0.3	0	0	0

Conclusions

In conclusion, we return to the five questions used to frame this paper.

1. Are different types of institution better or worse at attracting disabled students, and does this vary in England and Scotland?

Overall, English institutions had a higher proportion of disabled students than Scottish institutions. The differences were statistically significant, although they were not huge. This could indicate a difference in policy and approach towards the recruitment of disabled

students between the two countries. NUs were better at attracting disabled students than universities. One could speculate that this was due to the particular subject areas on offer in these institutions (eg creative art and design) which have been shown to attract disproportionately high numbers of students with dyslexia. Indeed, English NUs did have a higher proportion of dyslexic students compared with universities.

2. Do disabled students with different impairments tend to study in different parts of the higher education sector?

English NUs had attracted a higher proportion of students with dyslexia than universities. Otherwise, the proportions of disabled students with different types of impairment were reasonably similar across types of institution, with unseen disabilities and dyslexia forming the two largest groups. The OU had a relatively large proportion of students with multiple disabilities and relatively few students with dyslexia.

3. What proportion of disabled students receive the DSA and is this related to type of impairment? Does this vary by type of institution or country?

About one-quarter of known disabled undergraduates in England and one-fifth in Scotland were known to be in receipt of the DSA, and only a small fraction of post-graduates. The data on DSA are known to be somewhat unreliable, however, in the year studied, particularly in Scotland. Disabled students at English NUs were more likely to be receiving DSAs than those at other institutions. This was not particularly impairment-related – students with most types of impairment were more likely to be getting DSAs in these institutions. Overall, DSAs tended to be received by those with dyslexia, sensory impairments, mobility difficulties and multiple disabilities.

4. What is the profile of disabled students in terms of gender, age, ethnicity, socio-economic status and highest qualification on entry, and how does this compare with the profile of non-disabled students?

In terms of social profile, disabled students were more likely to be white males aged between 19-24 than other students. The gender difference was almost entirely accounted for by the prevalence of males amongst those with dyslexia. In new universities and English NUs disabled students were more likely to have come from the more advantaged end of the social class spectrum. In old universities there were no particular differences between disabled and non-disabled students in terms of social class. However, overall these institutions had the worst record of attracting students from the more disadvantaged social class groups, anyway. Furthermore, those with dyslexia and unseen disabilities were slightly more likely to have come from the upper end of the social class spectrum.

5. How do disabled students' choices of subject area, level and mode of study compare with those of non-disabled students?

A relatively high proportion of dyslexic students were studying creative art and design courses and disabled students generally were under-represented on courses allied to medicine, but not medicine/dentistry itself. This suggests the influence of professional bodies providing additional barriers to admissions for disabled applicants. The findings suggest a more traditional route into and through higher education for disabled students than for other students. They were more likely to have entered with A levels/Highers rather than 'other HE' qualifications, more likely to enter aged 19-24, more likely to be studying full-time and more likely to be studying at degree level rather than 'other undergraduate' level.