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Inclusive Assessment in Higher Education:
A Resource for Change

HIGHER EDUCATION *hefce* FUNDING COUNCIL FOR ENGLAND

Staff-Student Partnership for Assessment Change and Evaluation (SPACE) was a HEFCE funded Project of eight HEIs in the South West of England, co-ordinated and managed by the Disability ASSIST Services (DAS) at the University of Plymouth. A full list of the institutions and the participating membership can be found on the inside rear cover of this document.

Project ethics statement

In the pursuit of student candour the Project Team were keen to establish ground rules for student confidentiality. For publication purposes, where student contributions have been used, anonymity has been achieved for the student voice by only assigning to it the label of the academic subject area studied and, in the case of disabled students, their disability has been identified using the UCAS disability codes. Students were provided with a fact sheet explaining the purpose of the Project, how the findings would be used and our ethical stance over confidentiality. The Project has not encountered major ethical challenges.

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Inclusive Assessment in Higher Education:
A Resource for Change

"I think it is great that this project even exists – hopefully it will change things for the better."

Non-disabled student studying Technology

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All the SPACE Project Partnership Representatives listed in full on the inside rear cover of this document.

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We are especially indebted to the students who made multiple contributions to this valuable work. Answering questionnaires which is never a popular activity, least of all annually over a three year period, attending student focus group meetings, being prepared to be interviewed one-to-one and participate in the trialling of alternative and inclusive assessments are commitments indeed, especially in the face of the prior commitment of degree level studies.

Most of the students, as disabled people, had to be prepared to be open and self-disclosing about issues that could sometimes be difficult and emotionally charged.

Given these levels of commitment it is nonetheless a necessity that our student respondents remain anonymous, as this was our pledge to them for agreeing to make their experiences and ideas known to us and available for dissemination to the sector. We feel that their singular and combined contributions will be key factors in the change process of promoting inclusive assessments, a not insignificant aspect of the pressing need to make higher education more equitable.

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✦ **A current perspective on disabled students in Higher Education**

In the past decade the Higher Education (HE) sector has witnessed an increase in the number of disabled students applying for and studying on a wide range of courses. In the academic year 1994-1995 the total number of students known to have a disability (UK domiciled and international students) was approximately 31,400 based on the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) standard HE population. By the year 1999-2000 the number had grown to approximately 77,500. From this period until 2002-2003 HESA changed their method for recording the disabled student population. The HESA return for 2002-2003 indicates approximately 110,770 students which represents 5.09% of the student population, although the statistics conceal the true measure of percentages in individual institutions and on specific courses (NDT, 2004). The figures also only represent those students who have chosen to make a declaration of disability.

Until very recently Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCE) projects, funded through the Special Initiative Funding for Improving Policy and Provision for Disabled Students, placed the emphasis upon the development of specialist support services. This may have provided the opportunity for good developmental practice, but did not necessarily create on-going consistency, or the development of strategic approaches to inclusive practice through curriculum change, resource planning and relevant staff development. More recently this funding has encouraged dialogue and innovation between disability services and academic departments, to support institutional change. The SPACE Project is a product of this dynamic interface.

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The drivers for change are several:

- ❖ disability and equality legislation;

- ❖ QAA Periodic Subject Reviews, self-evaluation exercises, codes of practice;

- ❖ HEFCE strategically aims to "contribute to culture change in higher education, encouraging proactive and mainstreaming approaches to improving provision for disabled students" (HEFCE, 2005);

- ❖ the expectation laid down in the Government White Paper of 2002 for 50% participation in HE of 18-30 year olds by 2010;

- ❖ the concomitant widening participation agenda for access and retention of under-represented groups;

- ❖ the importance of student retention to university finances;

- ❖ the introduction of student top-up fees;

- ❖ the increased emphasis upon graduate employability through Personal Development Planning and the HE Progress File from 2005;

- ❖ the 37% fall in resources per student since 1989;

- ❖ the increasing cost for high numbers of special examination arrangements for disabled students;

- ❖ the role of students as consumers, student satisfaction ratings and the risk of litigation.

The complex interplay of all these factors is contributing towards a cultural shift within the sector.

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★ Our new positive duty: an opportunity for change for all

The disability-specific legislation is of particular importance. The advent of Part 4 of the Disability Discrimination Act (Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA) 2001) placed a legislative imperative upon educational establishments which provided the sector with an opportunity, as well as a requirement, to address the validity of current practice and to take a more inclusive approach to the teaching, learning and assessment of disabled students whilst maintaining academic and professionally prescribed standards. It continues to oblige institutions to anticipate the requirements of disabled students in their planning and delivery of the learning experience and attendant services. In addition, from October 2004, amendments to Part 2 of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995 placed the legislative responsibility on qualifications bodies and professional bodies not to promulgate policy and practice which discriminates against disabled people.

The need to consider change and eliminate the barriers to developing more inclusive practice is made more timely still by the advent of the Positive Duties (general and specific) set down in the DDA 2005, which amends the DDA 1995 in significant ways. The definition of disability is extended by it to include people with HIV, cancer and multiple sclerosis from the point of diagnosis. The definition of mental health difficulties has been modified and the Act dispenses with the requirement that mental illness be "clinically well recognised".

The Positive Duty will necessitate a new approach for higher education institutions (HEIs) in that there will be an expectation of "actively promoting equality of opportunity for disabled people and celebrating diversity". The new duty will also "shift the emphasis from retrospective individual action to tackle discrimination towards an anticipatory and proactive problem solving approach". There is an expectation that the legislation will encourage "a systematic whole-institution approach to the identification and analysis of potential discriminatory policies, practices

and procedures in all aspects of an institution's activities" (Equality Challenge Unit, 2004).

Institutions will have to have "due regard" to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination and promote equality of opportunity. The specific measures place a duty on HEIs to produce a Disability Equality Scheme and to implement and monitor that scheme in conjunction with disabled people. **(See Section 2. The Disability Discrimination Act (2005) and the opportunity for assessment change.)** The purpose of the Disability Equality Scheme is to narrow the differential in the outcomes and experiences between disabled and non-disabled people, and the legislation will require commitment at senior management level to deliver these outcomes. The Statutory Code of Practice states that the duty is aimed at tackling systemic institutionalised discrimination against disabled people, because:

> "….disadvantage and social exclusion experienced by many disabled people is not the inevitable result of their impairments or medical conditions, but rather stems from attitudinal and environmental barriers. This is known as 'the social model of disability'…." (Disability Rights Commission, 2005).

Yet the legislative expectation is not simply a reflexive one for the sector but a proactive society-wide responsibility. As the Equality Challenge Unit has identified, "Education providers are regarded by government as having a particularly significant role to play in promoting equality and redressing long-standing societal imbalances." (Equality Challenge Unit, 2004.) The amended Act "….places positive, proactive responsibilities on authorities to work towards a more equal society by mainstreaming disability equality….to ensure equal access to and participation in society of disabled people" (Disability Rights Commission, 2005). As Stuart (2005) has argued, "increasingly higher education institutions are expected to contribute to the development of society itself, not just the development of academic knowledge." This aspect was highlighted by discussion amongst the Project Student Focus Groups which clearly

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demonstrated that the student population has broad expectations of social equality and justice from HE, in meeting the needs of its own diverse student populations and the challenge of addressing social inequality.

Until very recently access to HE for disabled people has largely been a facet of the widening participation agenda which for the most part has focused on recruitment, support provision and development rather than institutional change, fitting students into what already exists with the aid of compensatory approaches. In 2002 at the end of our preceding HEFCE-funded project, the South West Academic Network for Disability Support (SWANDS), the combined partnership of academic staff, educational developers, disability specialist staff and students from nine South-West Regional HEIs concluded that:

> "We need to reflect upon whether the current teaching styles, course materials and assessment tasks allow disabled students the necessary opportunities to demonstrate their acquisition of the learning outcomes, in a way that is perceived as 'a level playing field'. The emphasis needs to be upon parity of experience through strategic change, embedded, consistent practice rather than 'bolt on' or ad hoc provision." (Waterfield and West, 2002.)

The HEFCE recommendation of base level provision for the support of disabled students (HEFCE, 1999) provided a spring-board for an improved student experience, but it has not necessarily created the strategic approaches to more inclusive practice in the sphere of teaching, learning and assessment. This weakness in provision was also acknowledged by HEFCE in its report on teaching and learning strategies and the need for joined up strategic thinking (HEFCE, 2001). The research undertaken by Riddell at al (2002) revealed gaps between policy and practice in the UK, reporting that disabled students are still encountering barriers to choice of institution, subject and access to the physical environment. In these terms increasing participation does

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not of itself represent inclusive education. Moreover, the rise in the number of disabled students entering the sector means that traditional methods have to be examined for the extent to which they may confer disadvantage and social exclusion: the very antithesis of the current legislation. With the requirements of the new Positive Duty at hand we have to examine our practice and our values in order that universities can accommodate a diverse student body. This will challenge assumptions of what is valued and how we maximise student talents. Barton (2003) confirms the need for change in our HE provision when he asserts that "inclusion is not about assimilation or accommodation of individuals into an essentially unchanged system of educational practice." Instead it is about the "transformation of those deep structural barriers to change".

It was this progressive pursuit of fundamental change that influenced the parameters of the current Project and our recognition that a change in assessment procedures was vital for validity, reliability and real inclusive practice. Hence we concluded that the issue was not merely making assessment for disabled students more relevant, rather that assessment should be made more relevant for all students. However, the barriers to such changes are indeed pervasive. As Stuart (2002) has observed, "participation in education continues to be focussed on fitting people into what is already available." This has been the case even where the remit has been to assure quality for disabled students and likewise general student assessment, through the respective Codes of Practice drawn up by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA). The lack of a strategic link between such Codes and the absence of a specific responsibility to promote disability equality across the sector has not best served the interests of inclusivity. In the absence of a clear QAA mandate to consider inclusion, it has been institutional strategic thinking, albeit uneven, that has driven the inclusion agenda forward. However, with the advent of the DDA 2005 the QAA will have a general duty to remove barriers for disabled people and to promote equality of opportunity through the focus of its work with HEIs.

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Indeed, in the broadest context of the generic debate about assessment in HE there is a growing sense amongst assessment policy makers that the QAA has been a barrier to greater flexibility and that the pressure for consistency outweighs a desire for diversity (Student Assessment and Classification Working Group, 2003). Critical commentators have observed that traditionalism in assessment practice, reinforced by agencies such as the QAA, privileges the notion of the **reliability** of procedures, and therefore robustness is pursued at the expense of fully considering the **validity** of assessment in meeting the task of testing skills and knowledge. The risk, as Elton (2005) has observed is of "doing the wrong thing righter", and as such missing the opportunity to actually enquire into what is being assessed or indeed, what is worth assessing. There is a clear message that establishing valid modes of assessment is likely to offer more credible approaches long-term to interpreting achievement and ability than the positivist entrenchment around what has been traditionally seen as reliable.

It is timely with the legislative requirements facing HEIs and professional bodies to acknowledge that the new legislation raises fundamental questions about the equality of the learning experiences on offer and the efficacy of current assessment practices for disabled students. It is our belief that in the long-term, flexibility in assessment practice is likely to be the benchmark for meeting the diversity focus, a more valid system of assessment for all students including those with disabilities.

✦ Conceptualising approaches to assessment practice to meet the needs of a diverse student population

To fully appreciate the possibilities and challenges offered by making assessment more valid to disabled students, it is necessary to conceptualise the practice of assessment in both its historical context and in the potential it offers for the future. This continuum prescribes the background to the development of our own thinking and practice within this Project, as the trajectory of our research has broadened out

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from the three-year study of disabled student opinion, to a more general interest in the assessment needs and experiences of all students, as reflected in our non-disabled student control group. To help us to clarify the distinctions between ways of addressing specific assessment requirements, focusing first on the methods used for accommodating disabled students within traditional practice, then considering innovation for this group and finally addressing disability as one diversity within a holistic approach to assessment, we formulated a trinity of concepts. Our framework explores three distinct elements, two of which are compensatory and only available to disabled students and one of which is suitable for the diversity of all students. We gave these three distinct approaches the following terms:

- ❖ **contingent approach** ("special arrangements" such as extra time, amanuensis, own room, etc.) which is essentially a form of assimilation into an existing system;

- ❖ **alternative approach** (e.g., a viva voce instead of a written assignment) offering a repertoire of assessments embedded into course design as present and future possibilities for a minority of disabled students;

- ❖ **inclusive approach** (e.g., a flexible range of assessment modes made available to all) capable of assessing the same learning outcomes in different ways.

It is worth spending some time examining these three approaches in a little detail, as their explication reveals a good deal about the issues at the heart of this Project: issues that we believe inform good assessment practice and meet the requirements of the Positive Duties placed upon HEIs.

❖ The contingent approach

It is believed that the majority of the more than 110,000 declared disabled students in the sector are mostly accommodated in formative and summative assessments through a range of provisions such as extra time, amanuensis, own room, the use of a computer, examination

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questions on audio tape, extensions to course work, etc. There is a confusion of terminology relating to the ways in which institutions apply these adjustments or provisions to current assessment methods for disabled students, and this is reflected internationally with repercussions for trans-national student mobility and for staff. Variously these terms include "special arrangements", "reasonable adjustments", "assessment provision" (UK), "accommodations" (USA), and "alternative assessments" (Australia). From our point of view these approaches, which are by their very nature intended to be compensatory, can be categorised by the concept of a **contingent approach** targeted specifically at disabled students. This practice developed through expediency, initially reflecting the possibility of assimilating low numbers of disabled students in the early 1990s (Stuart, 2002).

As suggested by Sharp and Earle (2000) these ultimately threaten to subvert the equality of opportunity they aim to provide. There is little research to support the efficacy of such arrangements or the qualifications of staff to make comparisons and award certain "special provisions" for specific individuals. Williams and Ceci (1999) believe that "there is no empirically defensible reason to assert that 150 per cent, 200 per cent, 250 per cent or any other per cent is the magical compensatory threshold". The decision-making processes around such compensatory offers are based upon custom and practice in the absence of formal research to inform policy and procedure. The plethora of such arrangements also requires significant resources in terms of space, staff time and training. In particular, high demands are placed upon academic staff administering time-tabled assessments in class. These compensatory arrangements, as a **contingent approach**, continue to bracket disabled students into a "special" category. In this way they are both marginalised and held in a medical model of response by institutions, which are factors also reflected in the direct student responses collated and analysed by this Project.

Qualitative data from the annual questionnaire survey, feedback from the Student Focus Group meetings and evidence from the in-

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depth interviews gives a considerably nuanced picture of disabled student perceptions of "special arrangements" (e.g., extra time, amanuensis, own room, etc.). **(See 5.2. How students view "special arrangements" for assessments.)** It is our view that the 32.1% of student questionnaire respondents in receipt of "special arrangements" who were not satisfied with them for examinations, the 37.1% not satisfied with them for "in-class" tests and the 18.8% not satisfied with them for other forms of assessment, is an under-measurement of the degree of dissatisfaction felt amongst disabled students. The ambivalence and negativity to be found in the questionnaire responses, reinforced through the feedback from the Student Focus Groups and the in-depth interviews, shows that the **contingent approach** of "special arrangements" is not universally applauded by disabled students although there is some understandable reticence to say so. It appears that while valuing the institutional recognition of their disability, often reflected in generally positive answers to the questionnaires, the experience of "special arrangements" could be far from satisfactory when critically unpacked as a practice. We concluded that the discrepancy between the positive and negative feedback might conceal in the former an anxiety that criticism might lead to a removal of "special arrangements" and that a provision, however imperfect, was better than no provision at all.

However, these disabled student perceptions were formed prior to the duties enshrined in the DDA 2005, and it is anticipated that in future "applicants to HEIs may arrive with some prior experience, understanding and expectations about the kinds of reasonable adjustments that can be made to assist them in examination settings" (Sutherland and Pepper, 2005). It may be that incoming cohorts of disabled students may not be so quiescent!

❖ **The alternative approach**

As a Project imperative - derived from the outcomes of the previous SWANDS Project (see above) - we were initially intent on counter posing the **contingent approach** with a survey and research programme

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exploring the validity of alterative assessments for disabled students. At the outset we construed alternative assessments as "measured tools to assess core learning outcomes whilst minimizing the impact of a disability on a student's performance" (Waterfield et al, 2006). We envisaged presenting a range of rich case studies that explored the outcomes of offering students such alternative assessments (e.g., a viva voce or an audio-visual presentation in place of an assignment), including staff feedback and the impact on marking and grading. By critically examining the practice and provision of alternative assessments provided exclusively for disabled students, following feedback from the student focus groups, academics in the Partnership and Project dissemination, the Project Team reassessed its objectives. **(See 5.9 Alternative and inclusive assessment case studies.)** We came to regard this exclusive provision as a further facet of a broadly compensatory range of activities that should more accurately be conceptualised as only part of a changed approach to assessment. On the positive side this **alternative approach** is capable of reflecting the particular learning styles and learning requirements of individual disabled students. There will always be a requirement to consider an alternative assessment in certain "one off" circumstances of disability, in a small number of cases. However, if generalised there is an undesirable consequence in reproducing the notion of "disabled" as "different" which is both counterproductive and negative on a large scale, albeit unavoidable on some limited occasions.

❖ The inclusive approach

We came to feel strongly, through our research, that if academic departments could successfully offer alternative assessments to disabled students and improve student learning and student grades for assessed work as part of an **alternative approach**, then why not offer such opportunities to all students? Opportunities of this kind, involving choice and flexibility in how to demonstrate the students' acquisition of the learning outcomes, may usefully be conceptualised by a third definition, that of an **inclusive approach** to assessment. This way of assessing student learning makes no arbitrary distinction between

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"disabled" and "non-disabled" in the same way that it would make no distinction between students from "traditional" and "non-traditional" backgrounds. Quite to the contrary, in the pursuit of meeting the needs of the diverse student population, the **inclusive approach** to assessment is concerned with equity, regardless of disability, learning style or learning experience. The **inclusive approach**, which does not compromise academic standards but rather improves the chances for students to fairly demonstrate their acquisition of the learning outcomes, is also congruent with the social, cultural and legislative imperatives pressing the HE sector to play an active role in creating a more inclusive society.

The limitations placed upon assessment of disabled student learning by the widespread deployment of a **contingent approach,** or the occasional experimentation with an **alternative approach** or even the promotion of an **inclusive approach,** cannot be addressed in a meaningful way as isolated issues when there is a thoroughgoing debate in progress about the reliability and validity of current assessment practice per se in the HE sector. The cultural ideal of widening participation to HE from other non-traditional cohorts also requires the sector to examine traditional practice with a critical eye, which it is presently doing. In relation to HEIs Specific Duties under the DDA 2005, assessment policy and practice will also need to be examined as part of each institution's Disability Equality Scheme. This scheme will be monitored annually and reviewed every three years. Examining traditional practice also gives HEIs the opportunity to consider the full gamut of the equalities agenda.

The increased emphasis upon graduate employability and the HEFCE requirement for students to be provided with opportunities to recognise and record their learning styles and strengths will also have an influence. The requirement to formalise Personal Development Planning (PDP) will ensure that the assessment debate will continue to widen out and challenge traditional practice for the benefit of all students. Elton and Johnston (2002) contend that "the achievements of

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the learning objectives and graduateness are not satisfactorily served by traditionalism" and for disabled students this assertion is amplified through the current mechanisms of compensation in all its guises, the **contingent** and **alternative approaches** to assessment**.**

Acknowledging that the rightful place for a debate about the equity of assessment regimes for disabled students resides squarely within the broader debate about the validity and reliability of assessments in general, leads inexorably to another consideration. There is a need to explore assessment methods from the point of view of examining how assessment of learning can be made generally applicable, without resorting to compensation, and therefore viable and equitable for the broadest student constituency. In an international context, specifically in Australia and the USA, one important platform for the critique of traditionalism has sprung from the concept of a universal design for learning. Having its genesis in the field of architecture and the desire to design buildings to ensure access for all, over a decade ago the notion of universal design was deployed in an educational context. Concerned about the consequences of making categorical distinctions between "disabled "and "non-disabled", not least neglecting the subtle range of nuances that reside within this crude binary opposition, universal design has focused upon meeting the needs of divergent populations of learners. However, even when accepting the rubric that "designing for the divergent needs of special populations increases usability for everyone", the base-line for universal design remains the ideal of responding to the individual learner and their individual learning style (Rose and Mayer, 2000). Paradoxically, from the point of view of the SPACE Project, divergence in this context meant broadening our research to include non-disabled students' evaluation of **inclusive approaches** to assessment. **(See Section 5.9. Alternative and inclusive assessment case studies.)**

Making our research comparative in this way, and thus taking "universal" to mean both students with and without disabilities, we concurred with Rose and Mayer (2000) that the "curriculum should include alternatives

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that make the learning accessible and applicable to students with different backgrounds, learning styles, abilities and disabilities". Hence, universal design does not imply a unitary solution for all learners, but by contrast proposes flexibility in content, course activities, learning environments and assessment of learning. In theory this approach accommodates individual differences between learners without, most importantly, the need for routine categorisation and negative labelling. Promoting the notion of flexibility in assessment practice, as a cornerstone of an inclusive and universal approach, is not to deny absolutely the need for **contingent** and **alternative approaches** for some disabled students in some assessment circumstances, but rather to create an **inclusive approach** to assessment where these are numbered by the handful in institutions rather than in the hundreds or thousands.

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Summary points

★ The past decade has seen a very significant increase in the number of disabled students entering HE.

★ Factors influencing change in policy and practice in HE towards disabled students have been multi-faceted and various.

★ Legislative requirements and governmental expectations have placed a responsibility on HEIs to take a proactive role in society to mainstream disability equality.

★ Students participating in the SPACE Project expressed broad expectations of social equality and justice from HEIs.

★ Unfortunately, despite a decade of resources directed at disability issues in the sector, there is still a gap between policy and practice.

★ The area of assessment practice has, in particular, developed in ways that need critically examining for equitable change to take place.

★ We have given assessment practice three conceptual terms to help provide a framework for considering current practice and planning equitable change:

  ❖ **contingent approach** ("special arrangements" such as extra time, amanuensis, own room, etc.) which is essentially a form of assimilation into an existing system;

  ❖ **alternative approach** (e.g., a viva voce instead of a written assignment) offering a repertoire of assessments embedded into course design as present and future possibilities for a minority of disabled students;

  ❖ **inclusive approach** (e.g., a flexible range of assessment modes made available to all) capable of assessing the same learning outcomes in different ways.

★ Although starting from a position of wishing to consider the validity of the **alternative approach**, mid-term the Project was redefined to consider the **inclusive approach**, considering disability as merely one diversity within a holistic approach to the question of equitable assessment practice in HE.

2. The Disability Discrimination Act (2005) and the opportunity for assessment change

What this section contains:

◆ Background to the requirements of the Disability Equality Scheme

◆ Strategies and policies

◆ Procedures and practice

◆ Gathering information and data collection

◆ Structured improvement

2. The Disability Discrimination Act (2005) and the opportunity for assessment change

◆ Background to the requirements of the Disability Equality Scheme

As already outlined, the new duties, both general and specific, introduced by the new DDA 2005 require HEIs to promote disability equality across all activities. Institutions are required to be proactive and to examine strategies, policies and procedures to ensure disability equality is built into every function. **(See Section 1. Introduction.)**

The new duties demand a cultural shift in thinking. The DDA part 4 placed the onus upon the disabled student to enforce their own rights rather than on organisations to ensure they met their legal responsibilities. The new focus on organisational change and the change in the burden of proof provides institutions with the opportunity to examine their assessment policies and practices to ensure the gap is closed between disabled and non-disabled students' experiences and opportunities.

In developing the first Disability Equality Scheme for December 2006, institutions are required to:

- ❖ involve disabled students in its development and implementation;
- ❖ prioritise policies and practices in terms of relevance and impact, and assess for barriers to equality of opportunity;
- ❖ gather evidence from disabled students, both quantitative and qualitative;
- ❖ monitor and analyse data;
- ❖ plan actions at strategic and operational levels, embedding these actions into the institutional committee structure.

In the context of assessment practice, senior managers will also need to impact assess, gather data, review and identify actions for change. Examples of these activities are given below.

2. The Disability Discrimination Act (2005) and the opportunity for assessment change

◄ Strategies and policies

- ❖ Review the Institutional Learning and Teaching Strategy to ensure it promotes and delivers disability equality and identifies negative impact.

- ❖ Review assessment policy, placing alternative and inclusive assessment into mainstream practice in order that assessment is fit for the purpose for disabled students.

- ❖ Ensure that vision of widening participation translates into reality of inclusive practice though systemic change.

- ❖ Consider if the current allocation of resources allows for change to assessment practice. How can these resources be redeployed for best use?

- ❖ Consider how the institution ensures that the views of disabled people influence and inform strategic planning.

- ❖ Ensure the new positive duties and inclusive assessments are specifically addressed in the Learning and Teaching in Higher Education courses for new academic staff.

- ❖ Consider changes to programme documentation in order that inclusive or alternative assessments are identified in line with equality duties at course and programme planning and approval. Monitor provision for effectiveness at annual programme monitoring and periodic review.

- ❖ Examine quality assurance documentation for approval of partner institutions to ensure the proposed institution has appropriate policies and Disability Equality Scheme Action Plans in place, to meet the assessment requirements of disabled students.

2. The Disability Discrimination Act (2005) and the opportunity for assessment change

◄ Procedures and practice

- ❖ Identify training requirements, e.g. disability awareness for invigilators in examination settings.

- ❖ Identify staff development requirements at faculty and school levels in relation to assessment change, development of inclusive curricula and assessment learning, disability equality duties and disability awareness training.

- ❖ Foster creativity in assessment design, exploring non-cognate assessment modes, identified in the QAA benchmark statements (Waterfield and West, 2002).

- ❖ Consider who has responsibility in each academic school or department for ensuring the positive duties are met and how staff members are informed and supported.

- ❖ Engage disabled students and staff in the consideration of assessment change.

- ❖ Develop guidance for approval panels to ensure more inclusive assessments have been identified, resources considered and necessary staff development identified.

2. The Disability Discrimination Act (2005) and the opportunity for assessment change

◀ Gathering information and data collection

- ❖ Consider what information the institution does not currently gather regarding disabled students and assessment. What are the priorities? How will you gather the information?

- ❖ Assess the impact of "special arrangements" for assessments on disabled student satisfaction and achievement. **(See Section 5.2. How disabled students view "special arrangements" for assessments.)**

- ❖ Monitor disabled student grades against non-disabled student grades.

- ❖ Undertake action research on disabled student experience of current and planned assessment practice through focus groups, one-to-one interviews and questionnaires (qualitative and quantitative) delivered at course or institutional levels.

- ❖ Explore the reasons behind student choice of modules and assessment modes.

- ❖ Examine impact of assessment workload on disabled students and on staff.

- ❖ Gather data on disabled students' experience of assessment on courses delivered in partnership arrangements.

- ❖ Information that needs to be gathered on policies and practices, and an example of the impact of assessment mode change, can be found in 'Disability Impact Assessment – A Brief Guide from the Scottish Disability Team' at **www.sdt.ac.uk/resources.asp**.

◀ Structured improvement

It is imperative we assess what needs to change in current assessment practice to meet our positive duties and address inequalities. Mapping policies and practices and identifying the priority areas for change is the first step in this process and disabled people need to be part of this activity.

2. The Disability Discrimination Act (2005) and the opportunity for assessment change

By commencing impact assessments in a structured way in relation to current assessment policies, procedures and practice, for the first Disability Equality Scheme Action Plan, institutions have the opportunity to move from assimilation of disabled students into a largely unchanged course assessment regime, to the transformation of our assessment culture. The new DDA 2005 provides an imperative but also a real opportunity to improve our response to the diversity of students, including disabled students, who make up the HE population of the twenty-first century.

◄ For further information see the following:

Disability Rights Commission (DRC), Skill, Scottish Disability Team and the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) (2006) 'Briefing for Heads of Institutions on the new duties to promote disability equality' Joint Publication: London
www.ecu.ac.uk/guidance/disability/guidance.htm

DRC (2006) 'Disability Equality Overview' DRC: London
www.drc-gb.org/businessandservices/disabilityequalityduty/asp
Also accessible at **www.dotheduty.org**

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3. Twenty-one things you need to know about current assessment practice for disabled students when considering inclusiveness

What this section contains:

- What is pertinent in the debate about assessing disabled students?

- What is wrong with traditional assessment practice for disabled students?

- What is the student perspective?

- What makes good assessment practice?

3. Twenty-one things you need to know about current assessment practice for disabled students when considering inclusiveness

➤ What is pertinent in the debate about assessing disabled students?

1. A conceptual distinction needs to be made between three elements, two of which are compensatory and only available to disabled students and one of which is suitable for the diversity of all students:

   ❖ **contingent approach** ("special arrangements" such as extra time, amanuensis, own room, etc.) which is essentially a form of assimilation into an existing system;

   ❖ **alternative approach** (e.g., a viva voce instead of a written assignment) offering a repertoire of assessments embedded into course design as present and future possibilities for a minority of disabled students;

   ❖ **inclusive approach** (e.g., a flexible range of assessment modes made available to all) capable of assessing the same learning outcomes in different ways.

2. There is as yet little research to support the validity of the range of special examination arrangements currently deployed within the **contingent approach**. Williams and Ceci (1999) argue that there is no "empirically defensible reason to assert that 150 per cent, 200 per cent, 250 per cent, or any other percent is the magical compensatory threshold" to ensure equity in traditional assessment arrangements. Similarly Phillips (1994 quoted in Elliot and Roach, 2002) has queried "whether the scores with and without accommodations are comparable…., do scores from non-standard test administrations have the same meaning as scores from standard test administrations?" Debates with the SPACE Partnership, the Management Team and through dissemination events have consistently raised these same uncertainties.

3. Twenty-one things you need to know about current assessment practice for disabled students when considering inclusiveness

3. "The current arrangement of thousands of special provisions annually for the assessment of disabled students, which has never been costed, is becoming untenable and demands complicated administrative systems centrally and departmentally which stretch resources, physical facilities and administration within the sector." (Waterfield and West, 2002.)

4. "Across the UK the extensive use of 'special examination arrangements' for disabled students is reactive practice which is indicative of an assimilation culture; it forces students to adopt a disability identity, which confers on them a medical model and at a purely practical institutional level is an ad hoc response with…. equity implications that are not desirable or sustainable." (Waterfield et al, 2006.)

5. Current institutional practice often leaves the responsibility for decision making around the **contingent approach** or sometimes the **alternative approach** with specialist disability staff, often with little joint consideration and dialogue between them and staff in the academic departments despite the requirement of HEFCE that "disability is the responsibility of the whole institution" (HEFCE, 2001).

6. There is a confusion of terminology relating to the ways in which institutions internationally apply compensatory adjustments or provisions (e.g., extra time, amanuensis, separate room, etc.) to current assessment methods for disabled students. Variously these include "special arrangements", "reasonable adjustments", "assessment provision" (UK), "accommodations" (USA), and "alternative assessments" (Australia). This is confusing for trans-national student mobility and for staff.

7. External examiners will need to be well informed of the responsibilities of course developers to meet new legislative duties for positive action in curriculum development and offered appropriate staff development, in order that discrimination of disabled students in the assessment process is eliminated.

➤ What is wrong with traditional assessment practice for disabled students?

8. In the mid 1990s researchers found that the majority of HEIs were utilising what was referred to as a "compensation approach." This is what we have termed the **contingent approach** of "special arrangements", e.g., extra time, amanuensis, own room, etc. The same study also revealed the general absence of well-considered principles on which individual decisions could be based (Earle, 1977 cited in Sharp and Earle, 2000). In the intervening period the volume of such arrangements has grown and the lack of well-considered principles has atrophied.

9. "Whilst compensation is thought to promote equality of opportunity, it does little to promote the idea of an inclusive education and non-discriminatory system of higher education for disabled students." (Sharp and Earle, 2000.)

10. In the mid 2000s the **contingent approach** to assessment for disabled students is still regarded as the main solution, when in practice there may be no formal policy, no validity, no comparability, no consistency and a paucity of relevant staff development. The inevitable consequence is that the allocation may be inappropriate and it certainly does not "level the playing field" as previously hoped. The majority of alternative assessments are still provided on a "one off" basis to meet individual student need. They are rarely considered at course development and approval and raise the same issues of reliability, validity and equity almost a decade on.

3. Twenty-one things you need to know about current assessment practice for disabled students when considering inclusiveness

11. "When we focus on categorical differences between learners such as 'disabled/non-disabled'…., we miss the many differences between learners across categories." (Rose and Meyer, 2000.)

12. The expediency of "special examination arrangements" or the offer of an ad hoc solution for individual disabled students by individual members of staff precludes the consideration of measured tools strategically embedded into course planning and approval.

13. The provision of extra time for assessment modes other than examinations is not always feasible because of clashes with other course deadlines or module and year endings.

14. The **contingent approach** to assessment does not necessarily produce an enabling environment or student satisfaction due to a lack of resources (such as single use rooms), equipment failure, inappropriate practical arrangements and a shortage of adequately trained amanuenses, readers and invigilators.

15. The current system for assessing disabled students reflects societal inequality where "participation in education continues to be focussed on fitting people into what is already available" (Stuart, 2002).

✦ What is the student perspective?[1]

16. The SPACE survey shows there is considerable ambivalence amongst disabled students when discussing their attitudes towards the **contingent approach** of "special arrangements" for examinations and there is evidence to indicate student self-selection out of courses or modules that contain unseen, time-limited written examinations.

17. Disabled students are often unaware that "in-class" assessments are to be undertaken until the day of the test and many are also unaware that adjustments to assessments are available for "in-class" assessments.

18. The common **contingent approach** of offering students extra time for examination tasks is counter-productive for many disabled students whose learning style is predicated upon factors precipitating fatigue.

➤ What makes good assessment practice?

19. If an alternative assessment arrangement has equity by successfully measuring the same learning outcomes as the traditionally offered assessment mode, could it not be offered to all students and thereby become an **inclusive approach** to assessment? If not, it can be a considered response in a repertoire of alternatives for a minority of disabled students.

20. The **contingent approach** sets disabled students apart and does not address the needs of the broader Widening Participation constituency. Dismantling the costly artifice of "special arrangements" will free up resources for developing a more **inclusive approach** to assessment to meet the requirement of the diversity of learners.

21. With the inception of the DDA 2005 it is not possible to perpetuate an unchanged system of assimilation and discriminatory practice. As public sector bodies with a specific duty, HEIs are required to be inclusive and this should include taking an **inclusive approach** to assessment.

Section notes
1. **See Section 5.2. How disabled students view "special arrangements"; Section 5.3. How student learning styles affect assessment performance and Section 5.5. Students' preferred choice of assessment modes.**

4. Twenty-one things you need to know about the general assessment debate when considering inclusiveness

What this section contains:

- What is pertinent in the generic assessment debate?

- What is wrong with traditionalism in practice?

- What is the student perspective?

- What makes good assessment practice?

4. Twenty-one things you need to know about the general assessment debate when considering inclusiveness

◆ **What is pertinent in the generic assessment debate?**

1. "Debates on this issue can become lively, even irrational." (Mutch and Brown, 2001.)

2. There is a conflicting dualism at the heart of the assessment system and debate. There are antithetical pressures in the increased number of students, the heightened awareness of the responsibility of HEIs for influencing employment opportunities and the concomitant drive towards creating summative assessment systems that are economical to deliver. In opposition to this there are pressures to make assessments formative and developmental, a major drive towards unpacking the learning process and marrying practice to theories of learning. (Elton and Johnston, 2002.)

3. "The key principles of effective assessment and the common weaknesses of assessment systems are primarily concerned with linkages between outcomes, the design of assessment tasks, criteria, marking procedures and feedback." (Brown, 2001.)

4. "Assessments need to be responsive to growing demands – increased diversity, increased inclusion of all types of students in the general curriculum, and increased emphasis on and commitment to accountability for all students." (Thompson et al, 2004.)

5. The on-going development of HE Progress Files, Student Transcripts and Personal Development Planning (PDP) and the need to impact assess and monitor our practice for legislative purposes will require a more coherent backwards linkage for all students, between these systems for recording the students' own learning and the pursuit of a breadth of flexible methods of assessing that learning.

4. Twenty-one things you need to know about the general assessment debate when considering inclusiveness

What is wrong with traditionalism in practice?

6. Change in the area of assessment practice has been surprisingly tardy. To date innovative approaches, or at least critiques challenging traditionalism posed in the late 1960s, have failed to bare fruit in any thoroughgoing way. Much current assessment practice has been targeted by critics for its "abiding amateurishness" (Elton and Johnson, 2002).

7. The role of the professional bodies is often held up as a reason for resisting change but the DDA confers responsibilities upon them to make "reasonable adjustments".

8. The pressure of increased marking loads has privileged the use of exams, tests and computer marked assessments. The emphasis on allocating marks (to distinguish between students and to distinguish degree classifications) and on accountability (to demonstrate to outsiders that standards are satisfactory) does not necessarily support capturing student attention and effort, generating appropriate learning activity or providing feedback to the student. (Gibbs, 1998.)

9. Despite the lack of suitable research evidence, it has been reasonably supposed that "something like 90% of a typical university degree depends on unseen time-constrained written examinations, and tutor-marked essays and/or reports." (Race, 2001 cited in Elton and Johnson, 2002.)

10. Some of the most common weaknesses identified with current assessment practice include the following:

   ❖ overload of students and staff;

   ❖ insufficient time for students to do the assignments;

   ❖ too many assignments with the same deadline;

❖ overuse of one mode of assessment such as written examinations, essays or closed problems;

❖ adopting as a rule of thumb unproven systems of equivalence, such as a three-hour paper being "equivalent" to a 3000-word assignment;

❖ there is a widespread acknowledgement of the difficulty of assessing independent critical thinking, creativity, academic or life-skills as opposed to subject content;

❖ the insistence on high reliability has resulted in curriculum areas that are inadequately represented in examinations, especially where originality of thought amongst students was likely to be involved;

❖ inadequate or superficial feedback provided to students (Brown, 2001; Elton and Johnson, 2002; Mutch and Brown, 2001).

11. Analysis of students' marks in science at one South of England university showed that 5% of their current volume of marks would produce the same degree classification (Gibbs, 1998).

➤ What is the student perspective?

12. According to the joint report of the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE), Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC), and Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals (CVCP) (1977) there are more student complaints about unfair assessment than in any other area (cited in Talbot, 2004).

13. "….a consequence of the students' increasingly consumer-like role in higher education will be to surely demand increasing transparency in assessment – clarity in learning outcomes, assessment criteria, judgements against that criteria, and so on. The evolution of the student's role may – if pushed to the limit – increasingly involve

litigation." (York, 2001.) This has been borne out by disability cases brought against HEIs in Australia where the majority were about a lack of consideration in assessment.

14. There is a "'backwash effect' from the learning that precedes assessment, i.e., students take their cues as to what and how to learn from the assessment that they will be subjected to rather than from the teaching which they have received." Evidence from student diaries shows that in the final year students spend less than 10% of their time on non assessed academic work. (Elton and Johnson, 2002; Gibbs, 1998.)

15. There is "growing interest in the evidence that the form in which the assessment takes place will affect the outcomes, with some (groups of) students performing better with some forms of assessment than others….. This is a particularly crucial issue in relation to summative assessment." (Talbot, 2004.)

16. "….the registrar admitted that after years of word processing she would hate a handwritten exam, too – but unless I was actually disabled, I would be handwriting like everyone else. Apparently there are a few challenges to the status quo every year, but so far not enough of a groundswell to threaten current practice. But how long can the status quo endure?" (Braid, 2004.)

What makes good assessment practice?

17. One pragmatic solution to the challenges of assessment validity and reliability would be to combine several types of assignment utilising "highly objective" approaches (multiple choice, computer assessment, factual reports) with "open ended" methods (creative writing, portfolios, in tray exams, and open ended projects). (University of Plymouth, 2002.)

4. Twenty-one things you need to know about the general assessment debate when considering inclusiveness

18. Evaluating whether different modes of assessment have differential effects on different groups of students is one basis on which to consider whether a department's assessment methods need to be changed. Such an understanding would also help inform how student achievement is judged. (Mutch and Brown, 2001.)

19. Assessment can best support learning when the following criteria are highlighted in policy and practice:

    ❖ the importance of intrinsic motivation amongst students is recognised;

    ❖ confidence building is encouraged;

    ❖ detailed and substantive feedback on assessment outcomes is provided;

    ❖ collaboration is sought rather than competition between students;

    ❖ the need to encourage students' metacognitive skills and ability to monitor and direct their own learning (Black and William, 1998 cited in Elton and Johnson, 2002).

20. Contemporary critics of traditionalism tend to favour a range of more nuanced approaches to assessment encouraging student commitment and feedback through:

    ❖ flexibility and choice of assessment method;

    ❖ portfolios;

    ❖ peer, group and self-assessment;

    ❖ connoisseurship amongst teams of assessors taking in both positivist and interpretivist judgements (Elton and Johnson, 2002; Gibbs, 1998).

21. Writing learning outcomes with flexible interpretations for assessment procedures in mind is highly desirable, for example, the concept of being able to "produce" a learning outcome allows for the learning to be tested both orally and/or in written form (Moon, 2002).

5.0 The SPACE Project survey and research

What this section contains:

- Introduction and background to the SPACE survey and research

- Key questions for the SPACE survey and research

- The components of the SPACE survey and research

  - ❖ The annual SPACE student questionnaire (2002-2005)

  - ❖ The longitudinal study of disabled students

  - ❖ The composition of the annual SPACE questionnaire survey group by disability type

  - ❖ The composition of the annual SPACE questionnaire survey group by subject representation

  - ❖ The composition of the annual SPACE questionnaire survey group by route of entry

  - ❖ Student focus groups

  - ❖ One-to-one, semi-structured, in-depth student interviews

  - ❖ Case studies of piloting alternative and inclusive assessments

5.0 The SPACE Project survey and research

✦ Introduction and background to the SPACE survey and research

The primary purpose of the SPACE Project was to explore disabled student experience of assessment practice in HE and examine ways in which the practice of assessment could be made more inclusive. As a pilot project, we were keen to explore the possibility of removing the necessity for the current reliance on the annual deployment of tens of thousands of "special arrangements" across the sector, the validity of which has never been researched. **(See Section 5.2. How students view "special arrangements" for assessments.)** To form a broad understanding of the impact of traditional assessment practice and how more inclusive assessment procedures could be offered, evaluated and quality assured, the Project sought the participation of disabled and non-disabled students, academic members of staff, educational developers and disability officers.

The remit for the HEFCE funded, three-year SPACE Project developed its focus from an earlier project initiative, the South West Academic Network for Disability Support (SWANDS), also co-ordinated by the University of Plymouth, which developed a benchmarking system for auditing HE practice to comply with the then forthcoming Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA). Providing the HE sector with a guidance platform, the earlier project established through its network and dissemination that a key area for concern amongst disability officers and academic staff was the issue of making "reasonable adjustments" to assessment practice to meet the learning requirements of disabled students. In this respect SPACE is a natural development of the earlier work.

Although established and funded to explore disabled students' experiences, reviewing the first year's work of the Project, the Project Team and the Management Group decided that the SPACE survey would benefit from broadening its remit to also include a cohort of non-disabled students. Adding non-disabled students gave the Project the opportunity to consider inclusive assessments for all students rather

than just evaluating alternative assessments for disabled students. This shift in the Project trajectory was also advantageous and timely in relation to the burgeoning raft of disability legislation relating to placements and qualification bodies (October 2004) and the new DDA 2005. It also supports changes that need to be made to meet the other equalities' agendas.

For the SPACE Project we have chosen to interpret the term assessment in its broadest sense to encapsulate all types of summative and formative assessment characterising undergraduate studies in HE. This includes the myriad forms of in-class assessments, coursework, practice-based assessments and formal examinations. Indeed, in the SWANDS Project we identified 47 specific modes of assessment drawn from the QAA Benchmark Statements and currently used in the HE sector (Waterfield and West, 2002). The same matrix was utilised in the current Project to explore student preferences for a wide range of modes of assessment. **(See Section 5.5. Students' preferred choice of assessment mode and Appendix 1.)**

SPACE Project participation also had its roots in the earlier SWANDS Project in as much as the Project network was made up of a core group of eight South-West Regional HEIs:

- ❖ University of Bath
- ❖ Bath Spa University
- ❖ Dartington College of Arts
- ❖ University College Falmouth
- ❖ University of Gloucestershire
- ❖ University of Plymouth (Project Co-ordinator)
- ❖ College of St Mark and St John
- ❖ University of the West of England

Additional contributions were made by Swindon College.

5.0 The SPACE Project survey and research

The students surveyed for the SPACE Project, representing all year groups drawn from the above consortium, also represent a broad range of course and subject areas within the Schools and Faculties of Arts, Built Environment, Business, Education, Health and Social Care, Science, Social Science and Technology.

From a student perspective, the SPACE Project has been highly participatory and our remit was predicated upon the imperative of seeking the "involvement of disabled people, a key principle underpinning the general duty to promote disability equality" (DDA, 2005) and a key Project driver. The emphasis upon participation was also, of course, extended to the non-disabled student control group. Adopting a range of interrelated research and survey methods (including questionnaires, interviews, observation and ethnography) the Project has collected both quantitative and qualitative data, but the emphasis has been upon exploring the more qualitative responses sought and obtained through open-ended questions. Others have also recognised that quantitative feedback alone can not do justice to the complexity of the every-day-life of disabled people (Abberley, 1991). Hence, qualitative information that was once regarded disparagingly by researchers as "soft data" is now more appropriately valued for its particular subjective capacity to allow respondents to "give their view, rather than asking them to fit their experiences into a framework" (Sikes et al, 2003).[1]

The research focus explored disabled and non-disabled students' experience of course assessment. Over the three-year period students participated in a number of core Project activities as follows:

- ❖ an annual questionnaire survey of disabled students over 3 years;

- ❖ an annual questionnaire survey of non-disabled students over 2 years as a control group;

- ❖ a longitudinal questionnaire of a cohort of disabled students over a 3-year period;

❖ one-to-one, in-depth, semi-structured interviews of disabled and non-disabled students;

❖ trials and evaluations of alternative and inclusive assessments involving disabled and non-disabled students, including an element of ethnographic study;

❖ student focus group activities involving disabled and non-disabled students.

➤ Key questions for the SPACE survey and research

Underpinning both the quantitative and qualitative methods of research was a desire to consider a range of important interrelated issues:

❖ the effectiveness of any "special arrangements" provided for disabled students for examinations, "in-class" tests and other forms of assessment;

❖ the evaluations that disabled and non-disabled students place upon current assessment practice;

❖ the significance of individual learning styles upon assessment performance for both disabled and non-disabled students;

❖ the importance of identifying disabled and non-disabled students' preferred assessment modes.

➤ The components of the SPACE survey and research

In attempting to explore the range of issues at the heart of traditional assessment practice in HE and alternatively to posit a range of quality-assured assessment modes offering inclusivity to both disabled and non-disabled students, the various phases of the Project were conducted as discussed below.

❖ The annual SPACE student questionnaire (2002-2005)

Each year over a three-year period (2002-2005) a student questionnaire was circulated to take "snap shots" of student opinion about their

experiences of assessment and their ideas for how assessments could be made more responsive to individual student learning styles.

For Phase One of the Project a disabled student cohort of respondents was recruited through the dissemination of 200 questionnaires across the Project Partnership, with a return of 49.5%, i.e. 99 respondents formed the disabled student base-line as shown in **Table One**.

Table One: The number of disabled questionnaire respondents by Project phase	
Research phase	**Disabled students returning questionnaires**
Phase One (2002-2003)	99
Phase Two (2003-2004)	69
Phase Three (2004-2005)	61

Over the period of the three years of the Project (termed Phases One, Two and Three) the number of disabled students returning questionnaires changed year-on-year from 99 for Phase One through 69 for Phase Two and 61 for Phase Three. As **Table Two** shows for Phase Two of the Project, a cohort of 45 non-disabled students returned questionnaires, which represented a 37.5% return on the dissemination of 120 questionnaires. For Phase Three of the Project, 25 non-disabled students returned questionnaires.

Table Two: The number of non-disabled questionnaire respondents by Project phase	
Research phase	**Non-disabled students returning questionnaires**
Phase Two (2003-2004)	45
Phase Three (2004-2005)	25

The two cohorts of respondents fluctuated over time reflecting movements of students in and out of placements, students failing to

return questionnaires in one phase but returning them for a later phase, students transferring between courses and, of course, student drop out from institutions. We wished to retain as high a level of questionnaire return as possible and when necessary recruited additional students to both cohorts. In practice the number of students shown to be surveyed by Project phase in **Tables One and Two** is an under-measurement of the total number of students surveyed by questionnaire for the Project overall, which included 145 disabled students and 60 non-disabled students: 205 students in all.

❖ **The longitudinal study of disabled students**

At the end of the 3-year period we were able to confirm that 20 of our disabled respondents had returned questionnaires for each of the "snap shot" years, where all the relevant fields of data had been completed. These 20 disabled students had effectively provided us with longitudinal data, especially important for exploring how student assessment choice changes over time. **(See Section 5.5. Students' preferred choice of assessment modes.)** Considered both longitudinally and as annual "snap shots", these questionnaire returns represent a significant resource of disabled and non-disabled student opinion, as they contain both closed and open-ended questions affording both qualitative and quantitative responses to a broad range of assessment-related questions. The information gained in this way, supported by the in-depth interviews (see below) provided the evidence base for much of the material to be found throughout this document.[2]

5.0 The SPACE Project survey and research

❖ **The composition of the annual SPACE questionnaire survey group by disability type**

Table Three shows the fluctuations in the number and percentages of students by disability type participating in the three phases of the annual survey by questionnaire, with the non-disabled students being introduced as a control group for Phases Two and Three only.

Table Three: The distribution of questionnaire respondents by type of disability by Project phase[3]			
Disability by UCAS coding	**Phase One 99 students**	**Phase Two 114 students**	**Phase Three 86 students**
Specific learning difficulty (for example dyslexia)	67 (68.0%)	43 (37.7%)	35 (40.7%)
Blind or partially sighted	3 (3.0%)	3 (2.6%)	2 (2.3%)
Deaf or hard of hearing	2 (2.0%)	1 (0.9%)	2 (2.3%)
Wheelchair user or has mobility difficulties	5 (5.0%)	4 (3.5%)	1 (1.2%)
Autistic Spectrum Disorder/Asperger Syndrome	1 (1.0%)	1 (0.9%)	0 (0%)
Mental health difficulties	5 (5.0%)	5 (4.4%	4 (4.6%)
Disability that cannot be seen	7 (7.0%)	6 (5.3%)	2 (2.3%)
You have two or more of the above	3 (3.0%)	3 (2.6%)	9[1] (10.5%)
You have a disability/ special need/medical condition not listed above	6 (6.0%)	3 (2.6%)	6 (7.0%)
Not disabled	0 (0%)	45 (39.5%)	25 (29.1%)
Total	**99 (100%)**	**114 (100%)**	**86 (100%)**

5.0 The SPACE Project survey and research

In an attempt to overcome sampling bias, institutions in the Project Partnership were encouraged to survey as many students with different disabilities as possible. Examining **Table Three,** it is obvious that students declaring a disability with a "specific learning difficulty" (i.e., principally dyslexia) form the largest disabled student cohort for each of the three years surveyed. This finding is hardly surprising given that students with dyslexia represent the most significant declared disability in the HE sector in the UK according to the HESA statistics for 2003-2004, i.e., 42.25% of the disabled student population. What is surprising, perhaps, is that students with dyslexia represent a considerably larger population in percentage terms for the Partnership than the national average. Respectively for each Project phase, students with dyslexia constituted 68.0% (Phase One), 62.3% (Phase Two) and 57.4% (Phase Three) of the disabled student population, a reflection of the fact that HEIs in the Project Partnership have a highly successful track record in recruiting and supporting students with dyslexia throughout their HE studies. It is also a facet of the Partnership HEIs' cultural focus on the Arts.

5.0 The SPACE Project survey and research

❖ **The composition of the annual SPACE questionnaire survey group by subject representation**

Table Four shows the distribution in numbers and percentages of respondents by subject studied for each of the three phases of the Project. It should be noted that Phase One represents disabled students only.

Table Four: The distribution of questionnaire respondents by academic subjects studied by Project phase			
Academic Subject	**Phase One 99 students**	**Phase Two 114 students**	**Phase Three 86 students**
Arts (incl. applied, creative and performance, etc.)	26 (26.3%)	34 (29.8%)	22 (25.6%)
Built Environment (incl. architecture, environmental management and garden design, etc.)	5 (5.1%)	13 (11.4%)	5 (5.8%)
Business (incl. tourism and leisure)	6 (6.1%)	3 (2.6%)	3 (3.5%)
Education	11 (11.1%)	15 (13.2%)	7 (8.1%)
Engineering (incl. mathematics)	X	1 (0.9%)	2 (2.3%)
Health and Social Care (incl. community work and sports science)	13 (13.1%)	4 (3.5%)	5 (5.8%)
Science (incl. geography, geology and psychology)	14 (14.1%)	16 (14.0%)	15 (17.5%)
Social Science and Cultural Studies (incl. English, humanities and religion)	11 (11.1%)	13 (11.4%)	17 (19.8%)
Technology (incl. computing and ICT)	2 (2.0%)	7 (6.2%)	3 (3.5%)
Field not completed	11 (11.1%)	8 (7.0%)	7 (8.1%)
Total	**99 (100%)**	**114 (100%)**	**86 (100%)**

As **Table Four** shows, recruitment of students from the various disciplines covered by the SPACE Project was not evenly dispersed across subject areas as the participating institutions offer a greater number of Arts-based subjects and the recruitment of students was not organised to reflect cross-subject parity. The recruitment of questionnaire respondents was low in the areas of Engineering and Technology, but to some extent this was ameliorated, as **Table Seven** (below) shows, through two of the large-scale case studies that we conducted which involved very significant cohorts from Architecture, Building Surveying, Civil Engineering and Construction Management. Equally, the designation of subjects studied to sit within one discipline area or another is a debatable point, as each institution has its own unique way of grouping subject areas into Schools and Faculties. We have tried to remain consistent in this matter to give a sense of the breadth of the subjects studied, rather than try to slavishly follow the designations of subjects to be found in one institution or another in the Project Partnership.

❖ **The composition of the annual SPACE questionnaire survey group by route of entry**

As part of establishing the statistical base-line for the Project, students were asked to identify the route of entry they had followed when accessing an HE course in one of the eight partnership HEIs. Students were offered a choice of five distinct routes of entry covering the range of possibilities. **Table Five** shows all phases of the Project: column one shows disabled students only for Phase One and columns two and three show both disabled and non-disabled student cohorts for Phases Two and Three.

Table Five: The distribution of questionnaire respondents by route of entry by Project phase			
Route of entry into Higher Education	Phase One 99 students	Phase Two 114 students	Phase Three 86 students
A Level or equivalent	59 (59.6%)	61 (53.5%)	42 (48.8%)
Foundation Course	16 (16.2%)	18 (15.8%)	13 (15.1%)
Access Course	11 (11.1%)	11 (9.6%)	9 (10.5%)
GNVQ	3 (3.0%)	7 (6.1%)	5 (5.8%)
Other	8 (8.1%)	13 (11.4%)	17 (19.8%)
Field not filled in	2 (2.0%)	4 (3.6%)	0 (0%)
Total	**99 (100%)**	**114 (100%)**	**86 (100%)**

Table Five shows that the bulk of the student respondents for the annual questionnaires entered HE through the traditional route of A Levels or their equivalent and a smaller percentage arrived via a range of Foundation Courses representing both traditional arts-based practice and more recent science-based approaches, while the number of students entering through Access Courses and the GNVQ route was relatively smaller.

5.0 The SPACE Project survey and research

❖ **Student focus groups**

As part of the Project it was planned to probe student opinion by a variety of methods, including the device of asking both disabled and non-disabled students to participate in student focus groups. The main student focus group was organised at the Project Co-ordinating Partner institution and it ran year-on-year for the duration of the Project, additional to which student focus groups were organised for the purpose of evaluating the large-scale piloting of assessment choice. **(See Section 5.9. Alternative and inclusive assessment case studies.)** There were also a number of satellite student focus groups in some of the other Project Partner institutions. The student focus groups provided a forum for discussing issues raised by the questionnaires and the case studies in an informal environment. Students were able to share their experiences and discuss the interim findings of the survey work and thus influence the development of the Project in a constructive way.

❖ **One-to-one, semi-structured, in-depth student interviews**

To corroborate the findings of the annual "snap shot" questionnaires and provide more in-depth responses to nuance the answers to the open-ended questions, the Project sought out a number of students, disabled and non-disabled, who would be prepared to explore assessment issues in an in-depth way. As **Table Six** shows, 17 students in their second and third years of study (12 disabled and 5 non-disabled) participated in one-to-one, semi-structured, in-depth interviews. These provided a detailed exploration of a broad range of assessment experiences by a group of students willing to reflect upon their experiences in a self-analytical way.

5.0 The SPACE Project survey and research

Table Six: Semi-structured, in-depth, one-to-one student interviews by course, year of study and student type			
Course studied	**Year of study**	**Disabled**	**Non-disabled**
Built Environment	2	X	
Business Studies	3	X	
Combined Honours and Creative Studies	3	X	
Computer Science	3	X	
Dance	3	X	
Education and Music	3	X	
Education and Psychology	2	X	
English	2		X
English	3	X	
English Literature and Education	3		X
History	3	X	
Housing Policy and Management	2	X	
Mathematics	2	X	
Music	3	X	
Psychology	2		X
Speech and Language Therapy	2		X
Sports Development	2		X
Total		**12**	**5**
Total students interviewed		**17**	

The feedback derived from these semi-structured interviews has been used in conjunction with the evidence from the annual questionnaires to provide the sample student voice that informs so many of the sections of this document[4]. Indeed, it is our opinion that the student voice aspect of the research was a key element in our platform for conducting participatory research, we listened carefully and that encouraged both disabled and non-disabled students to be involved in an engaged way that allowed the full and free expression of their views.

5.0 The SPACE Project survey and research

❖ **Case studies of piloting alternative and inclusive assessments**

The final element in our repertoire of research and survey methods, indeed in many respects its culmination, was the activity of piloting alternative and inclusive assessment modes. These piloting activities were undertaken as part of our initial Project remit to explore the strengths and weaknesses, through student and staff evaluation, of a range of assessment methods not currently or commonly in use in the subject areas piloting them. As **Table Seven** indicates, 8 case studies were undertaken during the lifetime of the Project. These 8 case studies represent a breadth of study areas and involved the participation of 480 students, of whom 54 were disabled, in both small-scale and large-scale pilot activities. A total of 140 students were part of the ethnographic research for **Case Study 3**. In **Case Study 8**, a survey was undertaken in three parts with the 146 disabled and non-disabled students, to allow for self-reflection on their assessment choice.

Table Seven: Student participation in case study activities by subject area and student type			
Case study	Subject area	Disabled students	Non-disabled students
Alternative assessments – for disabled students only			
1	Learning and Teaching in HE (PG Cert.)	1	0
2	HND Fine Art	1	0
Inclusive assessments for all students – offering more accessibility than the traditional modes			
3	Extended Science	14	126
4	BA (Hons) 3d Design for Sustainability BA (Hons) Spatial Design	8	42
Inclusive assessments for all students – offered as an option in assessment choice			
5	BEng Civil Engineering BSc Building Surveying BA Architecture	8	112
6	BA (Hons) Humanities	6	15
7	MSc Health and Social Care	1	0
8	BA Architecture BSc Building Surveying and the Environment BSc Construction Management	15	131
Total		54	426
Total students		480	

5.0 The SPACE Project survey and research

The outcome of these pilot activities can be found as a set of case studies elsewhere in this document. **(See Section 5.9. Alternative and inclusive assessment case studies.)**

Finally, it must be observed that the Project's triangulation strategy derives from the combination of, on the one hand, empirical research through the collection and interpretation of student and staff feedback, and on the other hand, non-empirical research involving an extensive literature review on inclusive education and assessment. Complimentary to the three phases of research conducted within the Project are the development of alternative and inclusive assessment case studies that also form part of the triangulation strategy.

Section Notes

1. From the literature review conducted by Melanie Parker.

2. See, for example, **Section 5.4. How students view their current assessment modes; Section 5.6. What students say about assessments based on group work; Section 5.7. What students say about assessments based upon oral presentations and Section 5.8. What students say about staff feedback on assessment performance.**

3. The division of students by disability type used in this table and throughout the Project, for comparative purposes and cross-sector coherence, is drawn from the UCAS Disability Codes. These, unfortunately, lack clarity from an analytical point of view, not least because the designation "you have two or more of the above" conceals the actual number of students recorded by disability type.

4. See, for example, **Section 5.4. How students view their current assessment modes; Section 5.6. What students say about assessments based on group work; Section 5.7. What students say about assessments based upon oral presentations and Section 5.8. What students say about staff feedback on assessment performance.**

Summary points

- In a variety of ways, we have attempted to survey the opinion of in the region of 800 students during this 3-year Project.

- From a survey population of 320 disseminated questionnaires we had an initial positive response from 144 students of which 99 were disabled students at Phase One and 45 were non-disabled students at Phase Two.

- In total we surveyed 205 students by questionnaire during the annual "snap shot" surveys.

- A core group of 20 disabled students were surveyed longitudinally for all 3 phases of the Project (2002-2005).

- Students with specific learning difficulties represented the largest disabled student cohort for all phases of the Project questionnaire.

- Students from an Arts background (applied, creative and performance, etc.) constituted the largest subject-based cohort for all phases of the Project questionnaire.

- Students entering HE though the A Level route represented the largest cohort for types of entry route for all phases of the Project questionnaire.

- A central student focus group operated throughout the lifetime of the Project at the Co-ordinating Partner Institution and focus groups were organised to evaluate the major trials of inclusive assessments. Satellite student focus groups met in some of the other partnership institutions.

- Of the student questionnaire respondents, 17 participated in the in-depth interviews.

- 480 students, disabled and non-disabled, participated in the large-scale piloting of alternative and inclusive assessments, with 140 students taking part in the ethnography reviewed in **Case Study 3** and 146 undertaking surveys over the lifetime of **Case Study 8**.

5.1 The challenge of assessment change for institutions and academic staff

What this section contains:

- The challenges perceived by academic staff

- Indicative resistant staff comments

- Recurring staff themes

5.1 The challenge of assessment change for institutions and academic staff

◄ The challenges perceived by academic staff

During the lifetime of the SPACE Project (2002-2005) and to a significant extent the lifetime of its predecessor SWANDS (2000-2002) the issue of change to assessment practice has been hotly debated by both colleagues within the Project partnerships and within the broader academic community through dissemination activities. Our initial interest in assessment issues concerned the need to make assessment equitable for disabled students as part of the remit of making "reasonable adjustments" to satisfy the legislative imperatives of the SENDA 2001. This was formalised as part of the SWANDS Project audit tool which contained a section on auditing assessment practice (Waterfield and West, 2002), the feedback from which was instrumental in the planning of the current SPACE Project.

More recently, as a value-added element of the SPACE Project, we extended our focus to include non-disabled students in an attempt to ground issues of disability equity in the context of making assessment inclusive for all students. We wanted to shift the debate away from the narrow parameters and binary labelling of students as "disabled" and "non-disabled" and consider instead the relationship between individual learning styles and the best assessment methods for measuring students' achievement of the learning outcomes. Needless to say during the developmental processes offered by planning and delivering two major projects and through the dissemination activities which have accompanied them, wide discussion amongst colleagues has been both challenging for the project teams and challenging for staff being confronted with our strongly argued case for assessment change. It is these challenges of change that we wish to address in this section.

5.1 The challenge of assessment change for institutions and academic staff

As part of our dissemination remit the discussion has been extended to colleagues nationally and internationally through conference platforms and special interest groups. The Project team wished to engage the academic community in exploring **three key action questions:**

❖ How can we change assessment policies and current academic practice to remove discrimination and exclusion?

❖ How can we assess ability and not the effects of disability?

❖ How can we accommodate the learning styles of a range of learners at assessment?

We discovered through these forums of staff debate that our three interrelated questions raised a range of important responses. In the current climate of staff overload and financial stringency, it became clear that raising questions of change to promote inclusive assessment engendered a lively discussion! On the positive side, colleagues believed this was a major way forward to respond to the diversity of the student body and would reduce many of the negative issues that arise out of current assessment practice, and hence wished to engage their institutions and departments in direct action. On the other hand, these discussions often raised anxiety, invoked a sense of a good idea that would be almost impossible to implement and in some instances provoked a range of generally resistant replies.

Given the remit of the Project to promote change we will engage here with some of the resistance, exploring solutions through deploying arguments and ideas from the SPACE Partnership, student and conference feedback.

5.1 The challenge of assessment change for institutions and academic staff

✦ Indicative resistant staff comments

Although we recognise the often heartfelt nature of the comments below we nevertheless believe that they stem from a resistance to change which could be influenced by a range of factors such as: overwork, too much pressure, lack of resources, absence of opportunities to engage with the academic debate around teaching and learning, etc. In this context we note that the Staff and Educational Development Association (2004) have identified "53 interesting ways in which colleagues resist change".

> ◗ "It's a good idea in theory but I think it's the slippery slope to the end of the difference that is HE if we use assessment methods used in FE."
>
> ◗ "I don't see why we should change – we've done exams for thirty years and not had any students complaining."
>
> ◗ "I am happy to do it but how do you get a department to change? I don't have the power."
>
> ◗ "How can we be sure that an inclusive assessment will assess the desired learning outcomes?"
>
> ◗ "There is no way our external examiners will go for this."
>
> ◗ "It is the professional bodies you need to talk to – we are willing but our hands are tied."

While it is not straightforward to unravel the underlying reasons for colleagues' resistance to change proposals in the consideration of inclusive assessments, we feel it is important to engage with the recurring themes, identify the issues and share the interventions and ideas of colleagues who wish to embrace innovation for inclusivity. Such is the conserving power of traditionalism that a failure to deal with these recurring themes threatens the credibility of and engagement

with this type of innovative work, both from the point of view of making assessment inclusive for the majority of disabled students and other diverse student groups and from the point of view of the generic assessment debate where traditional views are also endemic. The widening participation agenda, the promotion of the notion of students as "customers" and the incipient culture of litigation requires change.

✦ Recurring staff themes

The remaining pages of this section address the recurring themes listed below in more detail and provide some recommendations for strategic change.

1. Making strategic change within institutions and programmes is difficult.

2. There are so many barriers to applying new thinking to a sector steeped in traditionalism.

3. Whatever the alternative or inclusive assessment method, students will still need to demonstrate the acquisition of the learning outcomes.

4. Unfamiliar assessment methods will require new marking policies to be embraced.

5. Change always requires resources.

6. The power of the professional bodies.

7. The threat of plagiarism.

5.1 The challenge of assessment change for institutions and academic staff

1. Making strategic change within institutions and programmes is difficult

Comments

❖ Under the DDA 2005 school examining bodies will be covered by the Act therefore students will have an increasing expectation of more inclusive assessment practice when entering HE.

❖ "Inclusion will require organisational learning, reviewing systems and mechanisms that are already in place to eliminate discrimination." (ECU, 2005b.)

❖ In the pursuit of inclusive assessment practice a reflexive assessment policy affords the opportunity for considered change.

❖ Seeking disabled student feedback of their assessment experience, for positive change, can prevent departments making costly "special arrangements" or amending unsuitable assessment practices or continuing ad hoc arrangements.

❖ Anticipate that some academic members of staff might resist attempts to formulate inclusive assessment policies and practice at school and programme level.

❖ Professional development for staff has to be a major tool for change.

5.1 The challenge of assessment change for institutions and academic staff

Recommendations for strategic change

- ❖ Identify the key strategists and staff responsible for establishing policy and those knowledgeable about good assessment practice for the consideration of inclusive assessments. Academic staff need direction from the top at faculty and programme level. This issue is too important and pertinent to leave until policy is reviewed.

- ❖ Consider inclusive assessments as a regular feature on the agenda of institutional, faculty and school Learning and Teaching Committees to facilitate their inclusion into current and new course developments and provide a forum to discuss the resource applications and the staff development requirements.

- ❖ Use course development and review as vehicles to address the assessment platform, hence providing an opportunity to promote student choice and coherence for the learning experience and valuing student diversity, whilst promoting inclusivity, academic standards, accountability and transparency.

- ❖ Senior managers are urged to acknowledge "….that assessment expectations are appraised from the point of view of best educational practice, and that curricula are adjusted as appropriate, rather than simply expecting existing assessment requirements to be amended in order to cater for students with disabilities". (York, 2001.)

- ❖ Draw upon the expertise of a disability specialist and disabled students for policy development, review and evaluation, taking inclusivity as the remit rather than highlighting "disability" as difference.

- ❖ Student expectations of assessment should be appraised as a key component of curriculum development. Undertaking an impact assessment annually in the area of assessment will also contribute to meeting the Specific Duty requirement to monitor the institutional Disability Equality Plan.

5.1 The challenge of assessment change for institutions and academic staff

❖ Clearly set out the parameters of inclusive assessment in the course documentation, both for student information, course approval and review purposes.

❖ Seek research and development opportunities through Higher Education Academy (HEA) subject centres and learning and teaching development monies to pilot new and inclusive assessment regimes and research their effectiveness.

❖ Define a suitable strategy for continuing staff development. Use learning and teaching courses for new staff to engender debate and ideas for alternative and inclusive assessment practice.

❖ Monitor and evaluate student outcomes and student satisfaction at programme and school level to demonstrate the effects of change.

❖ Share good practice for transferability to other non-cognate subject areas as a catalyst for the adoption of tried and tested assessment methods deployed in other curriculum areas.

❖ Engage with and disseminate to the relevant external players such as the HEA, SEDA, HEA Subject Centres, Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETLs), professional bodies and external examiners.

2. There are so many barriers to applying new thinking to a sector steeped in traditionalism

Comments

- ❖ "The achievements of the learning objectives and graduateness are not satisfactorily served by traditionalism." (Elton and Johnston, 2002.) Considering change for inclusive practice will afford the opportunity to improve current practice.

- ❖ The written examination which originated simply as the easiest means of testing the power of mathematical problems was everywhere adopted as an educational panacea.

- ❖ Traditional assessment practices could have a negative impact on student rates of attrition if they fail to develop learner confidence and meet the students' preferred assessment modes.

- ❖ The performance of students with dyslexia is known to drop on average by 20 marks when subject to time-constrained examinations rather than assessment through course work.

- ❖ "Diversity is upon us and we will be changed by it." (King, 2004.)

- ❖ The transformation of systems requires the valuing of diversity and the concomitant changes to culture and structure within the institution.

- ❖ Inclusive assessment choice allows students to monitor their own work loads and select assessments that are manageable given academic and personal pressures, e.g., work and family commitments. It also promotes student responsibility for their own learning.

- ❖ Being "fit to graduate" is an academic principle which can easily accommodate inclusive assessment.

5.1 The challenge of assessment change for institutions and academic staff

Recommendations for strategic change

- ❖ Critically examine learning and teaching strategies at institutional and faculty level to remove barriers to using assessment modes other than time-limited examinations.

- ❖ Examinations and the widespread use of the traditional essay format should be de-emphasised as the "gold standards" of assessment practice.

- ❖ Evaluate whether different modes of assessment have differential effects on different groups of students, as one basis on which to consider whether a department's assessment methods need to be changed. Such an understanding would also help inform how student achievement is judged at individual course level. (Mutch and Brown, 2001.)

- ❖ Develop innovation in assessment for a positive course or discipline outcome worthy of flagging as "excellent practice, capable of wider dissemination" in programme reviews.

- ❖ Formulate a broad and flexible assessment strategy, increase the use of formative assessments and improve the pattern of assessment to meet the requirements, learning styles and learning experiences of diverse learners.

- ❖ Consider the work of contemporary critics of traditionalism who favour a range of more nuanced approaches to assessment, encouraging student commitment and timely feedback to students through:

  - flexibility and choice of assessment method;

  - portfolios;

  - peer, group and self-assessment ;

  - connoisseurship amongst teams of assessors taking in both positivist and interpretivist judgements. (Elton and Johnson, 2002; Gibbs, 1998.)

5.1 The challenge of assessment change for institutions and academic staff

- ❖ Combine several types of assignment utilising "highly objective" approaches (multiple choice, computer assessment, factual reports) with "open-ended" methods (creative writing, portfolios, in-tray exams, and open-ended projects) as a pragmatic solution to the immediate challenge of assessment validity, reliability and equality of opportunity (University of Plymouth, 2002).

- ❖ Use the opportunity for the requirement of Student Transcripts and Personal Development Planning for employment, to provide a backwards linkage to assessment methods. Expanding the breadth and flexibility of assessment methods to demonstrate learner development will be increasingly important and necessary.

3. Whatever the alternative or inclusive assessment method, students will still need to demonstrate the acquisition of the learning outcomes

Comments

❖ The corollary of an inclusive approach to assessment is not lowered academic standards.

❖ The traditional emphasis upon accountability does not necessarily support capturing student attention and effort, generating appropriate learning activity or providing feedback to the student (Gibbs, 1998).

❖ Do we consider the diversity of student background, learning experiences and the diversity that exists in the daily realities of student life when we design assessment tasks and determine the necessary learning outcomes?

Recommendations for strategic change

❖ Be clear about how current assessment methods measure the learning outcomes and how the chosen repertoire of alternative and **inclusive assessment** methods would fulfil or better fulfil the same task and better serve all students.

❖ Write learning outcomes with flexible interpretations for assessment procedures in mind, for example, the concept of being able to "produce" a learning outcome allows for the learning to be tested orally, visually, practically and/or in written form (Moon, 2002). This notion might reduce the need for an alternative assessment that is for a minority of disabled students only.

❖ Ensure that inclusive assessment policies are carefully worded to allow flexibility in how learning outcomes can be assessed.

4. Unfamiliar assessment methods will require new marking policies to be embraced

Comments

❖ As long as the learning outcomes link directly to the assessment criteria then the marking process will be clearer and more transferable.

❖ If the person marking is confident that the assessment mode supports and enhances the students' learning in a way that allows the student to demonstrate their understanding, then there is no requirement for complicated marking concessions which treat students differently and are difficult to standardise.

❖ The pressure of increased marking loads has privileged the use of examinations, tests and computer marked assessments (CMAs). The emphasis on allocating marks (to distinguish between students and to distinguish degree classifications) and on accountability (to demonstrate to outsiders that standards are satisfactory) does not necessarily support capturing student attention and effort, generating appropriate learning activity or providing feedback to the student. (Gibbs, 1998.)

Recommendations for strategic change

❖ Senior staff with responsibility for teaching and learning at school level need to ensure transparency and consistency in the marking and grading procedures when different types of assessment modes are offered for the assessment of the same course or module elements.

5.1 The challenge of assessment change for institutions and academic staff

❖ Students will need supporting through the process of assessment choice and to be offered guidance to understand their own learning development, to ensure that the assessment mode(s) chosen reflect their optimum learning styles in order to maximize their achievement.Effective and timely feedback is crucial to this process. **(See section 5.8. What students say about staff feedback on their assessment performance and Section 5.9. Alternative and inclusive assessment case studies.)**

❖ Continuing professional development should be offered to staff to ensure that they are familiar with the programme strategy for aligning the designing of assessment tasks, their linkage to the learning outcomes and marking procedures.

❖ Programme leaders will have to be responsible for ensuring that external examiners are clearly briefed on the rationale behind the range of inclusive assessment modes in order that moderation of marking is based on clear criteria.

5. Change always requires resources

Comments

❖ Addressing our positive duties under the DDA 2005 will have real cost benefits through pre-empting the likelihood of costly litigation where potentially discriminatory policies and practices surrounding assessment have not been eradicated.

❖ Factoring disability equality into an institution's function at the outset as part of a more general equality strategy is recommended in the DDA Code of Practice and is economically good practice.

❖ "Assessment needs to be feasible and practical. How much time is spent by members of the department on assessment including preparation of assessment tasks, marking, checking results, and preparing reports and attendance at meetings? Are there alternative methods that could assess the learning outcomes but which are less burdensome for staff and students? Are the physical resources sufficient to support the methods of assessment?" (Mutch and Brown, 2001.)

❖ "It is clear that some methods of assessment are far more time consuming for hard-pressed academics to prepare and administer than are others." (Talbot, 2004.)

❖ "The current arrangement of thousands of special provisions annually for the assessment of disabled students, which has never been costed, is becoming untenable and demands complicated administrative systems centrally and departmentally which stretch resources, physical facilities and administration within the sector." (Waterfield and West, 2002.)

5.1 The challenge of assessment change for institutions and academic staff

❖ "I don't think improving the assessment base and strategy in the ways we and the research are suggesting will save time but it is pretty certain that improving assessment will develop better learners, improve the quality of our provision and hence make academic life more enjoyable for staff and students. If we do this well the investment will pay off." (Dr. D. Harwood, Director of Science Education, University of Plymouth.)

❖ "Among the challenges associated with universally designed assessments is the possibility that development costs will increase at a time when the costs of assessments are already seen by some as excessive…….the initial incorporation of universal design elements may seem expensive." (Thompson et al, 2004.)

Recommendations for strategic change

❖ Collect data on the cost of administering "special arrangements" for the assessments of disabled students. List costs and identify the reasons for the increased usage of student support services at times of end of year summative assessment, student appeals procedures and student complaints regarding assessment.

❖ Consider the redeployment of resources identified from the above exercise to support the initial development stages of inclusive assessments, new marking regimes and staff development.

❖ Impact assess current assessment practice for student satisfaction and accessibility and review accordingly to reduce barriers and the possibility of litigation and to support the marketing strategy.

5.1 The challenge of assessment change for institutions and academic staff

❖ Build accessibility of assessment into course development, validation and review by ensuring that a range of assessment modes are identified and resource implications specified to prevent ad hoc and unscheduled use of resources to meet "one-off", unplanned demands.

❖ If the consideration of inclusive assessments is part of the scholarship of teaching and learning and staff are rewarded for that scholarly activity, it will be less burdensome and less stressful.

6. The power of the professional bodies

Comments

❖ The Institute of Employment Studies (Hurstfield et al., 2004) found that one-third of the qualification bodies surveyed did not know whether the new disability regulation (DDA Part 2) applied to them. Only one-fifth had reviewed their competency standards to ensure they were not discriminating.

❖ Professional qualifications and trade bodies are covered under DDA Part 2 (amended 2003) and have a legislative duty to make "reasonable adjustments". With the new DDA 2005 extension to general bodies, disabled applicants to HE will have expectations that will have to be met.

❖ We need to distinguish between what the professional body really demands, what we imagine it demands and what we can achieve locally.

❖ "We use portfolios, orals, video formats, team based self-assessment, continuous assessment and are always reviewing practice." (British Automation and Robotic Association.)

Recommendations for strategic change

❖ Institutions must ensure that any changes to assessment practice do not compromise academic standards nor students' "fitness to practice" in professional programmes.

❖ Initiate opportunities for joint activities between academics, HEA subject centres, and professional bodies with regard to educational and professional development programmes.

7. The threat of plagiarism

Comments

❖ Attempting to marry assessment methods to the students' preferred learning styles and pace of learning is less likely to result in cheating and more likely to encourage a positive engagement with assessment and learning.

❖ The student is more likely to be able to demonstrate their achievement if flexibility and choice removes the negative impact of factors such as juggling paid employment and study, family responsibilities and study or the impact of a disability and meets their own preferred mode of learning.

❖ The risk of plagiarism, and indeed the tendency to focus upon this enhanced sense of risk, has contributed to the maintenance of traditionalist and positivist approaches to assessment, i.e., the enthusiasm for unseen examinations (Stefani and Carroll, 2001).

❖ Plagiarism in its current dominant form, the unattributed stealing of the writing of others (the ease with which sources on the internet can support cut-and-paste or be purchased from "paper mills"), would be dealt a significant blow if written assignments were merely one method of assessment within a much wider repertoire of approaches.

❖ To focus upon the attendant risks of plagiarism as a reason not to consider inclusive assessment practice is a smoke screen, which prevents the challenging of traditional academic practice and a difficult to sustain belief in the fairness of the current system.

❖ We are seeing a drift back to examinations because they are seen to be the ultimate response to academic dishonesty, but plagiarism can be addressed via an assessment design that uses the principles of choice and flexibility.

Recommendations for strategic change

❖ Students and staff should be made aware of the parameters of plagiarism on the one hand, and on the other hand, preventative strategies should be applied to avoid it.

❖ Provide a range of more flexible assessments to reduce stresses caused by poor time management and planning skills for students unable to juggle the choices, both social and academic, that face them during the semester (Harris, 2004).

❖ In considering a range of more inclusive assessment methods, the following recommendations can be applied:

- use problem solving or creative writing assessments where information cannot be found in the exact format requested;

- examine unfamiliar forms of assessment to determine if they are more or less prone to plagiarism than the programme's more traditional methods;

- seek examples of good practice from other disciplines for transferability;

- elements of portfolios can be undertaken in class with individual project aspects required on key dates;

- encourage students to regard the assessment process steps (research outline, draft structure, selecting a bibliography, etc.) as learning elements;

- bibliographical resources can include lecture or seminar notes, very recent publications or sources derived from the department;

- ensure lengthy periods between posting assignment topics and cut-off dates for completion.

5.1 The challenge of assessment change for institutions and academic staff

Summary points

- The SPACE Project (2002-2005) and before it the SWANDS Project (2000-2002) have developed an on-going dialogue with academic staff regarding disabled students and the challenge of providing equitable and latterly inclusive assessment.

- Through Project and dissemination-based dialogue with academic staff, seven recurring themes were identified as barriers to change.

- To each of the barriers it was possible to interject a range of pertinent comments and provide targeted recommendations for strategic change.

- Although each recurring theme was provided with its own targeted rationale, common denominators were also present in change driven by legislation, senior level responsibility, flexibility in practice, monitoring and evaluation of outcomes and, of course, dialogue with disabled and non-disabled students.
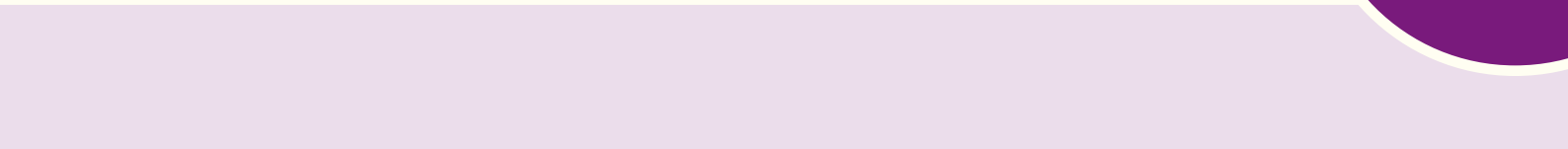
5.2 How disabled students view "special arrangements" for assessments

What this section contains:

- The contingent approach of "special arrangements"

- Indicative comments by disabled students on "special arrangements" for examinations

- Indicative comments by disabled students on "special arrangements" for in-class tests

- Indicative comments by disabled students on "special arrangements" for other forms of assessment

- Commentary on the disabled students' evaluations of "special arrangements"

5.2 How disabled students view "special arrangements" for assessments

✦ **The contingent approach of "special arrangements"**

> **Contingent approach** ("special arrangements" such as extra time, amanuensis, own room, etc.) which is essentially a form of assimilation into an existing system.

Since the early 1990s, when the number of disabled students entering HE was relatively low, the main approach to meeting the assessment requirements of this student cohort took the form of the provision of "special arrangements". There has been a widespread assumption amongst colleagues that the accommodation of disabled students through the **contingent approach** has "levelled the educational playing field". In a decade-and-a-half this provision has grown exponentially to become a resource hungry edifice and, paradoxically, its value to students has not been explored. Very few observers have drawn attention to the lack of research into the validity of "special arrangements" (Williams and Ceci, 1999) or the values enshrined in such accommodations (Sharp and Earl, 2000).

To begin to evaluate the **contingent approach** from a disabled student point of view we made the provision of "special arrangements" one of the foci of our annual "snap shot" questionnaires. We divided the arena of "special arrangements" into three distinct categories, reflecting disabled student experience of assessment practices across the breadth of discipline areas:

❖ examinations

❖ in-class assessments

❖ other types of assessment (course work, design tasks, essays, fieldwork reports, etc.)

Table Eight shows the distribution of "special arrangements" received by disabled students, for each category of assessment type, through the three phases of the SPACE Project.

5.2 How disabled students view "special arrangements" for assessments

Assessment type	Phase One			Phase Two		Phase Three	
	Yes	**No**	**Field not completed**	**Yes**	**No**	**Yes**	**No**
Table Eight: The distribution of "special arrangements" received by disabled students by assessment type by Project phase							
Examinations	63 (63.6%)	36 (36.4%)	0 (0%)	35 (50.7%)	34 (49.3%)	34 (55.7%)	27 (44.3%)
In-class assessments	31 (31.4%)	63 63.6%)	5 (5.0%)	11 (16.0%)	58 (84.0%)	10 (16.4%)	51 (83.6%)
Other assessment types	28 (28.3%)	66 (66.7%)	5 (5.0%)	14 (20.3%)	55 (79.7%)	18 (29.5%)	43 (70.5%)
Total disabled students by project phase	**99**			**69**		**61**	

To evaluate the student experience we posed a series of questions during Phases One, Two and Three of our survey. We wanted to gauge the number of disabled students in receipt of "special arrangements" amongst our survey cohort but more importantly seek their views, positive and negative, of their experience of the allocation of "special arrangements". We have organised their responses looking firstly at "special arrangements" for examinations, then in-class tests and finally at other forms of assessment. Within each of these three assessment categories we have selected, where available, a series of indicative student comments reflecting the breadth of opinion expressed: being positive, ambivalent, reflecting on an absence of provision and finally negative. It is also worth remarking on an important discrepancy that appears in some of the questionnaire responses. Some students answering unequivocally "yes" in a tick box to affirm that their requirements had been met by a "special arrangement", nevertheless sometimes delivered an ambivalent set of comments in the respective questionnaire dialogue box. The latter have been attributed the status of an ambivalent reply for the purposes of analysis and the presentation of the findings. This equivocation was also evidenced through the in-depth interviews and feedback from student

5.2 How disabled students view "special arrangements" for assessments

focus groups which consolidated the recorded sense of ambivalence. Taken together, it reflected a complex negotiation by disabled students of "special arrangements", where there was a clear reluctance to be critical of a system specially put in place that might, in student minds, be removed through adverse comment. We will return to this issue shortly.

➤ Indicative comments by disabled students on "special arrangements" for examinations

As **Table Nine** shows, over the three phases of the Project, on average, 56.7% of the disabled students were in receipt of "special arrangements" for examinations. Of these students, 66.9% believed their requirements had been met, whereas 17.9% believed they had not, 14.2% were ambivalent and 0.94% failed to answer the question.

Table Nine: Comparison of disabled student evaluations of "special arrangements" for examinations by Project phase					
Project phase	**Total number of recipients of "special arrangements"**	How "special arrangements" met student requirements for examinations			
		Satisfied	Not satisfied	Ambivalent	Field not completed
Phase One 99 responses	63 (63.6%)	48 (76.2%)	12 (19.0%)	3 (4.8%)	0 (0%)
Phase Two 69 responses	35 (50.7%)	21 (60.0%)	7 (20.0%)	7 (20.0%)	0 (0%)
Phase Three 61 responses	34 (55.7%)	22 (64.7%)	5 (14.7%)	6 (17.7%)	1 (2.9%)
Average %	**56.7%**	**66.9%**	**17.9%**	**14.2%**	**0.94%**

5.2 How disabled students view "special arrangements" for assessments

❖ **Sample positive comments about "special arrangements" for examinations**

✳ "Without the special arrangements I wouldn't be able to demonstrate my potential." (Student with a disability not listed by the UCAS codes, studying Social Science.)

✳ "These arrangements help to take away the pain and discomfort of writing for long periods of time." (Student with a disability not listed by the UCAS codes, studying Education.)

✳ "With special arrangements I finish the paper." (Student with mental health difficulties, studying Science.)

✳ "I felt happier sitting in a smaller group as it enabled me to concentrate." (Student with dyslexia, studying Social Science.)

✳ "The colour filter took the glare off the page in order for me to read the questions better." (Student with dyslexia, studying Science.)

✳ "Without the single room, extra time and rest breaks I wouldn't be able to show what my disability hides." (Student with two or more disabilities, studying Science.)

✳ "Extra time was a great benefit to me." (Student with dyslexia, studying Health and Social Care.)

✳ "Being able to use the computer, wrist rest, portable chair and typing rather than handwriting helps, as my arm swells through extensive writing." (Student with two or more disabilities, studying Education.)

5.2 How disabled students view "special arrangements" for assessments

❖ **Sample ambivalent comments about "special arrangements" for examinations**

✳ "Extra time is useful but I don't know if it helps demonstrate my potential." (Student who is blind or partially sighted, studying Business.)

✳ "I have used every minute of this extra time and feel 30 minutes rather than the 20 minutes would reduce my anxiety further." (Student with dyslexia, studying Science.)

✳ "The extra time is helpful but I feel embarrassed about taking my exam in a separate room to my peers." (Student with dyslexia, studying Arts.)

✳ "I was allocated a room to myself which helped, but I did feel a little isolated." (Student with dyslexia, studying Science.)

✳ "I have chosen to use a computer this year because I had problems with the scribe." (Student with dyslexia, studying Health and Social Care.)

✳ "Mostly they are useful but with my condition there is always the possibility that I will feel very ill on the assessment day." (Student with a disability not listed by the UCAS codes, studying Engineering.)

5.2 How disabled students view "special arrangements" for assessments

❖ **Sample negative comments about "special arrangements" for examinations**

✴ "The single room allocated for my last exam was completely inappropriate. It was a very hot day and I had to have the window open. Students outside were playing loud music and it was right next door to the accommodation block." (Student with an unseen disability, studying Social Science.)

✴ "The room on my own doesn't help me demonstrate my potential. It just stops me being embarrassed about breaking down in front of other students and not causing a disturbance." (Student with a disability not listed by the UCAS codes, studying Science.)

✴ "I was in a shared room with other disabled students who had their questions read out to them which can be disrupting." (Student with dyslexia, studying Health and Social Care.)

✴ "We started late and were all put together for extra time and people wanted to know 'why', so I felt a bit stupid." (Student with dyslexia, studying Business.)

✴ "I find invigilators tend to be quite mixed and some don't seem to have any idea of what's going on. I often have to explain rest breaks to them." (Student with mobility difficulties, studying Engineering.)

✴ "The extra time is not really that helpful as I get tired within the normal two hour exam." (Student with a disability not listed by the UCAS codes, studying Business.)

✴ "There wasn't enough extra time. If I write fast the quality of my writing gets worse and probably makes it harder to read. Also if I write quicker spelling and punctuation suffers." (Student with dyslexia, studying Social Science.)

✴ "I feel great apprehension in using my scribe." (Student with dyslexia, studying Education.)

5.2 How disabled students view "special arrangements" for assessments

⬥ **Indicative comments by disabled students on "special arrangements" for in-class tests**

As **Table Ten** shows, over the three phases of the Project, on average, 21.3% of the disabled students were in receipt of "special arrangements" for in-class tests. Of these students, 60.7% believed their requirements had been met, whereas 24.7% believed they had not, 12.4% were ambivalent and 2.2% failed to answer the question.

Table Ten: Comparison of disabled student evaluations of "special arrangements" for in-class tests by Project phase					
Project phase	**Total number of recipients of "special arrangements"**	**How "special arrangements" met student requirements for in-class tests**			
		Satisfied	Not satisfied	Ambivalent	Field not completed
Phase One 99 responses	31 (31.4%)	21 (67.7%)	8 (25.8%)	0 (0%)	2 (6.5%)
Phase Two 69 responses	11 (16.0%)	6 (54.5%)	2 (18.2%)	3 (27.3%)	0 (0%)
Phase Three 61 responses	10 (16.4%)	6 (60.0%)	3 (30.0%)	1 (10.0%)	0 (0%)
Average %	**21.3%**	**60.7%**	**24.7%**	**12.4%**	**2.2%**

5.2 How disabled students view "special arrangements" for assessments

❖ **Sample positive comments about "special arrangements" for in-class tests**

⁎ "Sitting near the exit with a 10-minute rest break each hour lowers my anxiety and therefore my panic threshold is higher." (Student with mental health difficulties, studying Science.)

⁎ "Having a note taker is very helpful." (Student with dyslexia, studying Social Science.)

⁎ "Having handouts and lecture notes provided before the start of in-class tests is essential because I have a very short-term memory and can't copy things down from overheads." (Student with dyslexia, studying Health and Social Care.)

⁎ "With my handouts on coloured paper I can read it better." (Student with dyslexia, studying Social Science.)

⁎ "I was enabled to think carefully and read the question properly because I had more time." (Student with dyslexia, studying Education.)

❖ **Sample ambivalent comments about "special arrangements" for in-class tests**

⁎ "These are helpful but lecturers have to be reminded by me before the test takes place." (Student with dyslexia, studying Health and Social Care.)

⁎ "Extra time is beneficial to me. However the arrangements are not always satisfactory and there is usually some sort of disturbance during the extra time period." (Student with dyslexia, studying Social Science.)

5.2 How disabled students view "special arrangements" for assessments

❖ **Sample comments on the absence of provision of "special arrangements" for in-class tests**

✷ "I didn't know there were special arrangements for these." (Student with two or more disabilities, studying Technology.)

✷ "I am at a disadvantage. I have had to take in-class tests in the corridor outside the room because it had steps I couldn't get up." (Student with two or more disabilities, studying Science.)

✷ "If I had been more comfortable I would have been able to work better rather than thinking about how my back hurts." (Student with mobility difficulties, studying Social Science.)

✷ "There are no special arrangements for presentations. I feel the first presentation I gave that my grade was, in part, affected by my disability as I struggled to read the overhead projector." (Student who is blind or partially sighted, studying Social Science.)

✷ "Not being able to read something meant I had to try and memorize it. This is particularly difficult and I suffered nerves because of this, which ultimately lead to a fairly poor performance." (Student who is blind or partially sighted, studying Business.)

✷ "Sometimes for in-class assessments I don't always have these special arrangements. For example, I didn't do the seminar tests on a PC and I didn't have any extra time. Therefore I couldn't keep up with the test and realise my true potential." (Student with two or more disabilities, studying Social Science.)

✷ "I feel I could do with extra time but don't know how to access this for in-class tests." (Student with mental health difficulties, studying Science.)

5.2 How disabled students view "special arrangements" for assessments

❖ **Sample negative comments about "special arrangements" for in-class tests**

✳ "I get enlarged papers but sometimes I also need more space to work in than I have." (Student who is blind or partially sighted, studying Business.)

✳ "Unfortunately I never know if I have extra time before a test as it only gets announced by the tutor at the start." (Student with dyslexia, studying Science.)

✳ "The benefits of extra time were lost by the disturbance caused by others leaving before I have finished." (Student with dyslexia, studying Technology.)

5.2 How disabled students view "special arrangements" for assessments

✦ **Indicative comments by disabled students on "special arrangements" for other forms of assessment**

As **Table Eleven** shows, over the three phases of the Project, on average, 26.0% of the disabled students were in receipt of "special arrangements" for other forms of assessment. Of these students, 52.4% believed their requirements had been met, whereas 7.9% believed they had not, 10.9% were ambivalent and 28.8% failed to answer the question.

Table Eleven: Comparison of disabled student evaluations of "special arrangements" for other forms of assessment by Project phase					
Project phase	**Total number of recipients of "special arrangements"**	**How "special arrangements" met student requirements for other forms of assessment**			
		Satisfied	Not satisfied	Ambivalent	Field not completed
Phase One 99 responses	28 (28.3%)	22 (78.6%)	2 (7.1%)	0 (0%)	4 (14.3%)
Phase Two 69 responses	14 (20.3%)	4 (28.6%)	0 (0%)	3 (21.4%)	7 (50.0%)
Phase Three 61 responses	18 (29.5%)	9 (50.0%)	3 (16.7%)	2 (11.1%)	4 (22.2%)
Average %	**26.0%**	**52.4%**	**7.9%**	**10.9%**	**28.8%**

5.2 How disabled students view "special arrangements" for assessments

❖ **Sample positive comments about "special arrangements" for other forms of assessment**

✴ "My support worker helps me to organise and check my work before it is handed in." (Student with Asperger Syndrome, studying Science.)

✴ "I have a personal helper to help carry heavy equipment." (Student with an unseen disability, studying Art.)

✴ "I have two hours with a specialist dyslexia tutor for assessment planning which helps me get my ideas formed for coherent essays." (Student with dyslexia, studying Built Environment.)

✴ "I could have had a profound difficulty with my fieldtrips without my "buddy" and there is a high probability that I would not have attended the trips and therefore failed the modules." (Student with mental health difficulties, studying Science.)

✴ "The extensions on coursework deadlines allowed me to take more time over my essays, reduced the risk of stress and therefore didn't increase the symptoms of my illness." (Student with a disability not listed by the UCAS codes, studying Health and Social Care.)

✴ "Four modules in the first semester instead of five, with a four year course spread over five years, makes the course semi part-time. This was a special arrangement just for me because I wasn't coping." (Student with a disability not listed by the UCAS codes, studying Engineering.)

5.2 How disabled students view "special arrangements" for assessments

❖ **Sample ambivalent comments about "special arrangements" for other forms of assessment**

✶ "I could do with even more extra time, a proof reader and reading sessions." (Student with dyslexia, studying Arts.)

❖ **Sample comments about the absence of provision of "special arrangements" for other forms of assessment**

✶ "I think if I asked the tutors for extensions to assignments I could get extra time, but I prefer not to as I feel too embarrassed to ask." (Student with dyslexia, studying Social Science.)

✶ "Have not had special arrangements for other types of assessment but I feel they may have been beneficial to me, especially extra time to complete essays." (Student with dyslexia, studying Built Environment.)

✶ "I would prefer to have a choice of when to hand in assignments agreed with my tutor, taking into consideration that it takes me longer." (Student with dyslexia, studying Social Science.)

5.2 How disabled students view "special arrangements" for assessments

❖ **Sample negative comments about "special arrangements" for other types of assessment**

✳ "Unfortunately not all staff think it is necessary to make my handouts on coloured paper and some just forget". (Student with two or more disabilities, studying Technology.)

✳ "I got severe headaches from working with black and white lecture notes." (Student with dyslexia, studying Education.)

✳ "I felt embarrassed when lecturers pointed out my spelling mistakes to friends and colleagues during presentations." (Student with dyslexia, studying Business.)

✳ "The department is very unwilling to offer even occasional extensions to deadlines because work piles up and coursework runs into the exams period." (Student with a disability not listed by the UCAS codes, studying Engineering.)

➤ **Commentary on the disabled students' evaluations of "special arrangements"**

❖ **Positive about provision**

Reading through the affirmative views of disabled students, one is immediately struck by the array of "special arrangements" that have been offered throughout the HEIs in the Project Partnership, for all the different modes of assessment. Behind the scenes of the different provisions are a network of staff located within the infrastructure of each institution, co-operating and liaising between disability services, academic departments and examination offices. This is an arrangement reproduced across the sector, operating at varying levels of effectiveness. The plethora of different "special arrangements" has also, for many individual students, accompanied them into the institution in the form of recommendations in a report supporting their entitlement to the Disabled Students' Allowances

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(DSA). Historically this has been an important document in establishing frameworks of "special arrangements" and thus instrumental in the **contingent approach** of accommodating disabled students within HE.

There are differing degrees of resource commitment in the deployment of "special arrangements". Some students require technical aids, specialist lenses, coloured overlays, computers and ergonomic furniture. These are most likely to be funded through the DSA as they reflect a day-to-day requirement linking the resource to the individual, although increasingly HEIs are making computer hardware available but not assistive technologies. Unfortunately in many respects the logistics of organising "special arrangements" for examinations run counter to the day-to-day arrangements that students have for supporting themselves through enabling technology. For the purpose of examinations where a disabled student may use a computer in an assistive role, the device must be "clean" of all student work including enabling software supplied through the DSA. For the most part this means that assistive technologies supplied through the DSA cannot be used.

This state leads to a two tier provision. In circumstances where the disabled cohort is relatively small, for example visually impaired students (2.6 % of our sample over three years), enabling technology such as screen reading software can be re-installed on to the "clean" computer. For a large cohort, such as students with dyslexia (59.8 % of our sample over three years) who use enabling technology such as Text-Help, the logistics of re-installing the programme within an HEI on literally hundreds of computers is not feasible to schedule. By any reckoning it is an untenable amount. Nor have institutions been prepared to purchase expensive site licences. Thus by divesting many disabled students of their day-to-day means of working, the protocols involved in "clean" computer access for examinations have tilted the playing field away from any "levelling" that was intended by the allocations of assistive technology made through the DSA.

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Similarly, in theory staff resources such as "buddies", note takers, readers, support workers, study skills advisors, IT trainers and dyslexia tutors, all of whom are part of the staffing repertoire of "special arrangements", can be funded through the DSA. However, this is a gloss on experience. The impact of staging examinations en masse across the sector creates its own pressures and disruptions. Special training is required for invigilators and amanuensis, staff funded through the DSA may not be available because of the volume of demand, students frequently have to rely on unfamiliar personnel and there is scant evidence that disabled students who require training in the art of dictating to a scribe are in receipt of it. This often makes what was good practice during term-time into a belt-and-braces style lottery.

Others "special arrangements" have required small, "reasonable adjustments" to presentation materials and flexibility in procedures for making students aware of information. These may simply be elements of good teaching practice applicable to all students throughout the teaching and learning activities of the semester and not restricted to assessed tasks for disabled students.

However, the most prevalent "special arrangement" of offering students additional time dedicated specifically to their reading, writing or responding, demands adjustments to assessment timetables and has highly significant implications for the deployment of invigilators and the use of space. Similar pressures arise from the logistics of allocating students a room for single occupancy, or a room with other disabled students in which to be assessed. In individual cases examinations and in-class tests can be re-scheduled and courses offered on a "one-off", semi-part-time basis to help ameliorate the volume of module assessments. At an institutional level, taken together, "special arrangements", which count into tens of thousands across the sector, require a huge, unmeasured, complex and interwoven allocation of a wide range of resources. Much of it far from successfully delivered.

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Because there has not been a dialogue about the value of "special arrangements" this approach has become the cultural norm, a form of hegemony which has precluded staff and disabled students contemplating different ways of doing things. Unfortunately "special arrangements" don't come without consequences of social inequality and exclusion, even for those students who unequivocally value them. To arrive at the point of delivery of the "special arrangement" the disabled student has to be identified as "other" and have their range of impairments evaluated to fit them into the already existing assessment system where they will be allocated a set of **contingent approaches** or occasionally **alternative approaches**.[1]

It does appear that in each of the three assessment areas evaluated, approximately 60% of students who are in receipt of "special arrangements" believe, broadly, that they benefit from them. During our survey we found over the three year period that, on average, there was a satisfaction rating of 66.9% for examinations, 60.7% for in-class tests and 52.4% for other forms of assessment. As **Tables Nine, Ten and Eleven** show, the positive feedback was counter-weighted by dissatisfied and ambivalent students, 32.1% of whom were not satisfied with "special arrangements" for examinations, 37.1% for in-class tests and 18.8% for other forms of assessment.

However, these results must be tempered in several ways. Firstly, the average number of students in receipt of "special arrangements" for in-class tests and other forms of assessment is significantly lower than for examinations, i.e., by comparison less than half the number of students obtain accommodations for these assessment activities and this tends to distort the strength of positive affirmations when averaged out over the three key areas of assessment. We also, unfortunately, obtained very limited feedback on student evaluations of "special arrangements" for other forms of assessment. Secondly, it is important to note the fact that the number of students specifically taking examinations declined markedly between Phase One (68.7%) and Phase Two (47.8%) as a

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consequence of a significant number of disabled students choosing courses with modules in their second year without end-of-year examinations. In Phase Three the mid-point increase (55.7%) reflected the presence of end-of-course finals. This aspect of student choice, dominated by the avoidance of traditional examinations is a facet not revealed through the "snap shot" questionnaires but evidenced through the in-depth interviews and discussions in the student focus groups.

Similarly, caution has to be added to any perusal of the positive comments that disabled students were prepared to commit to paper in the qualitative elements of the annual "snap shot" questionnaires. The mere fact of framing questions within the hegemony of "special arrangements", an unavoidable facet of our enquiry, reproduced the dominance that in turn requires respondents to "fit their experiences into a framework" (Sikes et al, 2003). Prizing open student experience through the informality of the focus groups or the candour arrived at through the in-depth interviews (17 were conducted) we obtained a significantly nuanced view of "special arrangements". We concluded that students perceived and valued "special arrangements" as the institutional recognition of their disability and therefore completed the questionnaires with that in mind. The students indicated that they were concerned not to criticise a system which had been put in place to assist, for fear that it would be removed (Waterfield et al, 2006). Thus within the questionnaire responses there is a high degree of self-censorship and closure, promoting the reproduction of the "special arrangements" as an accommodating necessity within an unchanged status quo.

Unsurprisingly, given this public caution, "special arrangements" find favour with many disabled students. They refer to them as "essential", providing a "great benefit", "taking away pain and discomfort", relieving pressure, lowering anxiety and removing stress. With "special arrangements" disabled students feel that they can "finish the paper", review their performance and generally be more coherent. Dramatically

stated by some students, "special arrangements" allow a "demonstration of potential," reveal what otherwise "disability hides" and can be the difference between success and failure on a module.

The value of "special arrangements" is thus judged by many of these students in terms of the individual effectiveness of their allocation in terms of "levelling the playing field": the dominant discourse of accommodation. If a disabled student feels that they have achieved their desired assessment award, the "special arrangement" is likely to be reinforced as a contingency. Once set in place this framework - reinforced through assumed levels of student satisfaction until now unmeasured - has had the effect of ossifying the edifice of the **contingent approach** at an institutional level. There have been some influential interventions in this development. The report of the National Working Party on Dyslexia in Higher Education was one key watershed with its recommendations of "special arrangements" as good practice, subsequently extrapolated out from the dominant disability of dyslexia in HE to encapsulate all disabilities (Dyslexia Working Party, 1999). "Special arrangements" has also, of course, as a conceptual framework of accommodation, set a rather closed agenda for considering validity. Hence, the appropriateness or otherwise of a "special arrangement" has tended to be measured in its own terms. For example, if a disabled student allocated extra time for an examination did not feel satisfied with their performance, the obvious solution has been to add additional extra time, rather than question the appropriateness of an exam regime that requires such escalating accommodations.

❖ **An absence of provision**

However, the provision of "special arrangements" was not equally distributed across the three main assessment modes evaluated by the annual questionnaire. While on average for the three phases of the Project, 56.7% of disabled students obtained "special arrangements" for exams, only 21.3% were allocated them for in-class tests and 26.0% for other forms of assessment. In Phase One we measured the percentage of students in our survey group not in receipt of "special arrangements".

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We found that for examinations, 36.4% of respondents reported an absence of "special arrangements", and at this stage respondents were not asked about underachievement in this assessment mode. We found that for in-class tests, 63.6% of respondents reported an absence of "special arrangements", of which 78% reported underachieving. Similarly, we found that for other forms of assessment in Phase One, 66.7% of respondents reported an absence of "special arrangements", of which 61.3% reported underachieving. Put simply the evidence of our questionnaire returns shows that "special arrangements" are more likely to be provided for traditional examination situations and less likely on a sliding scale of prevalence to be present for in-class tests and other forms of assessment.

The causes of the absence of "special arrangements" for in-class tests and other forms of assessment were also identified through the research in Phase One. Choosing from a list of possible explanations, including practicalities involving the late identification of disability or the absence of "special arrangements" for a specific assessment mode, on average the most significant reason for not receiving "special arrangements" (48.4%) was because students had not sought the "special arrangements" themselves.

Reading their responses there has clearly been a high degree of uncertainty surrounding in-class procedures. In some institutions some students indicated surprise that "special arrangements" were available for in-class tests at all; never having been offered such an arrangement, they lacked an understanding of how to access it, in contrast to their examination experiences. There was clearly a widespread sense of a grey area of un-discharged responsibility.

With regards to other forms of assessment, such as assignments and projects, disabled students bemoaned the absence of "special arrangements" as a facet of a lack of flexibility: barriers caused by the inflexible submission dates of the modular curriculum and a sense

amongst some disabled students of a lack of personal, individual control over their own pace of work relative to the assessed curriculum. The absence of "special arrangements" was regarded in the latter case, generally speaking, as a form of structural or institutional intransigence.[2]

❖ **Negative and ambivalent about provision**

For those disabled students in receipt of "special arrangements", for all forms of assessment evaluated by the questionnaire, we recorded significant levels of dissatisfaction expressed as negative opinions or ambivalence. For "special arrangements" made for examinations, 17.9% (of the average of 56.7% in receipt of them) believed their requirements had not been met, 14.2% were ambivalent and 0.94% failed to answer the question. For the "special arrangements" made for in-class tests, 24.7% (of the average of 21.3% in receipt of them) believed their requirements had not been met, 12.4% were ambivalent and 2.2% failed to answer the question. Finally, for the "special arrangements" made for other forms of assessment, 7.9% (of the average of 26.0% in receipt of them) believed their requirements had not been met, 10.9% were ambivalent and 28.8% failed to answer the question.

The failure to complete this element of the questionnaire indicates a degree of uncertainty in student minds: fifteen students in all over the three phases. It perhaps reflects a conflation of the possible meanings attached to the notion of "special arrangements" when applied to the on-going array of term-time assessments. For example, a student with Meares Irlen Syndrome utilising a special coloured overlay to help support assessment writing might on the one hand be regarded by an institution as having a "special arrangement", but on the other hand be regarded by the student themselves as simply accessing the curriculum on a day-to-day basis using an assistive devise funded by the DSA, and therefore not in receipt of a "special arrangement". Given this ambiguity, not made sufficiently clear by the probing of the questionnaires, the quality of the disabled student feedback on this point is not as full as we had anticipated.

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Exploring the negative feedback from the student questionnaires we find that "special arrangements" can be quite partial in their anticipated "levelling" agenda. For example, extra time is perceived to be not enough extra time, or it is too much extra time and fatigue is an issue. **(See Section 5.3. How student learning styles affect assessment performance.)** The particular allocation may not always come to fruition, or the potential benefits are lost through circumstance. Students feel "awkward" reminding lecturers of their disability. In some institutions, for in-class tests disabled students complain of "never" knowing in advance that they have been allocated extra time. Others have expressed embarrassment about being informed in front of the class, while others feel so embarrassed they never ask. "Special arrangements" for in-class tests may have the effect of amplifying the students' sense of their own disability, where arrangements for other aspects of their day-to-day learning may not. For example, a note-taker positioned at a discreet distance from a disabled student in a large lecture room may, in the more intimate "in-class" test surroundings of a class room or laboratory, be perceived by the student as an embarrassment. Indeed, one of the key findings of the survey is the effective element of the student feedback. Feelings are strongly held, emotions are powerful ones and, tellingly, the dominant negative emotion is one of "embarrassment." It is a term that crops up with regularity. Thus one significant negative corollary to "special arrangements" is the uncomfortable feelings that some disabled individuals are left with as a consequence.

As the comments clearly show, and they have been corroborated at all of the Project dissemination events, the most negative views are directed at circumstances where the "special arrangement" is inadequate, inappropriate or attached to disabled student underachievement. The most graphic image of disappointment with "special arrangements", and indeed the most common complaint, refers to the segregation of disabled students into special rooms. One of the key contexts of this **contingent approach** is to have had the unintended outcome of ghettoising disabled students. A range of provisions are

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made, based on their segregation into rooms on their own, or their "otherness" is consolidated by sharing a special room designated for the exclusive examination of disabled students. Our respondents repeatedly recounted tales of dissatisfaction. There were rooms that were "noisy and totally unsuitable", interruptions from students having questions read aloud to them, the disruptions of students leaving early, and invigilators needing "special arrangements" to be explained to them. Finally, consider the student who asserts that the single room allocated did not help to demonstrate potential at all but simply concealed the possibility of "causing a disturbance" and embarrassment about "breaking down in front of other students".

There is a widespread sense in HEIs - born out through Project dissemination, conference platforms, workshops and institutional consultation - that "special arrangements" represent host institutions making "reasonable adjustments" to existing practices, when as we have argued in many ways they have grown exponentially, unplanned and based on a philosophy of accommodating disabled people. They set disabled and non-disabled students apart from one another, create spheres of suspicion and discourses of inequality and privilege.[3] The validity of "special arrangements" has not been tested for its capacity to "level the educational playing field", nor has the cost to the sector been adequately estimated. What we can begin to deduce, however, is the negative effects of the interface between sustaining traditional assessment practices and relying on "special arrangements" as a means for fitting disabled students into traditional assessment practice. Positive and negative though their comments may be, and ambivalent too, as a means of accommodating cohorts of disabled students within the equality agenda, the framework for "special arrangements" is an antithesis born out of emphasising "difference" with a real consequence in frequent and actual segregation of students.

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Section Notes

1. See **Section 1. Introduction** for an explanation of terminology.

2. Given the prevalence of "special arrangements" as the perceived practical solution to the accommodation of disabled students into the mainstream and observing its uneven distribution and the concomitant upset caused, it is worth remarking on the fact that the Disability Rights Commission has already acted to enforce the anti-discrimination legislation in cases where disabled students have not obtained "special arrangements" for assessments in schools and vocational, professional examinations.

3. Although it has not been an element of our survey, there is evidence from the student focus groups to suggest that some allocations of "special arrangements", such as extra time, are perceived by non-disabled students as giving disabled students an unfair advantage.

5.2 How disabled students view "special arrangements" for assessments

Summary points

- ★ We have examined the **contingent approach** of providing "special arrangements" to disabled students for examinations, "in-class" tests and other forms of assessment.

- ★ Sample student comments were deployed to give voice to a range of perspectives on the provision of "special arrangements", to show the range of disabled student points of view from the positive, through the ambivalent to the negative. The absence of provision of "special arrangements" was also explored.

- ★ The statistical evidence on the availability of "special arrangements" over the lifetime of the Project showed prevalence in examination settings where 56.7% were in receipt compared with 21.3% for "in-class" tests and 26.0% for other forms of assessment. There was evidence of student underachievement in assessments where "special arrangements" were absent.

- ★ The satisfaction ratings amongst disabled students for "special arrangements" for the three categories of assessment type indicate that 32.1% were ambivalent or dissatisfied with examinations staged in this way, 37.1% with "in-class" tests and 18.8% with other forms of assessment. It is assumed that satisfaction rates amongst disabled students tend to mirror, in part, their performance expectations being reflected in the outward achievement of an anticipated grade.

- ★ The Project Team believe that these statistics belie the level of student ambivalence and dissatisfaction as students engaged in a high degree of self-censorship in responding to questionnaires, ncerned that criticism might result in "special arrangements" being withdrawn.

5.2 How disabled students view "special arrangements" for assessments

★ "Special arrangements" represent the status quo, the dominant framework through which discussions aimed at "levelling the educational playing field" and making "reasonable adjustments" find their delimiting boundaries for staff and disabled students.

★ When dissatisfaction was at its most vociferous it was in areas where disabled students had a strong sense of embarrassment, or of "special arrangements" being inappropriate or going wrong or of student underachievement.

★ Segregating disabled students under the practice of "special arrangements" is especially undesirable as a focus for these activities as it encourages negative discourses between disabled and non-disabled students. Quite the opposite of striving for social justice and equality.

5.3 How student learning styles affect assessment performance

What this section contains:

Analysing the differences in disabled and non-disabled student self-perceptions of their respective performances in effectively undertaking assessment related tasks:

- ❖ working in groups
- ❖ being effective at mathematical calculations
- ❖ recalling spoken information
- ❖ understanding questions
- ❖ organising ideas
- ❖ working under test conditions
- ❖ submitting work on time
- ❖ proof reading what I have written
- ❖ spelling and grammar
- ❖ recalling written information
- ❖ reading accurately
- ❖ writing legibly
- ❖ writing for lengthy periods
- ❖ getting down what I know on paper
- ❖ giving a presentation

5.3 How student learning styles affect assessment performance

Analysing the differences in disabled and non-disabled student self-perceptions of their respective performances in effectively undertaking assessment related tasks

As part of the three-year survey, the Project Team was committed to identifying the value that disabled and non-disabled students place upon their learning skills. We were particularly interested to measure those attributes that may have a positive or negative influence on the performance of assessment related tasks. Each student was asked to measure their performance in undertaking a wide range of assessment-related tasks, fifteen in all, on a sliding scale of four measures from "effective" through to "extremely poorly". Each was asked to evaluate the following:

- ❖ working in groups
- ❖ being effective at mathematical calculations
- ❖ recalling spoken information
- ❖ understanding questions
- ❖ organising ideas
- ❖ working under test conditions
- ❖ submitting work on time
- ❖ proof reading what I have written
- ❖ spelling and grammar
- ❖ recalling written information
- ❖ reading accurately
- ❖ writing legibly
- ❖ writing for lengthy periods
- ❖ getting down what I know on paper
- ❖ giving a presentation

5.3 How student learning styles affect assessment performance

Although disabled student feedback was sought for all three phases of the Project on the above skills, it is the comparative evaluations made in Phases Two and Three between disabled and non-disabled students that are the most fruitful. They offer insights into the comparative self-perceptions of the two cohorts. They show, in subjective terms, student perceptions of their own strengths and weaknesses when it comes to evaluating the discrete elements underwriting assessment performance. These insights also provide evidence for better understanding students' preferences when offered assessment choice and the negative impact of some of the "special arrangements" used for accommodating disabled students during assessment. **(See Section 5.2. How disabled students view "special arrangements" for assessments and Section 5.5. Students' preferred choice of assessment modes.)**

To establish an analytical picture of the self-perceptions of the disabled and non-disabled student cohorts, we took each of the assessment-related tasks identified above and made a comparison between the two cohorts.[1] The comparison was made by agglomerating the Phase Two and Phase Three percentages of students from each of the two cohorts, who positively recorded their performances as "effective" for each of the discrete tasks. We have provided in **Table Twelve** and **Table Thirteen** - which are sample tables for the purposes of explication - the supporting evidence used for analysing one of the assessment related tasks. In this example, provided to make the process clear, we have selected student evaluations of their performance of recalling spoken information. The data was as follows: 20.6% of disabled students in Phase Two felt they performed "effectively" and 17.7% of disabled students in Phase Three felt the same. Similarly for the non-disabled student cohort, 32.5% of students in Phase Two felt they performed "effectively" and 37.5% of non-disabled students in Phase Three felt the same. Taking the evidence in **Table Twelve** for Phase Two and Three as an average percentage, agglomerated, the table shows (in bold) that 19.1% of disabled students felt that their performance was effective. Similarly, agglomerated over the two phases as an average for non-disabled students we have a result of 35.0% (shown in bold) feeling that their performance was effective.

5.3 How student learning styles affect assessment performance

Table Twelve: Sample of the method by which disabled and non-disabled student evaluations of their respective performances in recalling spoken information was agglomerated for Phases Two and Three of the Project					
Student	**Project Phase**	**Effectively**	**Fairly effectively**	**Poorly**	**Extremely poorly**
Disabled	Phase Two	20.6%	47.1%	29.4%	2.9%
	Phase Three	17.7%	48.4%	27.4%	6.5%
	Average	**19.1%**	47.7%	28.2%	4.7%
Non-disabled	Phase Two	32.5%	53.5%	14.0%	0%
	Phase Three	37.5%	50.0%	12.5%	0%
	Average	**35.0%**	51.7%	13.2%	0%
	Average difference	**15.9%**			

If in **Table Twelve** we subtract the agglomerated average total (shown in bold) for each student cohort from one another, we arrive at a percentage that measures the average difference in self-perception – a comparative rating of performance satisfaction between the two cohorts. This sample table indicates that the agglomerated percentages for the two phases show that there is an average percentage difference of self-perception running at 15.9% in favour of non-disabled students. They believe to this extent as a cohort that they perform more effectively at recalling spoken information than their disabled peers.

5.3 How student learning styles affect assessment performance

This difference in self-perception of performance satisfaction can usefully be displayed for analytical purposes as **Table Thirteen** shows.

Table Thirteen: Summary information of the differences between the disabled and non-disabled student cohorts, in self-perceptions of effectiveness in recalling spoken information, agglomerated for Phases Two and Three of the Project		
Effectively recalling spoken information		
Average % of disabled student responses from Phases Two and Three	Average % of non-disabled student responses from Phases Two and Three	Average % difference between the responses of disabled and non-disabled students from Phases Two and Three
19.1%	35.0%	15.9%

For the remainder of this section concerning student learning styles, we intend to present the Project findings summarised in tables based upon the format of **Table Thirteen**. For the sake of simplicity and to help distinguish them from the two sample tables above, we have labelled the remaining 15 tables in this section with a prefix letter rather than a number.

When we came to analyse the agglomerated responses between the two cohorts, a clear pattern to the differences in self-perception of levels of "effectiveness" began to emerge. Generally speaking, we found that for each of the fifteen assessment-related skills evaluated by our two cohorts, the disabled students usually had a lower opinion of their effectiveness than their non-disabled peers, expressed as a lower percentage. We became interested in how this pattern manifested itself, sometimes in close comparison and sometimes in very significantly discrepant comparative levels of student satisfaction with performance.

To aid our analysis of the findings of the agglomerated student responses, we ordered the following 15 tables of assessment-related

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tasks into bands. These we grouped on the basis of the degree of percentage difference in student perceptions of effectiveness between the two cohorts. We have used margins of 10% difference, to bracket groups of assessment-related skills for the purpose of discussing the findings. In effect we are using varying degrees of negative difference between the self-perceptions of the two cohorts to order the responses hierarchically. There are two basic polarities:

❖ assessment related tasks where disabled students experience themselves as less effective compared to their non-disabled peers;

❖ assessment related tasks where non-disabled students experience themselves as less effective compared to their disabled peers.

At the outset it is important to state that fourteen of the fifteen tables fall into the former category and only one falls into the latter.

Using ascending scales of negative significance, we have ordered the assessment-related skills in the following way, firstly, focusing upon the comparative negative significance accorded by disabled students, and secondly, on the comparative negative significance accorded by non-disabled students in the following categories:

❖ a margin of less than 10% negative difference comparing the effectiveness of disabled with non-disabled students;

❖ a margin of more than 10% but less than 20% negative difference comparing the effectiveness of disabled with non-disabled students;

❖ a margin of more than 20% but less than 30% negative difference comparing the effectiveness of disabled with non-disabled students;

❖ a margin of more than 30% negative difference comparing the effectiveness of disabled with non-disabled students;

❖ a margin of less than 10% negative difference comparing the effectiveness of non-disabled with disabled students.

Within each category the tables have been presented in ascending order of significance to the respective student cohorts: the least negative first. To accompany each grouping of tables we have supplied an analytical commentary.

❖ **Tables showing assessment related tasks where the disabled student self-perception of effectiveness has a margin of less than 10% negative difference to that of the non-disabled student cohort (agglomerated for Phases Two and Three)**

Table A		
Effectively working in groups		
Average % of disabled student responses from Phases Two and Three	Average % of non-disabled student responses from Phases Two and Three	Average % difference between the responses of disabled and non-disabled students from Phases Two and Three
45.6%	50.8%	5.1%

Table B		
Being effective at mathematical calculations		
Average % of disabled student responses from Phases Two and Three	Average % of non-disabled student responses from Phases Two and Three	Average % difference between the responses of disabled and non-disabled students from Phases Two and Three
21.8%	28.0%	6.2%

Aside from **Table O** (see below), **Tables A and B** show the least percentage discrepancy between the two cohorts of respondents, indicating that in the areas of effectively working in groups (5.1% discrepancy) and being effective at mathematical calculations (6.2%

discrepancy) students with disabilities have a similar, but slightly more negative self-perception of effectiveness than non-disabled students. In these two areas, therefore, it is safe to conclude that although students with disabilities perceive themselves to be slightly less effective than non-disabled students, the two assessment related tasks of working in groups and mathematical calculations do not significantly disadvantage disabled students. **(See Section 5.6. What students say about assessments based upon group work.)**

❖ **Table showing assessment related tasks where the disabled student self-perception of effectiveness has a margin of more than 10% but less than 20% negative difference to that of the non-disabled student cohort (agglomerated for Phases Two and Three)**

Table C		
Effectively recalling spoken information		
Average % of disabled student responses from Phases Two and Three	Average % of non-disabled student responses from Phases Two and Three	Average % difference between the responses of disabled and non-disabled students from Phases Two and Three
19.1%	35.0%	15.9%

Table C provides the first indication of an assessment related task where disabled students begin to perceive themselves to be relatively disadvantaged compared with their non-disabled peers. The discrepancy of almost 16% shows that where assessments rely on students responding to a recollection of spoken information (e.g., in-class tests, fieldwork exercises, any assessment not supported by written information at hand, etc.) disabled students are relatively less well served than non-disabled students. This finding is consistent with being a facet of the dyslexic profile or learning style, and a reflection of the fact that in Phases Two and Three, on average, 59.8% of the disabled respondents had a

5.3 How student learning styles affect assessment performance

specific learning difficulty. However, in practical terms the "reasonable adjustment" of ensuring that all spoken information is produced in an accessible written format, which is simply good practice for all students, would suffice to overcome this difficulty.

❖ **Tables showing assessment related tasks where the disabled student self-perception of effectiveness has a margin of more than 20% but less than 30% negative difference to that of the non-disabled student cohort (agglomerated for Phases Two and Three)**

Table D		
Effectively understanding questions		
Average % of disabled student responses from Phases Two and Three	Average % of non-disabled student responses from Phases Two and Three	Average % difference between the responses of disabled and non-disabled students from Phases Two and Three
27.6%	47.9%	20.3%

Table E		
Effectively organising ideas		
Average % of disabled student responses from Phases Two and Three	Average % of non-disabled student responses from Phases Two and Three	Average % difference between the responses of disabled and non-disabled students from Phases Two and Three
29.6%	50.0%	20.4%

Table F		
Effectively working under test conditions		
Average % of disabled student responses from Phases Two and Three	Average % of non-disabled student responses from Phases Two and Three	Average % difference between the responses of disabled and non-disabled students from Phases Two and Three
16.8%	38.8%	22.0%

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Table G		
Effectively submitting work on time		
Average % of disabled student responses from Phases Two and Three	Average % of non-disabled student responses from Phases Two and Three	Average % difference between the responses of disabled and non-disabled students from Phases Two and Three
59.5%	84.6%	25.1%

Table H		
Effectively proof reading what I have written		
Average % of disabled student responses from Phases Two and Three	Average % of non-disabled student responses from Phases Two and Three	Average % difference between the responses of disabled and non-disabled students from Phases Two and Three
13.8%	39.2%	25.3%

Table I		
Effective at spelling and grammar		
Average % of disabled student responses from Phases Two and Three	Average % of non-disabled student responses from Phases Two and Three	Average % difference between the responses of disabled and non-disabled students from Phases Two and Three
19.7%	46.0%	26.3%

Table J		
Effectively recalling written information		
Average % of disabled student responses from Phases Two and Three	Average % of non-disabled student responses from Phases Two and Three	Average % difference between the responses of disabled and non-disabled students from Phases Two and Three
19.5%	47.1%	27.6%

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Tables D-J, seven tables in all, indicate a degree of discrepancy of 20%-30% in levels of satisfaction with performance across a broad range of assessment related tasks. Having been placed in ascending order of significance one can see that these tables record escalating levels of discrepancy between the two student cohorts, with disabled students falling further and further behind in terms of their satisfaction with their own performances. This is not to suggest that disabled students invariable fail to achieve the tasks as set, hence in the case of **Table G** almost 60% feel that they effectively submit work on time, but when compared with the almost 85% of non-disabled students who feel the same, the disabled students are significantly less satisfied with their levels of effectiveness. However, the question also, unfortunately, bears a degree of ambiguity, because "submitting work on time" might also be taken to mean, by a disabled student in receipt of "special arrangements", the successful submission of work within an extended time frame. It may be the case that the level of satisfaction recorded by disabled students is therefore inflated and should be read with caution.

The range of activities being evaluated here straddles two broadly based strands within the spectrum of assessment practice, the formal structure of assessment within HE **(Tables F and G)**, and the practical means of a student achieving an assessment task successfully **(Tables D, E, H, I and J).**

Working under test conditions and submitting work on time **(Tables F and G)** are structural elements of the assessment regime that provide additional difficulties for disabled students, respectively recording levels of satisfaction with their performance at 22.0% and 25.1% lower than non-disabled students.

Similarly, understanding questions, organising ideas, proof reading written work, being effective at spelling and grammar and recalling written information **(Tables D, E, H, I and J)** are all areas where students with disabilities feel that their performance at assessment is in the range of

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20%-30% less satisfactory than that of their non-disabled peers. It should be observed, as was the case with **Table C** (above), that the comparative underachievement of disabled students highlighted by **Tables D, E, H, I and J** can all be considered as aspects of the learning profile of students with specific learning difficulties (59.8% of the disabled student respondents).

Taken together, disabled students' avowed difficulties with making a satisfactory response across this broad range of learning skills is exacerbated in the practical context of assessment tasks such as unseen, time-limited examinations and in-class tests. In such circumstances our research shows that it is appropriate to refer to these circumstances as an interface of disadvantage for disabled students. Of course, historically speaking, this mismatch has been managed through the **contingent approach** of offering "special arrangements" to disabled students to try and accommodate them without changing the intrinsic characteristics of traditionalism in assessment practice. **(See Section 5.2. How disabled students view "special arrangements" for assessments.)**

❖ **Tables showing assessment related tasks where the disabled student self-perception of effectiveness has a margin of more than 30% negative difference to that of the non-disabled student cohort (agglomerated for Phases Two and Three)**

Table K		
Effectively reading accurately		
Average % of disabled student responses from Phases Two and Three	Average % of non-disabled student responses from Phases Two and Three	Average % difference between the responses of disabled and non-disabled students from Phases Two and Three
30.8%	65.5%	34.7%

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Table L		
Effectively writing legibly		
Average % of disabled student responses from Phases Two and Three	Average % of non-disabled student responses from Phases Two and Three	Average % difference between the responses of disabled and non-disabled students from Phases Two and Three
24.6%	64.2%	39.5%

Table M		
Effectively writing for lengthy periods		
Average % of disabled student responses from Phases Two and Three	Average % of non-disabled student responses from Phases Two and Three	Average % difference between the responses of disabled and non-disabled students from Phases Two and Three
16.1%	55.7%	39.6%

Table N		
Effectively getting down what I know on paper		
Average % of disabled student responses from Phases Two and Three	Average % of non-disabled student responses from Phases Two and Three	Average % difference between the responses of disabled and non-disabled students from Phases Two and Three
12.9%	55.5%	42.5%

These four tables **(Tables K-N)** represent the most highly significant discrepancies of response between the two cohorts of students. Ranging between 34.7% and almost 43.0%, the learning skills associated with reading and writing, absolute fundamentals in the learning, teaching and assessment arena, are considered by disabled students to be their least effective skills when compared with the self-evaluation of their non-disabled peers. In particular **Tables L, M and N** with their emphasis upon the communicability of satisfactory responses to assessment

5.3 How student learning styles affect assessment performance

tasks, indicate that the act of writing under examination conditions poses particular difficulties for some disabled students, again particularly in the context of unseen, time constrained, "on the spot" assessment tasks. Historically speaking, this has been an area where the intervention of "special arrangements" has been pursued by HEIs to try to ameliorate the impact of a disability, thus consolidating the edifice of accommodations without exploring the real issues posed by traditionalism in practice.

Of special interest here is **Table M** which shows an almost 40% discrepancy in levels of satisfaction between the two cohorts, indicating conclusively that the disabled students surveyed find writing for lengthy periods of time an especially unsatisfactory experience. Furthermore, through in-depth interviews and discussions at student focus group meetings, it became evident that some disabled students can find themselves in an examination room for up to two hours longer than their non-disabled peers. The allocation of extra time comes in many forms across the sector, often institutionally based as custom and practice, with allocations such as 10 or 20 minutes extra in the hour, or 25% extra time per examination having become normative parameters. During the three years of the SPACE survey we found that the allocation of extra time formed the single most significant element of "special arrangements" for examinations in each of the Project phases. The distribution of extra time for examinations by Project phase was as follows:

- ❖ Phase One: of the 63.3% of disabled students in receipt of "special arrangements" for examinations all 63.3% received extra time;

- ❖ Phase Two: of the 50.7% of disabled students in receipt of "special arrangements" for examinations 47.0% received extra time;

- ❖ Phase Three: of the 55.7% of disabled students in receipt of "special arrangements" for examinations 53.4% received extra time.

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Taking these findings into consideration one must seriously question the validity of offering disabled students additional time for examinations, which has for many years been one of the cornerstones of the **contingent approach** to assessments, long assumed to be a facet of "levelling the academic playing field". Quite to the contrary, **Table M** shows that offering additional time to disabled students who are not satisfied that they can write for lengthy periods of time is both inappropriate and counter-productive. In short, it makes a disadvantage even more disadvantageous, and perhaps has linkages to issues relating to the relatively low satisfaction levels disabled students report about writing legibly and their effectiveness in committing ideas to paper **(Tables L and N)**.

"Special arrangements" in this context may give the illusion to the institution of accommodating individual disabled students, but they seem to run contrary to the spirit of the intention. It is a double-bind for disabled students, in that the very system that has been specifically established to accommodate them in the mainstream, for which they are frequently appreciative, has elements that exacerbate areas of their avowed weaknesses in assessment-related skills. In other words, although students might reflect positively on the provision of extra time for examinations and they frequently do, when asked to evaluate the experiential elements such as writing for lengthy periods of time, the responses were contrary and strongly negative. **(See Section 5.2. How disabled students view "special arrangements" for assessments.)**

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❖ **Table showing assessment related tasks where the non-disabled student self-perception of effectiveness has a margin of less than 10% negative difference to that of the disabled student cohort (agglomerated for Phases Two and Three)**

Table O		
Effectively giving a presentation		
Average % of disabled student responses from Phases Two and Three	Average % of non-disabled student responses from Phases Two and Three	Average % difference between the responses of disabled and non-disabled students from Phases Two and Three
36.9%	33.3%	3.5%

We began this analysis of the discrepancies in self-perception between disabled and non-disabled students of their effectiveness in undertaking assessment related tasks with two tables **(Tables A and B)**, where the percentage difference between the two cohorts was at its least significant. Closely aligned in terms of parity between the two cohorts is the issue of effectiveness in giving a presentation. Here the discrepancy, a mere 3.5%, negligible in fact, has the unique quality of being the sole circumstance within the remit of this research where disabled students felt marginally more satisfied with their performance than their non-disabled peers.

As an indicator of an activity where the playing field may be "levelled", giving a presentation as an assessment opportunity is clearly much more equitable than the sector reliance upon unseen examinations and time-limited tests. Although this is not to suggest that giving a presentation is a panacea for equality of assessment opportunity, as some disabled students in particular were not enamoured with this approach at all. **(See Section 5.7. What students say about assessments based upon oral presentations.)**

5.3 How student learning styles affect assessment performance

Section Notes

1. Although the numbers of disabled and non-disabled students fluctuated throughout these two phases and the two cohorts did not mirror one another numerically, the respective measures of self-perception within each cohort were relatively consistent (as percentage measurements) despite the fluctuations in numbers.

5.3 How student learning styles affect assessment performance

Summary points

★ This aspect of our three-year survey has provided the Project Team with the opportunity to explore the differences in self-perception between disabled and non-disabled students, in the area of fifteen assessment-related skills. It is important to also remember that within each cohort there are wide variations in self-perception.

★ We found that between the two cohorts there were areas of congruence, activities where the degree of difference in level of performance satisfaction were negligible, such as:

  ❖ giving a presentation (**Table O**, 3.5% difference);

  ❖ working in groups (**Table A**, 5.1% difference);

  ❖ undertaking mathematical calculations (**Table B**, 6.2% difference).

★ To analyse the quantitative data for the broad swathe of assessment-related tasks that fall within the bracket of between 20% and 30% negative difference shown in seven tables **(Tables D-J)**, we made a conceptual distinction between the usual structure of assessment within HE, and the practical means of a student achieving an assessment task. We concluded that the negative self-perception of disabled students in these areas was as a consequence of the presence of an interface of disadvantage between these two factors.

★ For the disabled students surveyed, the structural challenge of:

  ❖ effectively working under test conditions (**Table F**, 22.0% difference)

  ❖ and effectively submitting work on time (**Table G**, 25.1% difference)

interfaced negatively with their avowed weaknesses in:

- ❖ effectively understanding questions (**Table D**, 20.3% difference)

- ❖ organising ideas (**Table E**, 20.4% difference)

- ❖ proof reading (**Table H**, 25.3% difference)

- ❖ spelling and grammar (**Table I**, 26.3% difference)

- ❖ and recalling written information (**Table J**, 27.6% difference), particularly under time constraints.

➤ To these practical means of students achieving an assessment task we might also add the findings from **Table C**, which show that disabled students believe themselves to be less effective than their non-disabled peers at recalling spoken information (15.9% difference).

➤ The most negative self-evaluations of effectiveness for disabled students reside in those tasks where the interface between the exacting conditions of traditional assessment practice exacerbates areas of avowed student weakness. The fundamentals of some assessment tasks:

- ❖ effectively reading accurately (**Table K**, 34.7% difference)

- ❖ and effectively committing knowledge to paper (**Table N**, 42.5% difference)

have particular significance for some disabled students, especially those with dyslexia, 59.8% of our survey group.

➤ It is not surprising, given the pressure of traditional assessment practices that disabled students' perceptions of:

- ❖ effectively writing legibly (**Table L**, 39.5% difference)

- ❖ and effectively writing for lengthy periods (**Table M**, 39.6% difference)

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– the corollary of the widespread allocation of extra time as a "special arrangement" - creates an image of disabled students struggling during an examination to give a proper account of the knowledge they have acquired.

★ The interface between the structural requirements of the traditional assessment regime and the practical means by which disabled students meet these objectives, based on their perceptions of where their relative strengths and weaknesses lie, does not add up to a picture of equity.

★ Traditional assessment practice requires, in many instances, disabled students to perform assessment-related tasks that privilege areas of skill that this cohort of students believes itself to be less than effective in performing compared with its non-disabled peers.

★ To respond to this mismatch between assessment mode and assessment-related learning skills through the **contingent approach** of offering "special arrangements" to disabled students is to misunderstand the very nature of the problem.

★ It is not desirable that HEIs should persist with the existing assessment regime for disabled students by tinkering with it to accommodate them, but rather that the range of learning skills deployed by this cohort should be valued in its own right. Taking diversity as the platform for assessment change means establishing inclusive modes of assessment, flexibility and choice that meet the skills of diverse learners, disabled or non-disabled: that is the essence of matching procedures to people, not matching people to procedures.

5.4 How students view their current assessment modes

What this section contains:

⬥ A brief background to student experience of current assessment modes

⬥ Students studying on courses where the assessment modes successfully match their learning styles

⬥ Students studying on courses where the assessment modes fail to match their learning styles

⬥ Students avoiding courses where the assessment modes fail to match their learning styles

5.4 How students view their current assessment modes

A brief background to student experience of current assessment modes

In the annual questionnaire all students were asked to list their current assessment methods and to evaluate their effectiveness. This exercise showed that, outside of the Arts (applied, creative and performing, etc.), student respondents were being assessed on courses principally relying upon unseen examinations or, more commonly, unseen examinations supported by a plethora of forms of formative assessment delivered throughout the semester and generally accounting for a small percentage of final marks, encouraging learning through assessment. This array of assessment modes, dependant upon subject studied, included principally assignments, coursework, design tasks, fieldwork journals, group work, on-line assessments, oral presentations, posters, work-based assessments and work books.

Asking students to evaluate the effectiveness of the assessment modes undertaken during their years of studies raised for many of them a central dichotomy between unseen examinations and all other types of assessment. In essence this dichotomy reflects a somewhat simplified version of the generic debate about the value of traditional assessment practices versus more interpretive modes and it was a dichotomy that students repeatedly returned to throughout our survey. As such it represents a facet of the dominant structure of feeling that students utilised to evaluate their feelings about the different modes of assessment known to them. Thus our consideration of student perceptions of current assessment modes is considerably circumscribed by student recourse to using this dichotomy by way of an explanation of their views. This dichotomy also prefigures students' choice when considering alternative and inclusive modes of assessment, including those modes from non-cognate subject areas. **(See Section 4. Twenty-one things you need to know about the general assessment debate when considering inclusiveness** and **Section 5.5. Students' preferred choice of assessment modes.)**

5.4 How students view their current assessment modes

➤ **Students studying on courses where the assessment modes successfully match their learning styles**

Listing their current modes of assessment and evaluating their effectiveness, students who were content provided clear evidence of the importance of congruence between learning styles and assessment mode.

Sample positive comments about current assessment modes

✳ "I prefer taking exams. You go in there fully prepared, knowing the books you will be asked questions about. It is so much easier. You have 2 hours to take an exam and then it's over with." (Non-disabled student, studying Social Sciences.)

✳ "My course is very exams orientated which suits my learning style based on rote learning." (Student with a disability not listed by the UCAS codes, studying Engineering.)

✳ "I think the modules that use coursework and an end of semester exam are the most effective, and the fairest way of testing learning. With mathematical modules (statistics or maths) exams seem to be a good way of assessing learning." (Non-disabled student, studying Social Sciences.)

✳ "Coursework, examinations, placements and presentation offers a good combination because there are a variety of methods." (Student with dyslexia, studying Health and Social Care.)

5.4 How students view their current assessment modes

Traditional methods of assessment, traditional in the sense of being time-worn and subject-bound, evidently provide a satisfying way of testing achievement for those students whose learning style mirrors the demands of the method. Affirmative student evaluations, like those above which find merit in the central platform of unseen examinations tend to reflect the fact that individual students have found that they have "cracked the code" as it were of revising, remembering and regurgitating. Having a proclivity for being examined in this way creates a greater likelihood that there will be congruence between a subjective sense of achievement (what one believes one knows), and the objective achievement through an examination grade (having successfully proved what one knows).

5.4 How students view their current assessment modes

◆ **Students studying on courses where the assessment modes fail to match their learning styles**

For many disabled and non-disabled students, the fact of trying to establish the bona fide of their preferences of assessment mode amongst those currently deployed on their course, often went hand-in-hand with deprecating unseen examinations as an affront to a predominant personal learning style.

Sample negative comments about current assessment modes

* "I feel it is more useful to be able to use the information in coursework, presentations and group work rather than simply remember it for examinations." (Student with dyslexia, studying Business.)

* "Coursework is fine, I don't agree with exams. They test my memory, not what I truly know, and I get tired doing them – having to write and focus for so long." (Student who is blind or partially sighted, studying Business.)

* "Essays and presentations I find not too bad after getting help to proof read my work and a lot of hard work for presentations. Examinations do not give a true understanding of my ability due to the pressure and my poor memory." (Student with dyslexia, studying Health and Social Care.)

* "I find it hard to structure and cover all aspects under exam conditions. Coursework assessments are more comfortable as I can manage the time to allow for review and to improve the work." (Student with dyslexia, studying Built Environment.)

5.4 How students view their current assessment modes

There is no sense in these evaluations that the student antipathy towards unseen examinations is simply a "knee jerk" reaction or a facet of seeking a scapegoat to excuse a poor personal performance through lack of effort. These negative evaluations are founded upon personal perceptions of strengths and weaknesses in learning styles, the impact of disability and the capacity of different modes of assessment to offer a framework for testing achievement of the learning outcomes. The binary opposition between unseen examinations and other modes of assessment that operates throughout these comments indicates that students conceptualise the issue of assessment practice almost exclusively in this way.

The degree of negativity in these comments also has to be remarked upon, because unseen examinations do not merely fail to play to the strengths of these students but actively make barriers to their achievement. If students without disabilities complain that unseen examinations are a mere test of memory, then those students with dyslexia, the largest disabled cohort in HE, are clearly going to feel disadvantaged by any mode that privileges learning styles where they have widely recognised and self-acknowledged weaknesses.

➤ Students avoiding courses where the assessment modes fail to match their learning styles

The student voice indicated that some disabled students, when they have the choice, in fact opt for courses where unseen examinations are absent, or a range of assessment methods is deployed that are not negatively perceived.

For some students the mere fact of a predominant mode of assessment, for example the presence of an unseen examination on a module, is enough to challenge on a personal level the viability of the module itself.

5.4 How students view their current assessment modes

Sample comments from students avoiding courses where assessment modes do not match learning styles

* ✳ "Coursework, take-away exams (72 hour), dissertations and presentations. Fair enough! I took the course partly to avoid unseen exams." (Student with dyslexia, studying Arts.)

* ✳ "I struggle to remember things so therefore in exams I do not show my full potential. In this semester because of this I have picked certain modules on the basis of the assessment, i.e., no exams or a small percentage of exams." (Student with dyslexia, studying Health and Social Care.)

Given this self-selecting process, in this instance by students with dyslexia, there are grounds for thinking that students with certain categories of disability, or non-disabled students with a particular learning style, are prone to operate a similar system of course choice by default. It is the case that for some students the principle modes of assessment on a course provide a strong incentive for aspiring to study the subject in the first place. We certainly found that this was confirmed in the student focus group meetings. For HEIs there are obviously serious ramifications in attempting to recruit students to courses with carefully crafted curricula, when students are focussing transversely on the assessment method and self-selecting out of some modules.

It is not surprising that when disabled and non-disabled students in the SPACE Project were offered the opportunity to select alternative modes of assessment and modes deriving from non-cognate subject areas that they entered into the activity with positive enthusiasm. **(See Section 5.5. Students' preferred choice of assessment modes.)**

5.4 How students view their current assessment modes

Summary points

- Disabled and non-disabled students surveyed at different phases of the Project were principally, outside of the Arts, being assessed on courses using unseen examinations as the main assessment platform with a range of other subject-specific modes representing a small percentage of the overall marks.

- When disabled and non-disabled students are offered the opportunity to evaluate their current assessment methods the normative response is to provide an evaluation that utilises a binary opposition between unseen examinations and other forms of assessment.

- Favouring one mode of assessment over another relates to the degree of congruence that students experience between their learning style and the fundamental elements of the assessment method.

- While some students clearly value unseen examinations as a means of demonstrating their acquisition of the learning outcomes of a course, many more students prefer other assessment modes or combinations of assessment modes.

- Many modes of assessment currently used by institutions have the potential to play to the strengths of a great many students, but unseen examinations provide a barrier to significant student numbers and carry a profound and widespread negative connotation not reflected in other current assessment modes.

- Exercising course and module choice by students is influenced by the presence or absence of particular modes of assessment therefore congruence of learning styles to assessment method is a factor in student choice.

5.5 Students' preferred choice of assessment modes

What this section contains:

- Making a choice of assessment modes

- Assessment choice and current assessment practice

- Students experiencing panic as an underlying factor in choice of assessment mode and assessment performance

- Where do unseen examinations appear in the league table of student choice of assessment mode?

- Student route of entry into HE and choice of assessment mode

- Assessment choice for all students for Phase Two and Phase Three of the Project

What this section contains (cont.):

⬧ Assessment choice for disabled students for all phases of the Project

⬧ Assessment choice for students with dyslexia for all phases of the Project

⬧ Assessment choice for non-disabled students for Phase Two and Phase Three of the Project

⬧ Comparing the top 10 assessment choices for disabled students, non-disabled students and all students considered together

⬧ Considering the top 5 assessment choices on the basis of course studied

⬧ Assessment choice as a longitudinal issue

5.5 Students' preferred choice of assessment modes

✦ Making a choice of assessment modes

In the final section of the annual SPACE questionnaires students were asked to consider how different modes of assessment might best suit their learning styles, as measurements of their achievement of the learning outcomes of their respective courses. This area of enquiry had a double trajectory. On the one hand, we were seeking more equitable ways of assessing disabled students and thus challenge the widespread reliance on "special arrangements" within the sector. **(See Section 5.2. How disabled students view "special arrangements" for assessments.)** On the other hand, we wanted to explore the assessment choices disabled and non-disabled students would make when offered a wide range of opportunities, including assessment modes from non-cognate subject areas. The common denominator for our interest in this part of the research was the possibility of "levelling the educational playing field" for disabled students through creating an assessment framework for inclusivity that would benefit **all** students and identifying preferred assessments as a basis for piloting assessment choice. **(See Section 5.9. Alternative and inclusive assessment case studies, especially case studies 5, 6, 7 and 8.)**

Annually over the three phases of the Project, respondents were asked to consider a list of 47 assessment methods derived from the QAA Subject Benchmark statements collated for the South West Academic Network for Disability Support (SWANDS), an earlier Project also coordinated by the University of Plymouth (Waterfield and West, 2002). Students were asked to place a tick alongside those assessment modes that would, in their opinion, better allow them to demonstrate their ability. **(See Appendix 2: Matrix of assessment modes.)** The list represented a rich array of possibilities allowing for cross-discipline choice and a great deal of potential for students to nuance their requirements: to "think outside the box" of their own subject areas. The responses initiated by this relatively simple process of selection were consolidated by an open ended question, "Why do you think the assessment tasks

identified by you would be more effective at demonstrating your learning?" Taken together these two elements of student choice of assessment mode and the explanations proffered by students to support their choices provide a complex picture of the learning and assessment interface which warrants careful analysis.

The first clear message to emerge from this facet of our research is that student perception of assessment choice and the categorisation of alternatives as viable or not tends to depend on a number of factors. The initial level of satisfaction with existing assessment methods is important, as is student understanding and knowledge of assessment modes outside of their immediate subject area. A small number of students explicitly state that they do not seek change.

* "Briefings, coursework with discussion and crits are the assessment tasks I already use and are very effective." (Student with dyslexia, studying Arts.)

* "I am currently tested in a number of different ways and I can't think of any others that would also be effective." (Student with dyslexia, studying Arts.)

* "This is a difficult question because I feel that the assessment tasks employed on my course have been more than adequate for my needs." (Student who is deaf or hard of hearing, studying Art.)

The process of choosing alternative or non-cognate subject assessment modes is given careful consideration by most respondents, perhaps in the hope that their comments may influence future change. For some students it is enough to highlight a single additional assessment mode and give a brief, but cogent explanation of its value to them.

5.5 Students' preferred choice of assessment modes

> ✳ "Multiple Testing is a quick way to test knowledge over a period of time so that learning can be assessed at key stages of the course." (Non-disabled student, studying Science.)

Other students were more profligate in their choices. One non-disabled individual studying Art registered 29 choices on the grounds that they were "less stressful than exams", alongside a handful of other students who also allocated in the region of 20 selections. Wide ranging choice also reflected a common belief in the value of having options at one's disposal.

> ✳ "Variety of assessment would also make learning more enjoyable." (Student with dyslexia, studying Science.)

Students are both pragmatic, making decisions on the basis of what suits them best individually, and altruistic, making proposals on the basis of trying to argue the case for change for the good of all: a framework of inclusivity.

5.5 Students' preferred choice of assessment modes

* ✳ "I have chosen 9 assessment types because I'm better at them than the other types." (Non-disabled student, studying Science.)

* ✳ "I feel a good mixture of different types of assessment can help students reach their full potential." (Student with dyslexia, studying Arts.)

* ✳ "Mostly I just think it would be more effective if several different methods were used, that would make it much more fair on everyone because that way people wont' suffer from being tested in a way that doesn't suit them." (Non-disabled student, studying Social Sciences.)

* ✳ "If the assessment system is changed I think all students should partake so that disabled students are not alienated." (Non-disabled student, in a case study focus group feedback.)

Aside from the students who made their intentions explicit in this way and gave cogent accounts, the Project Team began to suspect that the opportunity to make a choice of alternative assessment and/or choose assessment modes from non-cognate subject areas was not being fully exploited by all the student respondents. To explore our suspicions on this issue we examined the correlations between current course assessment mode and alternative mode of assessment chosen.

➤ Assessment choice and current assessment practice

In Phase Two of the Project, 114 respondents, disabled and non-disabled, were asked to list their "current assessment modes" and these were cross-tabulated with the alternative modes of assessment chosen in the matrix of 47 choices described above. We found that 15 assessment modes had been double chosen as it were, showing student

5.5 Students' preferred choice of assessment modes

satisfaction with existing assessment modes despite the purpose of the matrix, explicitly made clear, to establish student choice of alternatives to current practice. Most of these were insignificant statistically, being for the most part the preference of an individual student. However, as **Table Fourteen** indicates, 4 assessment modes from the matrix of 47 did register a degree of student satisfaction that indicates varying levels of contentment with a current assessment mode. **Table Fourteen** records the percentage of the total students selecting a mode of assessment, who in fact already have that mode of assessment available to them on their current course of study.

Table Fourteen: Prevalence of students making alternative choices of assessment also available as a current course mode of assessment	
Assessment mode	**Percentage of Phase Two students**
Coursework with discussion	32.4%
Crits (critiques)	10.5%
Examinations (unseen)	8.7%
Projects, independent and group	7.9%

As we will see later in this section, two of the modes of assessment that appear in **Table Fourteen** – coursework with discussion and projects, independent and group – find considerable popularity as a viable alternative with all cohorts of students surveyed. (See **Table Twenty Four.**) Coursework with discussion was clearly perceived to be a satisfactory current method of assessment amongst almost a third of the student respondents in Phase Two who had chosen it as an alternative. Of these twice as many students with an Arts background favoured coursework with discussion when compared with their peers from Education, Science and Social Science. The level of significance for projects, independent and group, amongst those who double chose it is under 10%, with no Arts students present and a preponderance of Science-based students. More peripheral still to the overall preferences identified later in this section, the choice of crits, with just over 10%

making a double choice, reflects an almost unanimous Arts-based proclivity whereas unseen examinations, with a less than 10% double choice, reflects an even split between Science and non Science-based subjects.

It is understandable that some students may feel a little reluctant to tick boxes against choices that they are unfamiliar with but overall these statistics show that, aside from coursework with discussion, the degree of congruence is relatively small between alternative assessment mode chosen and existing course mode of assessment. Coursework with discussion as an existing assessment mode is favoured and students who favour it wish to continue with it, and the same is true to a much lesser extent with the other three modes identified above. We should not be surprised that where existing modes of assessment succeed in student perceptions to measure their abilities, they are retained as favoured choices. Student satisfaction with current assessment modes is dealt with in the preceding section. **(See Section 5.4. How students view their current assessment modes.)** However, this is only part of the picture. Aside from the handful of students who make assessment choices that exactly mirror those on their current course of study, the larger minority recorded in **Table Fourteen**, who retain modes of assessment as a choice already available to them, do so in the context of an expanded repertoire of modes of assessment choice. Providing students with the opportunity to choose assessment modes leads to a range of choices being made, the common denominator being variety even where continuity is concerned.

✦ Students experiencing panic as an underlying factor in choice of assessment mode and assessment performance

As the above student comments indicate, respondents engage with questionnaires in a wide variety of ways, but it is very significant that the issue of assessment choice has elicited a common response amongst students, both disabled and non-disabled. Although the Project

5.5 Students' preferred choice of assessment modes

questionnaire was plainly probing the interface between traditional assessment practice and a more **inclusive approach**, there was no explicit attempt on our part to encourage student choice as antithesis to any specific traditionalist mode. For many students the process took on a different hue. Assessment choice, or the opportunity to select alternative ways of being assessed, was generally construed as the binary opposite to traditional, unseen examinations.

> ✳ "The assessment choices I have made all take away the onus from cramming unthinkable amounts of data/knowledge into just 3 hrs (like an exam). I feel that coursework, critical diaries, open book exams and peer evaluation would test my knowledge fairly and not my performance under stressful examination conditions." (Non-disabled student, studying Science.)
>
> ✳ "I find exams extremely stressful particularly the period leading up to them. I experience panic attacks and become physically ill." (Student with dyslexia, studying Health and Social Care.)
>
> ✳ "I tend to get stressed at exams. Sometimes I am physically sick. Exams are, and have always been, a trial for me." (Student with mobility difficulties, studying Social Science.)
>
> ✳ "For most of my modules there are end of semester exams. I believe it would be more relaxed doing other tasks where students can show their full potential rather than getting worked up about exams." (Non-disabled student, studying Education.)

The strength of negative feeling towards examinations was powerfully expressed; the concepts of anxiety, panic and stress are repeatedly used by both disabled and non-disabled cohorts of students through all phases of the Project to describe their feelings.

5.5 Students' preferred choice of assessment modes

As part of our remit we asked all students to evaluate the impact that a sense of panic might have on their completion of assessment tasks and by inference on choice of assessment mode. As **Table Fifteen** shows, high levels of moderate to serious negative effect were registered by both of the cohorts for all phases of the Project.

Table Fifteen: How disabled and non-disabled student performance of assessment tasks is affected by a feeling of panic, by Project phase					
Project phase	**No effect**	**A little effect**	**A moderate effect**	**A serious effect**	**Field not filled in**
Phase One of 99 disabled students	32 (32.3%)	18 (18.2%)	20 (20.2%)	17 (17.2%)	12 (12.2%)
Phase Two of 69 disabled students	10 (14.5%)	23 (33.3%)	19 (27.5%)	14 (20.3%)	3 (4.4%)
Phase Two of 45 non-disabled students	13 (28.9%)	7 (15.6%)	9 (20.0%)	6 (13.3%)	10 (22.2%)
Phase Three of 61 disabled students	15 (24.6%)	15 (24.6%)	15 (24.6%)	16 (26.2%)	0 (0%)
Phase Three of 25 non-disabled students	6 (24.0%)	8 (32.0%)	7 (28.0%)	2 (8.0%)	2 (8.0%)
Average of all students for all phases	**24.9%**	**24.7%**	**24.0%**	**17.0%**	**9.4%**

Taking the two cohorts independently, disabled students for all phases of the Project registered, on average, a moderate negative effect amongst 24.1% of the cohort and a serious negative effect amongst 21.2%. Their non-disabled peers registered for Phases Two and Three of the Project, on average, an almost identical moderate negative effect to their disabled peers of 24.0% and a serious negative effect of amongst 21.2%. Clearly, at the level of a moderate negative effect almost 25% of students, whether they are disabled or not, believe that a sense of panic is a key

factor in moderating their performance, whereas in the region of 17% of all students believe that a sense of panic is even more debilitating, and seriously so. These ascribed levels show that assessment practice creates, or exacerbates, psychological states amongst students, whether they are disabled or not, that are not in the least conducive to demonstrating potential. With this knowledge in mind it might be prudent for the staff responsible for maintaining existing assessment regimes to consider what it is they are in fact assessing. These findings indicate that to an extent the current and predominant forms of assessment measure ability and knowledge divulged in a state of panic or semi-panic amongst a significant percentage of the student population. This is the cost to some students of the administrative convenience to HEIs of large-scale, unseen examination regimes.

What we cannot be certain about from our research is how students evaluate different modes of assessment in terms of thresholds of panic. **(See Section 5.7. What students say about assessments based upon oral presentations.)**

> ✳ "Writing essays means that the work is done by me and me alone, relieving myself of the pressure of working with other people." (Student with mental health difficulties, studying Social Science.)

It is clear that any given mode of assessment has the very real potential to create anxiety and panic for an individual student in circumstances where the assessment mode elides the student's preferred learning style. There are always going to be, within the full repertoire of possible assessment modes, ways of assessing that will be counterproductive and negative if variety and choice are not available. Hence, while one student may value group work or oral presentations, these modes of assessment may be an anathema to another student, as indeed they

would undoubtedly be to the student above who has mental health difficulties. **(See Section 5.6. What students say about assessments based on group work and Section 5.7. What students say about assessments based on oral presentations.)**

From our research it is clear from the open ended questions that the negative concepts of panic, anxiety and stress are principally linked, but not exclusively so, to unseen examinations. It is not surprising, therefore, that by critically asserting the negative impact of this form of traditionalism, students are seeking to give additional weight to their alternative choices of assessment mode, as a negation of the negation. Put simply the predominant view amongst most students surveyed seems to be, as a form of short-hand almost, that the removal of unseen examinations takes away the worst exigencies of stress and makes assessment more acceptable. This structure of feeling is evident elsewhere in the questionnaire responses, most particularly in the questions probing student opinions on current assessment modes. **(See Section 5.4. How students view their current assessment modes.)**

★ Where do unseen examinations appear in the league table of student choice of assessment mode?

Examining assessment choice and the frameworks that students have adopted for explaining their choices over the three phases of the Project will be made clearer, for statistical purposes, by making a tripartite distinction between disabled students, non-disabled students and both cohorts of students combined, i.e., the Project population of all students. Furthermore, given that respondents could make numerous selections of assessment mode, we have made league tables of student choices, showing a top 10 in order of preference.

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However, to examine the way that students have deployed the assessment choice of unseen examinations, often negatively, it is nearer the bottom of the league table that we need to begin our exploration. If indeed we had developed a league table for all 47 assessment modes drawn from our matrix of assessment choice, the option of unseen examinations would generally be found languishing in the bottom half of the league table as **Table Sixteen** shows.

Phase One	Phase Two			Phase Three		
Disabled Only 99	Disabled Only 69	Non-disabled 45	All students 114	Disabled Only 61	Non-disabled 25	All students 86
42 (2.0%)	32= (11.6%)	32 (8.9%)	34= (10.5%)	39 (6.5%)	13= (20.0%)	31 (10.5%)

Table Sixteen: Assessment choice of unseen examinations indicating its relative position in the league table of 47 choices and percentage who made this choice by Project phase and student type

From **Table Sixteen** it can be seen that there are certain variations in levels of preference for unseen examinations both between the two cohorts of students and between the three phases of the Project. Enthusiasm for this assessment mode is never high and reflects very small numbers of students. It is at its lowest amongst disabled students in Phase One, it gains a little during Phase Two and falls away again for Phase Three. For non-disabled students there is apparently a significant increase in enthusiasm between Phases Two and Three, although a good deal of caution needs to be employed when considering the league table position of 13= for the latter, because the non-disabled student survey group was small for Phase Three and, therefore, capable of seriously distorting the general picture. Overall for Phases Two and Three, and considering both cohorts of students together, there is a congruence of levels of interest at just over 10% of the survey population for each phase. By comparison with the popular choices we will encounter later, this is a very low level of interest.

5.5 Students' preferred choice of assessment modes

★ Student route of entry into HE and choice of assessment mode

Wishing to understand a little more of the background for choosing unseen examinations, we looked towards the route of entry for those students who had indicated a preference for it as an assessment mode as **Table Seventeen** shows.

Table Seventeen: Route of entry for disabled and non-disabled students choosing unseen examinations as a preferred assessment mode, by Project phase					
Routes of entry	**Phase One**	**Phase Two**		**Phase Three**	
	Disabled	Disabled	Non-disabled	Disabled	Non-disabled
A Levels	2	6	4	4	4
Advanced GNVQ	X	2	X	X	X
National Diploma	X	X	X	X	1
Total students	2	8	4	4	5
% of all students in phase and type	2%	11.6%	8.9%	6.6%	20%
Total for phase	**2**	**12**		**9**	
% for phase	**2%**	**10.5%**		**10.5%**	

We were not surprised to find that, of the small number of students choosing unseen examinations, a more traditional route of entry into HE had been followed by all of them: A levels, Advanced GNVQ and National Diploma. Similarly we wished to explore the possibility that, despite the small number selecting unseen examinations as an assessment method of preference, there might be a strong correlation between the selection and current course choice. This possibility is explored in **Table Eighteen**.

5.5 Students' preferred choice of assessment modes

Table Eighteen: Subject studied for students choosing unseen examinations as a preferred assessment mode, by Project phase			
	Phase One 99 students	**Phase Two 114 students**	**Phase Three 86 students**
Arts (incl. applied, creative and performance, etc.)	X	X	X
Built Environment (incl. architecture, environmental management and garden design, etc.)	X	3 (2.6%)	2 (2.3%)
Business (incl. tourism and leisure)	1 (1.0%)	1 (0.9%)	X
Education	X	X	1 (1.2%)
Engineering (incl. mathematics)	X	X	X
Health and Social Care (incl. community work and sports science)	X	1 (0.9%)	X
Science (incl. geography, geology and psychology)	1 (1.0%)	4 (3.5%)	3 (3.5%)
Social Science and Cultural Studies (incl. English, humanities and religion)	X	1 (0.9%)	2 (2.3%)
Technology (incl. computing and ICT)	X	1 (0.9%)	1 (1.2%)
Field not completed	X	1 (0.9%)	X
Total number of students	**2 (2.0%)**	**12 (10.5%)**	**9 (10.5%)**

Table Eighteen indicates that in Phases Two and Three, unseen examinations found a few adherents amongst students studying Science, Social Science and subjects related to the Built Environment. Conversely, there was no interest whatsoever in unseen examinations as an assessment mode of choice amongst students studying Arts-based subjects. The data for Phase One was insignificant.

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By contrast we examined the assessment choices made by the students who had followed the non-traditional route into HE afforded by Access Courses. Amongst our sample group, for each phase of the Project, we were able to examine the views of 9 students who had entered via this route for widening participation. Again, analysing a small number of students comparable to those entering through the traditional route, we found that the choice of unseen examinations had **no** adherents whatsoever. Students entering HE from Access Courses, like their traditional counterparts, appear to make choices of assessment mode which in part reflect their recent previous assessment experiences and doubtless reflect assessment successes rather than failures. In total this cohort identified 16 assessment choices of preference of which the top 7 are listed in **Table Nineteen** in descending order of preference.

Table Nineteen: Assessment choices of disabled and non-disabled students entering Higher Education through an Access to HE course, by Project phase			
Chosen assessment mode	**Phase One of 9 students**	**Phase Two of 9 students**	**Phase Three of 9 students**
Coursework with discussion	5 (55.5%)	4 (44.4%)	9 (100%)
Continuous assessment	5 (55.5%)	4 (44.4%)	X
Essay assignments	4 (44.4%)	X	4 (44.4%)
Personal research	X	3 (33.3%)	4 (44.4%)
Fieldwork reports	X	3 (33.3%)	3 (33.3%)
Portfolios and sketchbooks	X	3 (33.3%)	3 (33.3%)
Oral examinations	2 (22.2%)	X	4 (44.4%)

5.5 Students' preferred choice of assessment modes

Additionally, a second rank order of preferences reflecting the views of fewer students than those listed above indicated choices such as:

- ❖ critical diaries, learning logs and journals;
- ❖ peer and self-evaluation;
- ❖ projects, individual and group;
- ❖ multiple choice;
- ❖ student led seminars.

The top 7 choices and the ancillary ones represent a varied repertoire: a backbone of choice that we will encounter again with other cohorts, each time nuanced by the addition or subtraction of a small handful of choices additional to the core.

➤ Assessment choice for all students for Phase Two and Phase Three of the Project

In **Table Twenty** we have combined the views of our two main cohorts of students, disabled and non-disabled, over Phases Two and Three of the Project. We have chosen to do this to enable us later to make comparisons between how the choices of this student population at large might be understood, compared with the choices identified as having been made by the disabled or non-disabled cohorts of students.

Taking this as our point of departure we have been able to produce a league table showing the top ten assessment choices for each of the two phases of the project where we had the benefit of being able to survey both our disabled cohort of students and our non-disabled control group. Student preferences for assessment mode have been allocated a league position, on the basis of the number of students choosing the specific mode as a percentage of the total number of students surveyed for each phase. Each cell in the table contains a number indicating league position and the respective percentile point. Where possible, each assessment choice has been listed in the table in descending order of significance using averages of league table position.

5.5 Students' preferred choice of assessment modes

Table Twenty: Top ten assessment choices for all students (disabled and non-disabled combined) for Phase Two and Phase Three, indicated by numeric position in the league table and percentage of students in Project phase		
Chosen assessment mode	**Phase Two of 114 students (disabled and non-disabled)**	**Phase Three of 86 students (disabled and non-disabled)**
Continuous assessment	1 (47.4%)	1 (48.8%)
Coursework with discussion	2 (43.0%)	2 (45.3%)
Personal research projects	3 (36.0%)	3 (37.2%)
Essay assignments	4 (35.0%)	4 (32.6%)
Multiple choice	7= (29.8%)	5 (31.4%)
Peer and self-evaluation	6 (30.7%)	6 (30.2%)
Critical diaries, learning logs and journals	7= (29.8%)	7 (29.1%)
Oral examinations	10 (27.2%)	9 (26.7%)
Exhibitions and poster displays	5 (31.6%)	X
Projects, independent and group	X	8 (27.9%)
Student led seminars	9 (28.9%)	X
Portfolios and sketchbooks	X	10 (25.6%)

5.5 Students' preferred choice of assessment modes

The following 8 preferred assessment modes appear in the top 10 choices of disabled and non-disabled students when considered together as a total student population for Phases Two and Three of the Project, constituting a highly correlated first tier:

- ❖ continuous assessment;
- ❖ coursework with discussion;
- ❖ personal research projects;
- ❖ essay assignments;
- ❖ peer and self-evaluation;
- ❖ multiple choice;
- ❖ critical diaries, learning logs and journals;
- ❖ oral examinations.

Additional to this, as can be seen in **Table Twenty**, there is a second rank order of preferences that appear in the top 10 of one phase or the other but not in both. These assessment choices concern preferences such as:

- ❖ exhibition and poster displays (Phase Two);
- ❖ student led seminars (Phase Two);
- ❖ projects, independent and group (Phase Three);
- ❖ portfolios and sketchbooks (Phase Three).

Thus the framework for assessment choice for disabled and non-disabled students considered as a student totality and combined for Phases Two and Three of the Project, consists of a two-tier hierarchy. We wish to focus mainly on the areas of choice where there is agreement between the phases, the first 8 choices, but not lose sight of the subordinate choices that are in fact still important within the phase in which they appear in the top 10. Later in the Project, however, **Case Study 3** developed the portfolio mode to include a variety of elements taken from these top choices with favourable results. **(See Section 5.9. Alternative and inclusive assessment case studies.)**

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◢ Assessment choice for disabled students for all phases of the Project

In **Table Twenty-One** we have concentrated exclusively upon disabled students' preferences for modes of assessment. As with the above sub-section but this time for all three phases of the Project, we have been able to produce a league table showing the top 10 assessment choices by phase. Disabled student preferences for assessment mode have been allocated a league position, on the basis of the number of disabled students choosing the specific mode as a percentage of the total number of disabled students surveyed for each phase. Each cell in the table contains a number indicating league position and the respective percentile point. Where possible, each assessment choice has been listed in the table in descending order of significance using averages of league table position.

5.5 Students' preferred choice of assessment modes

Table Twenty-One: Top ten assessment choices for disabled students by Project phase, indicated by numeric position in the league table and percentage of students in Project phase			
Chosen assessment mode	Phase One of 99 students	Phase Two of 69 students	Phase Three of 61 students
Continuous assessment	1 (49.5%)	1 (55.1%)	1 (51.0%)
Coursework with discussion	4 (27.3%)	2 (44.9%)	2 (49.2%)
Personal research projects	8 (19.2%)	3 (36.2%)	3 (36.1%)
Multiple choice	2 (33.3%)	8= (30.4%)	4= (34.4%)
Oral examinations	3 (32.3%)	8= (30.4%)	4= (34.4%)
Essay assignments	6 (22.2%)	4 (34.8%)	6 (31.1%)
Portfolios and sketchbooks	5 (26.0%)	10 (29.0%)	7= (29.5%)
Critical diaries, learning logs and journals	X	5 (33.3%)	7= (29.5%)
Peer and self-evaluation	X	6= (31.9%)	10 (26.2%)
Projects, independent and group	10= (14.1%)	X	9 (27.9%)
Exhibitions and poster displays	X	6= (31.9%)	X
Computer based assessments	6= (22.2%)	X	X
Examinations (take away)	9 (17.2%)	X	X
Video formats	10= (14.1%)	X	X

5.5 Students' preferred choice of assessment modes

The following 7 preferred assessment modes appear in the top 10 choices of disabled students for all three phases of the Project, constituting a highly correlated first tier:

- ❖ continuous assessment;

- ❖ coursework with discussion;

- ❖ essay assignments;

- ❖ multiple choice;

- ❖ oral examinations;

- ❖ personal research projects;

- ❖ portfolios and sketchbooks.

Additional to this, as can be seen in **Table Twenty-One**, there is a complex subordinate ranking of preferences offering a further two tiers of significance.

A second tier consists of assessment choices that find a place in the top 10 of two of the phases but not the third phase such as:

- ❖ critical diaries, learning logs and journals (Phase Two and Phase Three);

- ❖ peer and self-evaluation (Phase Two and Phase Three);

- ❖ projects, independent and group (Phase One and Phase Three).

Finally, a third tier consists of assessment choices that find a place in the top 10 of one phase only such as:

- ❖ computer based assessments (Phase One);

- ❖ take-away examinations (Phase One);

- ❖ video formats (Phase One);

- ❖ exhibitions and poster displays (Phase Two).

5.5 Students' preferred choice of assessment modes

The framework for assessment choice for disabled students considered over all three phases of the Project consists of a three-tier hierarchy. We wish to focus mainly on the areas of choice where there is agreement between the three phases, the first 7 choices, but remain alert to the tiers of subordinate choice. Not only do they remain important within the phase in which they appear in the top 10, but they help to construct a more detailed picture of the complex landscape of assessment choice, especially when regarded comparatively between student cohorts.

It is also important to keep in mind that disabled student choice of preferred assessment modes has developed negatively out of the everyday experience of finding that some assessment modes may directly disadvantage them as disabled people. This message can be clearly heard elsewhere in this document in the sample student voices considering the issues of "special arrangements" and student learning styles. **(See Section 5.2. How disabled students view "special arrangements" for assessments and Section 5.3. How student learning styles affect assessment performance.)**

Amongst the subordinate choices there are interesting discrepancies between the assessment choices made at Phase One compared to those made at Phases Two and Three. In Phase One disabled students make lower order rankings for computer based assessments, examinations (take away) and video formats which have no place in Phases Two and Three. In Phase One respondents find no place for critical diaries, learning logs and journals or peer and self-evaluation which do find favour in Phases Two and Three. Perhaps this discrepancy can be read as first year uncertainty. Critical diaries, learning logs and journals or peer and self-evaluation may appear, to a "fresher", to involve a higher degree of self-exposure than computer based assessments (often disliked by mature students) and take-away examinations which are more anonymous. Video formats which have the ring of novelty and the promise of de-schooling about them are also appealing. Yet, the latter is in essence a complex and lengthy procedure to arrange. **Case studies 1 and 2** piloted by the Project demonstrate the strengths and weaknesses of such assessment modes. **(See Section 5.9. Alternative and inclusive assessment case studies.)**

5.5 Students' preferred choice of assessment modes

➤ Assessment choice for students with dyslexia for all phases of the Project

Having explored the assessment choices of disabled students as a cohort and being aware of the large number of students with dyslexia amongst their numbers, we felt it was important to create a comparable league table to list the assessment preferences of students with dyslexia. These constitute respectively 67.7% of the disabled student survey group for Phase One, 62.3% for Phase Two and 57.4% for Phase Three. Expressed as an average for all Project phases, students with dyslexia constitute 62.5% of the disabled student cohort.

In **Table Twenty-Two** we have focused exclusively upon the modes of assessment preferred by students with dyslexia. As with the above two sub-sections we have been able to produce a league table showing the top 10 assessment choices by phase. The preferences for assessment mode expressed by students with dyslexia have been allocated a league position, on the basis of the number of disabled students choosing the specific mode as a percentage of the total number of students with dyslexia surveyed for each phase. Each cell in the table contains a number indicating league position and the respective percentile point. Where possible, each assessment choice has been listed in the table in descending order of significance using averages of league table position.

5.5 Students' preferred choice of assessment modes

Table Twenty-Two: Top ten assessment choices of students with dyslexia for all phases of the Project by numeric position in the league table and percentage			
Chosen assessment mode	Phase One of 67 students	Phase Two of 43 students	Phase Three of 35 students
Continuous assessment	1 46.3%	1= 55.8%	2 45.7%
Coursework with discussion	4= 26.9%	1= 55.8%	1 51.4%
Oral examinations	2 43.3%	3= 39.5%	3= 34.3%
Portfolios and sketchbooks	4= 26.9%	8= 34.9%	3= 34.3%
Personal research projects	7= 17.9%	3= 39.5%	8= 25.7%
Critical diaries, learning logs and journals	9 16.4%	5= 37.2%	8= 25.7%
Exhibition and poster displays	10= 14.9%	5= 37.2%	8= 25.7%
Multiple choice	3 37.3%	X	5 31.4%
Peer and self-evaluation	X	5= 37.2%	6= 28.6%
Essay assignments	10= 14.9%	X	8= 25.7%
Projects, independent and group	X	X	6= 28.6%
Computer based assessments	6 20.9%	X	X
Video formats	7= 17.9%	X	X
Student-led seminars, presentations and discussions	X	8= 34.9%	X
Briefings	X	8= 34.9%	X

5.5 Students' preferred choice of assessment modes

The following 7 preferred assessment modes appear in the top 10 choices of students with dyslexia for all three phases of the Project, constituting a highly correlated first tier:

- ❖ continuous assessment;
- ❖ coursework with discussion;
- ❖ oral examinations
- ❖ portfolios and sketchbooks.
- ❖ personal research projects;
- ❖ critical diaries, learning logs and journals;
- ❖ exhibition and poster displays.

Table Twenty-Two reveals**,** as was the case with **Table Twenty-One**, that there is a complex subordinate ranking of preferences offering a further two tiers of significance. A second tier consists of assessment choices that find a place in the top 10 of two of the phases but not the third phase such as:

- ❖ multiple choice (Phase One and Phase Three);
- ❖ peer and self-evaluation (Phase Two and Phase Three);
- ❖ essay assignments (Phase One and Phase Three).

Finally, a third tier consists of assessment choices that find a place in the top 10 of one phase only such as:

- ❖ projects, independent and group (Phase Three);
- ❖ computer-based assessment (Phase One);
- ❖ video formats (Phase One);
- ❖ student-led seminars, presentations and discussions (Phase Two);
- ❖ briefings (Phase Two).

5.5 Students' preferred choice of assessment modes

In common with the cohort of disabled students (discussed above) the framework for assessment choice for students with dyslexia, when considered over all three phases of the Project, consists of a three-tier hierarchy. We wish to focus principally on the areas of choice where there is agreement between the three phases which consists of the first 7 choices. However, the tiers of subordinate choice remain relatively important within the phase in which they appear in the top 10. Kept in focus in this way they bracket a broader set of student choices. They provide clusters of assessment modes that begin to suggest correlations between learning styles and student preferences for assessment modes that are believed by the respective students to better measure their ability.

Of course it is not insignificant, given the high percentage of students with dyslexia amongst the disabled student cohort, that 5 of the former's first tier of correlated choices in the top 10 also appear in the top 10 correlated choices of disabled students. The choice of the assessment modes of continuous assessment, coursework with discussion, oral examinations, portfolios and sketchbooks, and personal research projects are all modes of working that reflect the learning style of students with dyslexia: strong on oral and visual dimensions and demanding modes of assessment that contain feedback and cues to progress; but weaker on written elements. It is not surprising that the choice of essay assignments that finds high favour amongst disabled students more generally drops down in the reckoning a few levels for students with dyslexia. Multiple choice, as an option, is also less approved of. Conversely, exhibitions and poster displays are privileged, playing to one of the strengths of students with dyslexia, the visual dimension. Also, critical diaries, learning logs and journals have a slightly stronger showing which reflects the interface between student learning, personal development and the demands of academic courses. They also have the dual benefits of being a reflective form of learning and done at a student's own pace; playing to the strengths of this cohort of students. Perhaps for students with dyslexia these choices have

5.5 Students' preferred choice of assessment modes

the added advantage of being potentially more interactive with staff and therefore capable of providing feedback for students concerned with their own perceived learning style weaknesses. **(See Section 5.8. What students say about staff feedback on their assessment performance.)**

✦ Assessment choice for non-disabled students for Phase Two and Phase Three of the Project

Having explored the assessment choices for all students, disabled students and students with dyslexia, we now wish to turn our attention to the non-disabled student control group. In **Table Twenty-Three** we have focused exclusively upon the modes of assessment preferred by the non-disabled students for Phases Two and Three of the Project. As with the above three sub-sections we have been able to produce a league table showing the top 10 assessment choices by phase. The preferences for assessment mode expressed by the non-disabled students have been allocated a league position, on the basis of the number of non-disabled students choosing the specific mode as a percentage of the total number of non-disabled students surveyed for each of the two phases. Each cell in the table contains a number indicating league position and the respective percentile point. Where possible, each assessment choice has been listed in the table in descending order of significance using averages of league table position.

5.5 Students' preferred choice of assessment modes

Table Twenty-Three: Top ten assessment choices for non-disabled students for Phase Two and Phase Three, indicated by numeric position in the league table and percentage of students in Project phase

Chosen assessment mode	Phase Two of 45 non-disabled students	Phase Three of 25 non-disabled students
Continuous assessment	2 (35.5%)	1 (44.0%)
Essay assignments	2= (35.5%)	2= (40.0%)
Personal research projects	4= (33.3%)	2= (40.0%)
Coursework with discussion	1 (40.0%)	6= (32.0%)
Peer and self-evaluation	7= (28.9%)	5 (36.0%)
Multiple choice	7= (28.9%)	10= (24.0%)
Projects, independent and group	9= (24.4%)	8= (28.0%)
Critical diaries, learning logs and journals	9= (24.4%)	10= (24.0%)
Fieldwork reports	X	2= (40.0%)
Electronic presentations: CD, web pages, etc.	X	6= (32.0%)
Exhibitions and poster displays	6 (31.1%)	X
Dissertation	X	8= (28.0%)
Problem based learning	9 (24.4%)	X
"In-class" and module tests	X	10= (24.0%)

5.5 Students' preferred choice of assessment modes

The following 8 preferred assessment modes appear in the top 10 choices of the non-disabled students for Phases Two and Three of the Project, constituting a highly correlated first tier:

- ❖ continuous assessment;
- ❖ coursework with discussion;
- ❖ essay assignments;
- ❖ multiple choice;
- ❖ personal research projects;
- ❖ peer and self-evaluation;
- ❖ projects, independent and group;
- ❖ critical diaries, learning logs and journals.

Additional to this, as can be seen in **Table Twenty-Three**, there is a second rank order of preferences that appear in the top 10 of one phase or the other but not in both. These assessment choices concern preferences such as:

- ❖ dissertation (Phase Three);
- ❖ electronic presentations: CD, web pages, etc. (Phase Three);
- ❖ exhibition and poster displays (Phase Two);
- ❖ fieldwork reports (Phase Three);
- ❖ "in-class" and module tests (Phase Three);
- ❖ problem-based learning (Phase Two);
- ❖ student-led seminars, presentations and discussions (Phase Two).

As was the case above with our consideration of the assessment choice for all students, the framework for assessment choice for non-disabled students, combined for Phases Two and Three of the Project, consists of a two-tier hierarchy. We wish to focus mainly on the areas of choice where there is agreement between the phases, the first 8 choices, but not lose sight of the subordinate choices that are in fact still important within the phase in which they appear in the top 10.

5.5 Students' preferred choice of assessment modes

◆ Comparing the top 10 assessment choices for disabled students, non-disabled students and all students considered together

Having now established individual league tables for the two main cohorts of students (disabled and non-disabled) and having considered the two cohorts together as a student survey population, we are in a position to draw together the evidence from this tripartite survey and present student assessment choice as a single table, **Table Twenty-Four**. The tripartite preferences for assessment mode expressed by students have been allocated a league position, on the basis of the number of students by cohort choosing the specific mode, as a percentage of the total number of students by cohort surveyed for each phase of the Project. Each cell in the table contains a number indicating league position and the respective percentile point. Where possible, each assessment choice has been listed in the table in descending order of significance using averages of league table position.

Table Twenty-Four shows that when the top 10 assessment choices are all plotted by cohort and by phase, as a top 10 of top 10s as it were, there is a strong correlation and symmetry of choice, with highly significant corroborations of league position.

5.5 Students' preferred choice of assessment modes

Table Twenty-Four: Top 10 choices of assessment mode for disabled students, non-disabled students and all students considered together for all phases of the Project							
Chosen assessment mode	**Phase One of 99 students**	**Phase Two of 114 students**			**Phase Three of 86 students**		
	Disabled students 99	Disabled students 69	Non-disabled students 45	All students 114	Disabled students 61	Non-disabled students 25	All students 86
Continuous assessment	1 (49.5%)	1 (55.1%)	2= (35.5%)	1 (47.4%)	1 (51.0%)	1 (44.0%)	1 (48.8%)
Coursework with discussion	4 (27.3%)	2 (44.9%)	1 (40.0%)	2 (43.0%)	2 (49.2%)	6= (32.0%)	2 (45.3%)
Personal research projects	8 (19.2%)	3 (36.2%)	4= (33.3%)	3 (36.0%)	3 (36.1%)	2= (40.0%)	3 (37.2%)
Essay assignments	6 (22.2%)	4 (34.8%)	2= (35.5%)	4 (35.0%)	6 (31.1%)	2= (40.0%)	4 (32.6%)
Multiple choice	2 (33.3%)	8= (30.4%)	7= (28.9%)	7= (29.8%)	4= (34.4%)	10= (24.0%)	5 (31.4%)
Peer and self-evaluation	X	6= (31.9%)	7= (28.9%)	6 (30.7%)	10 (26.2%)	5 (36.0%)	6 (30.2%)
Oral examinations	3 (32.3%)	8= (30.4%)	X	10 (27.2%)	4= (34.4%)	X	9 (26.7%)
Critical diaries, learning logs and journals	X	5 (33.3%)	9= (24.4%)	7= (29.8%)	7= (29.5%)	10= (24.0%)	7 (29.1%)
Projects, independent and group	10= (14.1%)	X	9= (24.4%)	X	9 (27.9%)	8= (28.0%)	8 (27.9%)
Portfolios and sketchbooks	5 (26.0%)	10 (29.0%)	X	X	7= (29.5%)	X	10 (25.6%)

5.5 Students' preferred choice of assessment modes

All the assessment choices presented in **Table Twenty-Four** should be regarded as significant ones for understanding students' own perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of their own learning styles and how they perceive these to be reflected through different assessment modes.[1] It is also important to recall our comments elsewhere that disabled student choice of assessment mode is fashioned through an awareness of just how disabling some traditional assessment methods can be. **(See Section 5.2. How disabled students view "special arrangements" for assessments, Section 5.3. How student learning styles affect assessment performance and Section 5.4. How students view their current assessment modes.)**

Of the ten assessment modes chosen by students we can make a clear distinction between the first five choices and the latter five. The first five choices in descending order of significance (presented here with the average percentile point for all cohorts for comparison) broadly speaking represent consensus of assessment choice for all those surveyed through the SPACE Project:

❖ continuous assessment (47.3% on average);

❖ coursework with discussion (40.2% on average);

❖ personal research projects (34.0% on average);

❖ essay assignments (33.0% on average);

❖ multiple choice (30.3% on average).

Students have consistently selected these modes, whether they are disabled or non-disabled with the only caveat being that students with dyslexia have an inclination to demote essay assignments in their own league table of 10, to respectively 10= for Phase One, 8= for Phase Three and failing to register it in the top 10 for Phase Two. (See **Table Twenty-Two.**)

5.5 Students' preferred choice of assessment modes

✳ "Continuous assessment would be good to help organise my own learning, and allow feedback during the semester – helps me understand where I stand and what I need to work on." (Non-disabled student, studying Social Science.)

✳ "Continuous assessment and personal research projects involve me more in the learning process." (Non-disabled student, studying Science.)

✳ "Discussing coursework means being evaluated by different methods, i.e. friends, colleagues and teachers. These different ways would bring up different ideas." (Student with dyslexia, studying Arts.)

✳ "I have chosen personal research projects because I find it easier to spend time finding the best research and working in that way. I don't do well in timed tests and I find it hard to remember all the facts." (Student with dyslexia, studying Education.)

✳ "Writing on a particular subject in my own time allows me to show what I know." (Non-disabled student, studying Social Science.)

✳ "Multiple choice helps me by reducing the amount of work at one time." (Student with a disability not listed by the UCAS codes, studying Health and Social Care.)

This five-part consensual choice represents a balance of concept and method. Conceptually speaking, students have indicated overwhelmingly that they seek to be continuously assessed. In other words, they seek to have their achievements measured incrementally. Given the strength of opinion expressed throughout the student feedback, this consensual choice is by its very nature also a choice of exclusion. It seeks to marginalise traditionalist end of module or end of semester unseen

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examinations, which are the very antithesis of continuity, bunched together as they are in a crescendo of intense activity with their capacity to generate widespread anxiety and stress. Added to this, for disabled students, there is the panoply of, and ambivalence towards, "special arrangements" which can also never be far from the reckoning. **(See Section 5.2. How disabled students view "special arrangements" for assessments.)**

That sense of continuity preferred by most students neatly contains the methodological preferences of coursework with discussion[2], personal research projects, essay assignments and multiple choice assessments. As a set of choices it is well balanced, offering fluid and set-piece learning, focused upon aspects of staff-student interaction but also personal development, the skills acquired through assignment writing and the snapshot of progress obtained through a multiple choice assessment. It must be concluded that students are opting to be assessed through modes that reflect breadth and variety, in contrast to unseen examinations, with their reliance upon a relatively narrow range of learning skills: privileging effective memory and stamina for intensive working.

If we turn our attention to the subordinate set of 5 choices in the top 10 set out in **Table Twenty-Four**, we can see that our understanding of the theme of student assessment choice must be nuanced by considering the differences that exist between our cohorts as well as congruence. The subsequent five choices in descending order of significance represent high ranking choice where consensus across all cohorts and all phases is in some measure or other lacking:

- ❖ peer and self-evaluation;
- ❖ oral examinations;
- ❖ critical diaries, learning logs and journals;
- ❖ projects, independent and group;
- ❖ portfolios and sketchbooks.

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Despite the absence of absolute unanimity here there are some important conclusions to be drawn from this second rank set of assessment choices. We have already remarked when considering the findings for disabled students recorded in **Table Twenty-One** that the assessment choices of peer and self-evaluation and critical diaries, learning logs and journals that failed to appeal to disabled students in Phase One are strongly favoured in Phases Two and Three by all cohorts. We consider the former reticence in these areas to reflect "fresher" uncertainty and by the same token the approval of these modes in the latter two phases is further evidence of student choice maturing and consolidating around opportunities for inter-personal learning, personal development and tying the acquisition of academic knowledge to personal growth.

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✳ "Peer and self-evaluation would be good to build confidence." (Student with dyslexia, studying Social Science.)

✳ "Keeping an ongoing journal/diary allows one to reflect on progress and also to build in something new." (Student with a disability not listed by the UCAS codes, studying Art.)

✳ "Oral examinations would be better for me as it means I can voice my opinions. I find it easy to vocalise my ideas but I can't put them down on paper." (Student with dyslexia, studying Education.)

✳ "It is easier to find time when I am healthy for larger projects rather than lots of minor coursework. There is less risk of getting a low mark if I am ill on the day of the exam." (Student with a disability not listed by the UCAS codes, studying Engineering.)

✳ "I am good at group work because I am a confident person and find it much easier to explain and talk about what I'm studying rather than writing it down." (Student with dyslexia, studying Health and Social Care.)

✳ "Whilst I am not always able to attend University due to medication and my medical condition with a portfolio I can continue this work at home and in hospital." (Student with an unseen disability, studying Science.)

The same general observations about skills acquisition can be levelled at the presence of the assessment choice of projects, independent and group, that appears in every phase of the project in the lower registers of the top 10 but appealing patchily to different cohorts. We feel that this pattern of intermittent choice might reflect the fact that in Phase Two many students were on placement learning and therefore not focussing upon an assessment choice based upon group and project assumptions.

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There are two further observations that must be made about the assessment choices that appear in **Table Twenty-Four**. The choices of oral examinations and portfolios and sketchbooks are significant because they indicate graphically the difference in learning styles between the disabled student cohort and the non-disabled student control group. Both modes of assessment have appealed to disabled students but not to the non-disabled student cohort, and both found a slightly stronger showing in the choices of students with dyslexia (see **Table Twenty-Two**). For Phase One students, without knowing quite what it would involve or being aware of the level of training required to become proficient at being examined orally, it might be expected that oral examinations would be appealing to students with dyslexia, concerned with their capacity to adequately represent their ideas in writing. Oral examinations might be equally appealing to some other disabled groups and there is a widespread pre-conceived and exaggerated notion amongst students about what is expected of degree-level study. **(See Section 5.7. What students say about assessments based on oral presentations.)**

The relatively strong showing of portfolios and sketchbooks as an assessment choice amongst disabled students in Phase One needs some further explanation. It led the Project Team to consider the possibility that disabled students were primarily making assessment choices that simply reflected their course choice and current assessment mode, despite the intentions of the Phase One questionnaire to ascertain a sense of alternative. To examine this possibility we scrutinised the questionnaire responses for this cohort and discovered that of the 27 students who privileged this assessment method, 33.3% were currently on Arts courses where portfolios and sketchbooks would be a facet of the assessment regime. We concluded from this that despite a core of disabled students who wished to reaffirm the positive value to them of portfolios and sketchbooks, based no doubt on personal positive experiences, there were over 65% of the disabled student cohort who had chosen this method of assessment who

wished to explore its novel possibilities. Perhaps thinking more along the lines of a portfolio approach to assessment and learning, rather than the more narrow Arts connotations of portfolios and sketchbooks, adherents to this assessment method were drawn from all faculties and a wide range of subject areas including Education, Psychology, Earth Science, Tourism Management and Sports Science. The portfolio method of assessment was also trialled with 140 students, disabled and non-disabled, on an Extended Science course where it proved to be valued. **(See Section 5.9. Alternative and inclusive assessment case studies.)**

Taken together the top10 choices set out in **Table Twenty-Four** show a predilection amongst the SPACE Project student survey population for modes of assessment that encapsulate variety, promote self-development in the context of the acquisition of the learning outcomes, create congruence between ability and the means of measuring it, and, finally, implicitly place a high value on the possibility of assessment choice. From a disabled student point of view such considerations provide opportunities to reduce the impact of disability through relegating more closed modes of assessment, such as unseen examinations, that conflict with significant numbers of disabled students' learning styles. **(See Section 5.3. How student learning styles affect assessment performance.)**

✦ Considering the top 5 assessment choices on the basis of course studied

We wished to explore the relationship between courses studied and alternative modes of assessment preferred by students across the partnership of eight HEIs. On the surface this seemingly simple cross-tabulation was fraught with difficulty. The Project partner institutions have a cultural bias towards Arts subjects and therefore it was not possible to recruit a significant sample of students that was representative of all the major disciplines. Added to this, when seeking

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to analyse data cross-institutionally, there was the critical problem of course designation. The configuration of faculties within institutions and the often unique groupings of subjects within faculties meant that any given subject could appear, in different institutions, in different Schools and Faculties: for example, Psychology may be a Science or a Social Science, Architecture may be in the Arts or an aspect of the Built Environment, and Computing may be in a School of its own or located within a Faculty of Technology, etc. For statistical purposes, therefore, the grouping of subjects studied has the contradictory characteristics of being both self-evident and somewhat arbitrary in nature.

Despite the limitations of recruitment and course designation we wanted to examine how the top 5 assessment choices related to the subjects studied by the student respondents. This is set out in **Table Twenty-Five**.

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Table Twenty-Five: Top five assessment choices by course studied as average percentage of all phases					
	Continuous assessment	**Coursework with discussion**	**Essay assignments**	**Multiple choice**	**Personal research**
Arts (incl. applied, creative and performance, etc.)	23.9%	36.2%	11.7%	9.0%	27.4%
Built Environment (incl. architecture, environmental management and garden design, etc.)	7.7%	7.6%	6.3%	11.7%	7.4%
Business (incl. tourism and leisure)	3.7%	2.0%	5.6%	10.1%	3.8%
Education	10.6%	11.4%	16.6%	13.2%	4.6%
Engineering (incl. mathematics)	0%	0%	0%	1.0%	0.9%
Health and Social Care (incl. community work and sports science)	7.7%	5.7%	7.3%	11.1%	4.7%
Science (incl. geography, geology and psychology)	22.5%	15.6%	20.6%	25.9%	21.6%
Social Science and Cultural Studies (incl. English, humanities and religion)	14.0%	16.3%	22.6%	10.2%	22.0%
Technology (incl. computing and ICT)	6.4%	4.5%	6.3%	5.4%	6.7%
Field not completed	3.5%	0.7%	3.0%	2.4%	0.9%
Total percentage	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

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Table Twenty-Five shows that it is not possible from our research to be really incisive about the correlation between subjects studied and choice of assessment mode. We consider that the number of student respondents studying Engineering and Technology subjects is not sufficient to draw any sound conclusions about them. Similarly, any comments about students studying Business and Health and Social Care must be tentative ones. Being mindful of the caveat about the difficulty of course designation, there are significant elements that can be drawn out. Continuous assessment as a chosen mode was popular with both Arts and Science-based students, with a significant showing in both Education and Social Science. Coursework with discussion was most favourably placed by Arts-based students, with significant placings in Education, Science and Social Science. Essay assignments appealed most to Science, Social Science and Education-based students, with a smaller showing in the Arts. As an assessment option multiple choice is favoured principally by Science students with a rating of around 10% amongst students in the Arts, Built Environment, Business, Education, Health and Social Care, and Social Science. Finally, personal research has a strong showing in the Arts, Science and Social Sciences.

Within the broad subject areas designated by the research, the results show that in some instances there is a strong preference by subject studied for specific alternative modes of assessment. For example, coursework with discussion is most popular with Arts-based students (36.2%) and multiple choice is most popular with Science-based students (25.9%). Conversely, the conceptual promise of continuous assessment finds favour across the axis of both students of the Arts (23.9%) and of the Sciences (22.5%). However, it is the presence of personal research which manages to link Arts (27.4%), Science (21.6%) and Social Science (22.0%) in a triumvirate championing the objective of self-development as an alternative mode.

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The SPACE Project was only established as a pilot study and more research including student feedback is required to understand the interface between subject studied and chosen assessment mode: to explore the capacity for curricular modification to accommodate a range of methods for assessing the learning outcomes and to examine how students adapt to new assessment modes. **(See Section 5.9. Alternative and inclusive assessment case studies.)** Our research has shown that students are prepared for "thinking outside the box" of current assessment practice and there is clearly some evidence, albeit a little occluded, to suggest that subject studied may bracket the preferences of students for both existing assessment modes, where they are satisfied with them, and for conceiving of the value of a range of alternatives that they believed would be relevant to their subject.

✦ Assessment choice as a longitudinal issue

For the most part our research has considered the assessment choices made by the two main cohorts, disabled and non-disabled students, as comparators at different phases of the Project, or combined as a total student population for the Project. However we also wanted to take individual "snapshots" of students to examine their negotiation of assessment choice over the three year period. For this purpose we were restricted to the cohort of disabled students as the non-disabled control group was only recruited from Phase Two of the Project onwards. We focused on 20 disabled students who had completed all fields in their questionnaires, representing a broad range of subject areas, and analysed their personal assessment choices year-on-year.

Initially we were interested in volume of choices and subsequently continuity of choice. In Phase One student choice of assessment mode was limited by the research to 5 selections only but for Phases Two and Three the choice was made open ended in response to student feedback. Disabled students in Phase Two became somewhat more profligate, doubling up almost and making on average 9 assessment choices each, and finally striking a mid-point balance for Phase Three with just over 7 choices each on average.

5.5 Students' preferred choice of assessment modes

Our questionnaire was not established to ascertain the basis for these shifts in the volume of choices made after the end of the restrictions governing Phase One, but a few possibilities do suggest themselves. We suggest that the fluctuations in volume of choice in the second year of study reflects increased levels of confidence , a better knowledge of what a mode of assessment might entail, a willingness to be flexible and perhaps a critique of the perceived restrictions of past or existing course assessment modes. The settling pattern of the Third Phase may reflect an engagement with finals and the cold calculation of degree grades and the pressure of employer requirements. Discussion in the student focus groups raised all these factors.

The issue of continuity across the phases is an important one as it reflects a degree of student certainty about the applicability of a specific assessment mode to measure their ability in the context of their sense of the learning outcomes of the course. In practice continuity and change of choice of assessment mode between phases was complex. We can make a distinction between two tiers of continuity. On the one hand we have continuous choice running through all three phases of the Project and we will discuss this shortly. On the other hand, we have partial continuity which can be further sub-divided between choices that are continuous for any two phases of the project (Phase One to Phase Two and Phase Two to Phase Three) and choices that are discontinuous in that the choice only appears in Phases One and Three. **Table Twenty-Six** records the results for partial continuity in its three guises.

5.5 Students' preferred choice of assessment modes

Table Twenty-Six: Distribution of assessment choice for any two phases of the Project, by a sample of disabled students, where the mode of choice is the same as the mode offered on course			
Project phases compared	**Number of disabled students choosing the same option over two phases (of 20 disabled students)**	**Number of students choosing more than one assessment mode and number of assessment modes chosen for two phases**	
		Students	Modes
Phase One and Phase Two	13 (65.0%)	2 (10.0%)	3
		7 (35.0%)	7
Phase One and Phase Three	12 (60.0%)	2 (10.0%)	2
Phase Two and Phase Three	14 (70.0%)	1 (5.0%)	10
		2 (10.0%)	6
		1 (5.0%)	5
		2 (10.0%)	4
		3 (15.0%)	3
		3 (15.0%)	2

The results for the partial continuity of assessment choice between phases indicates that a significant number of disabled students in Phase One wish to carry over a small number of assessment mode choices into Phase Two, their second year, and a comparable number of students wish to do the same between Phases One and Three but generally speaking with only a single assessment mode leap-frogging from the first into the final year. By comparison the partial continuity between Phases Two

5.5 Students' preferred choice of assessment modes

and Three is more significant because although the number of students making repeat choices of assessment mode is broadly comparable to the other two double periods, the number of choices being repeated as clusters of varying size is greatly increased.

This tends to suggest that students regard their second year as an opportunity to explore assessment choice, taking modes through from Phase One but discounting them at the end of the year and selecting a further set of assessment modes during the year to take through to Phase Three, in many cases their final year. This juggling of choice accounts for the higher volume of choices generally stipulated by disabled students during Phase Two. This trend tends to reinforce the sense that issues of choice are based on fluctuations of student confidence and of having tried and tested methods in place to meet the exigencies of final year assessments for degree classifications.

Underlying the partial continuity between phases and the fluctuations in the number of choices made referred to above, there was a solid foundation in continuity of chosen assessment modes across all three phases of the Project as **Table Twenty-Seven** shows.

5.5 Students' preferred choice of assessment modes

Table Twenty-Seven: Distribution of assessment choice for all three phases of the Project, by a sample of disabled students, where the mode of choice is the same as the mode offered on course			
Project Phases compared	**Number of disabled students choosing the same option over three phases (of 20 disabled students)**	**Number of students choosing more than one assessment mode and number of assessment modes chosen for two phases**	
		Students	Modes
Phase One, Phase Two and Phase Three	14 (70.0%)	1 (5.0%)	4
		2 (10.0%)	3
		2 (10.0%)	2

Table Twenty-Seven reveals that of the 20 disabled students tracked for the 3 years, 14 made at least one choice of assessment mode that they adhered to for all three phases of the Project. Of these 14 disabled students, 2 had selected 2 assessment modes that they adhered to throughout, 2 selected 3 and one student tenaciously selected 4 modes of assessment for all three phases. These repeat choices of assessment mode concentrated on 15 options in total. Some clustering in this sub-sample is also evident and in keeping with the overall response to the annual questionnaire. Hence we find there is a top 5 here that we are already familiar with:

❖ continuous assessment;

❖ coursework with discussion elements;

❖ multiple choice;

❖ oral examinations;

❖ portfolios and sketchbooks.

5.5 Students' preferred choice of assessment modes

Not surprisingly, the top 5 assessment choices that find favour for continuity also find pride of place for being amongst the most frequently selected for the final year amongst this sub-sample (in descending order of significance):

- ❖ coursework with discussion elements;
- ❖ essay assignments;
- ❖ continuous assessment;
- ❖ critical diaries, learning logs and journals;
- ❖ exhibition and poster displays;
- ❖ multiple choice;
- ❖ oral examinations;
- ❖ personal research projects;
- ❖ computer-based assessments;
- ❖ portfolios and sketchbooks;
- ❖ student-led seminars, presentations and discussions;
- ❖ examinations (open book).

This bears all the hallmarks of the now familiar top 10 of assessment choices and obviously most clearly resembles that for the general disabled student cohort (see **Table Twenty-One**), although it is not as representative, being a much smaller sample.

Although the SPACE survey was not established to explicitly examine the process of change in disabled students' choice of assessment mode over time, and therefore we designed no mechanisms for the measurement of it, the pattern of choice clearly registers important changes of emphasis year-on-year. We feel there are grounds for further research into how student perceptions of assessment choice may change depending upon an individual student's academic career, the pattern of the delivery of the curriculum, and not least

the function of different types of assessment at different times of the degree programme. We are also aware, for example, that early stage antipathy amongst disabled students towards assignments as a mode of assessment is strongly influenced by the interregnum between applying for and receiving support through the Disabled Student Allowance (DSA). After receipt of this provision (for example, assistive technology and study skills support), attitudes towards assignments become more favourable. The research seems to suggest that students are most flexible during their second year of study and that many over a three-year period develop a good sense of what might best measure their ability in achieving the learning outcomes. Finally, it needs to be pointed out, as a point of reiteration in fact, that amongst the breadth of choices privileged by this sub-sample of disabled students, no matter how catholic or elastic, the possibility of unseen examinations was not countenanced at all.

Section Notes

1. It is important to state that the preferences tabulated in **Table Twenty-Four** are the representative choices of a survey population and not a tightly choreographed set of universal choices inherent to each individual student surveyed.

2. As **Table Fourteen** shows, 32.4% of those choosing coursework with discussion were already using it on course as a current assessment method.

5.5 Students' preferred choice of assessment modes

Summary points

★ Through the annual questionnaire students were asked to indicate their preferences for modes of assessment other than those offered by their current course. A small number of students indicated their contentment with the present arrangements and some students made choices of alternative modes that were in fact already available to them as current course modes of assessment. This was the case with coursework with discussion which was highly favoured throughout the survey.

★ Choice of assessment mode was examined for a number of different student cohorts:

   ❖ all students on the Project for Phases Two and Three;

   ❖ disabled students for all phases of the Project;

   ❖ students with dyslexia for all phases of the Project;

   ❖ non-disabled students for Phases Two and Three of the Project.

★ The issue of student panic at assessment times was raised as a factor effecting choice of assessment mode, and unseen examinations were often the focus for negative statements articulating a sense of anxiety, panic and stress.

★ For many students the activity of considering alternative modes of assessment and modes from non-cognate subject areas was conflated with a need to express their disapproval of traditional, unseen time-limited examinations.

★ Route of entry was a factor in determining student choice of assessment mode. We found that the small numbers choosing unseen examinations by preference, making it an unpopular choice, had entered HE by the traditional route of A Levels, etc. By contrast no students who had entered by an Access Course made this selection but instead opted for a much more nuanced set of options.

5.5 Students' preferred choice of assessment modes

- To help compare the assessment choices made by the various cohorts examined in this section, we ordered assessment choice as a top 10 listing by cohort preferences.

- Different cohorts, to some extent, proposed different selections of choices reflecting loosely defined common denominators of learning styles within cohorts.

- As to be expected there were many similarities of assessment choice made between the disabled student cohort and the students within that group with dyslexia. There were also some notable differences in the relative values attached to essay assignments and multiple choice testing, with disabled students favouring these modes more than students with dyslexia. Conversely the latter cohort more than the former favoured exhibition and poster displays, critical diaries and learning logs and journals.

- When comparing the preferences expressed by the disabled and the non-disabled cohorts, we found that oral examinations and portfolios and sketchbooks which were favoured by the disabled students were not so highly regarded by their non-disabled peers.

- Most startling is the congruence of choice that constitutes the top five assessment modes that find universal favour amongst all the SPACE Project cohorts:

  - continuous assessment (47.3% on average);

  - coursework with discussion (40.2% on average);

  - personal research projects (34% on average);

  - essay assignments (33.0% on average);

  - multiple choice (30.3% on average).

  This five-part consensual choice represents an interesting balance of concept and method.

5.5 Students' preferred choice of assessment modes

- The full top 10 shows a predilection amongst the students surveyed for modes of assessment that encapsulate variety, promote self-development in the context of the acquisition of the learning outcomes, create congruence between ability and the means of measuring it, and, finally, implicitly place a high value on the possibility of assessment choice.

- There was some evidence that the top 5 modes of assessment chosen correlated with subject studied. For example:

  - coursework with discussion is most popular with Arts-based students (36.2%);

  - multiple choice is most popular with Science-based students (25.9%);

  - continuous assessment finds favour across the axis of both the Arts (23.9%) and of the Sciences (22.5%);

  - personal research as a choice links Arts (27.4%), Science (21.6%) and Social Science (22.0%).

- Assessment choices made by students over a longitudinal period of three years indicated that in the second year of study students are most open to making exploratory assessment choices and many students developed a core set of choices that they believe might best measure their ability over time.

5.6 What students say about assessments based upon group work

What this section contains:

- Background to group work

- Positive student evaluations of group work

- Negative student evaluations of group work

5.6 What students say about assessments based upon group work

◄ Background to group work

Group work was one of the areas that was often referred to by students as a current assessment mode or as an assessment mode that they wished to be assessed by. Many student respondents throughout the lifetime of the SPACE Project had experiences of working in groups, although significant numbers had not.

The matrix of 47 assessment modes **(see Appendix 2: Matrix of assessment modes)** used to ascertain student choice of alternative assessment modes lists a range of assessment choices that are commonly predicated upon collective student effort, or could be so:

- ❖ design tasks
- ❖ exhibition and poster displays
- ❖ fieldwork reports
- ❖ finding primary source material
- ❖ laboratory practical reports
- ❖ peer and self-evaluation
- ❖ problem based learning
- ❖ projects, independent and group.

As described elsewhere **(see Section 5.5. Students' preferred choice of assessment modes)**, two of the above methods – peer and self-evaluation and projects, independent and group – appealed strongly to all student cohorts as an alternative, with the consequence that they both made an appearance in the league table of top 10 choices of assessment mode. (See **Table Twenty-Four.**)

Given the popularity of these two modes of assessment and the underlying significance of group work for so many assessment related tasks, we have sought student evaluations of their experiences of group

work for the purpose of presenting their views to aid the consideration of and the planning for assessment change.

During Phase Two and Phase Three of the Project students were asked to list their current assessment modes and group work represented a significant element for both disabled and non-disabled students. In Phase Two, 61 students participated in group work (54% of the sample of 114) and in Phase Three the number declined to 40 students (47% of the sample of 86). The small decline in percentage participation reflects, in part, the fact that group work can often be formative rather than summative, and that for most respondents Phase Three was their final year: a time when assessment is principally linked to individual effort leading to final grades and a degree classification.

The range of views expressed by students about the value of group work encompassed both the polarities of opinion and considerable nuance.

✦ Positive student evaluations of group work

Opinions of the positive value of group work come from disabled and non-disabled students, studying a broad range of subjects.

* "Well I prefer talking about an area, so group work presentations are a good way for me personally." (Student with dyslexia, studying Health and Social Care.)

* "I find it so much easier working in a group, in terms of dance, because you get so used to doing your own movements that it just gets boring, whereas if you're in a group of other dancers they bring new ideas, which makes it a more interesting piece." (Student with dyslexia, studying Arts.)

5.6 What students say about assessments based upon group work

* "I feel group work is really good for you because it helps you to work as part of a team. Even if you don't like the other people in your group you just have to get on with it. It teaches you good life skills." (Student with a disability not listed by the UCAS codes, studying Social Sciences.)

* "I find group work worthwhile or not depending on the group and it is not affected by my disability." (Student who is blind or partially sighted, studying Business.)

* "In groups we can share knowledge and learn other skills that will be helpful in a future career." (Student with dyslexia, studying Science.)

* "Group work is helpful as we can analyse as we go along and get feedback." (Student with dyslexia, studying Arts.)

* "Often I get to pick a partner for group work so that I am with someone who doesn't mind reading to me." (Student with dyslexia, studying Science.)

* "Group work helps to stimulate new ideas and raise new areas for concern and development." (Non-disabled student, studying Arts.)

* "Where group work is concerned I feel that peer and self-evaluation is the fairest way of assessing." (Student who is blind or visually impaired, studying Social Sciences.)

The value of group work to students appears to reside at the interface between academic work, the structures of formative and summative assessment, and interpersonal development. On the positive side students enjoy the chance to communicate orally, they regard the dynamics of group work - the interplay of individual personalities and the negotiation of their respective strengths and weaknesses - as opportunities to develop skills for personal growth and transition into

the workplace. In this sense there is strength in numbers, providing the latitude to improve academic performance and evaluate achievement through continuous circuits of feedback from peers and/or staff. Regarded positively there is no distinction between disabled and non-disabled student evaluations of group work, where the difference between individuals along this continuum is not addressed overtly as an issue. There is a sense of equality in the affirmative way that disabled students regard their achievements, or where there might be an issue of differences in learning styles the opportunity to find a supportive partner is regarded as an affirming possibility.

Negative student evaluations of group work

Opinions expressing negative views of group-work exercises come from an equally broad range of subject areas and from both disabled and non-disabled students.

* "Group work results in disproportionate marking and some students relying heavily on others." (Non-disabled student, studying Science.)

* "The assessment was done as part of a group because we were imitating what a jazz band would be like, but everyone tended to get the same mark which isn't fair." (Student with dyslexia, studying Education.)

* "Group work assessments should be better organised. I feel we should also be individually marked on the work we put into organising meetings, etc." (Non-disabled student, studying Science.)

* "Many students work in small groups but I find myself working on my own. I feel that is because I am slow at learning and many students are irritated by this." (Student with dyslexia, studying Arts.)

5.6 What students say about assessments based upon group work

* "Coursework and exams are good but I think group work in your final year is a poor method." (Student with an unseen disability, studying Health and Social Care.)

* "We have had a couple of group presentations. I think it is a good idea, in principle, having a group of people trying to work things out, but it doesn't always work in reality because most of us have jobs, children or outside influences that have a pull on us, and we don't live on campus. The younger ones tend to and they've got no other ties, so they have got more time to come and spend as a group." (Non-disabled student, studying Health and Social Care.)

* "I thought my performance in the group assessment was so poor that I couldn't see the point in doing it if I didn't have a speaking role. I don't know what happens, but when I get a stutter I go to pieces, especially when I first meet people and there's nothing I can do about it, it's horrible." (Student with a disability not listed by the UCAS codes, studying Health and Social Care.)

* "My performance in group assessed tasks is complicated sometimes. I feel that when I'm healthy in a way I tend to over contribute to try to make up for the times when I'm ill." (Student with a disability not listed by the UCAS codes, studying Technology.)

The main objection to group work, strongly felt but not widespread, relates very specifically to group tasks that are assessed as summative. There is an overt and sometimes underlying feeling that marking regimes are not sufficiently subtle to accommodate the different contributions of individuals within the totality of the achievements of the group. Hence many objections to assessed group work would probably evaporate if students felt unequivocally that group work was subject to a dual assessment: through the awarding of a group mark and individual marks.

5.6 What students say about assessments based upon group work

Other facets of the organisation and dynamics of group work have negative connotations. Group assessed tasks may not be appropriate in the final year. There is an issue of access to collective endeavour for mature students and those living off campus, especially if group tasks take place out of hours.

Regarded negatively, there is, in a few isolated cases, a distinction between disabled and non-disabled student evaluations of group work, where the difference between individuals along this continuum is addressed overtly by disabled students as an issue. Two of the disabled students regarded their achievements in highly personal and self-deprecating ways. However, it is not that the students concerned did not regard the group-work mode of assessment as a valuable one, rather that they felt that their performance failed to do justice to them as individuals. Their sense of negative achievement of course highlights one of the key dangers of group work, that the challenge of group participation can exacerbate negative personal feelings. Thus while the interpersonal negotiation of disabled and non-disabled students in group assessed tasks may mirror broader social interactions, and be none the worse for that challenge, there is clearly a need for staff to be vigilant about individual student's place and sense of self within the group. Such concerns, embedded in a structure of best practice, require staff to be mindful of how best to facilitate the allocation of tasks in assessed group work, to reflect the individual student's learning skills. Such considerations should also be addressed through staff feedback. **(See Section 5.8. What students say about staff feedback on their performance.)**

5.6 What students say about assessments based upon group work

Summary points

- Group work provides a useful platform for a wide range of formative and summative assessment tasks.

- Amongst the students surveyed for the Project significant numbers were studying on courses where group work had been applied to learning, teaching and assessment.

- On the positive side there is an affirmative equality of input and outcome for both disabled and non-disabled students.

- Group work offers opportunities for oral communication as well as supporting written contributions. Through it students can develop personally as well as academically; it provides skills transferable to the workplace and it offers continuous circuits of peer and staff feedback.

- On the negative side there is a perception of a mis-match between effort disproportionately made and marks not reflecting inequalities of commitment. A more subtle measurement is sought, offering dual assessment of both group and individual effort.

- Some disappointment was recorded by disabled students regarding their performance in the subjective sense of not doing themselves justice.

- Group work requires staff to be vigilant in how tasks are apportioned to play to the strengths in student learning styles and methods of measuring achievement should be linked to such considerations.

5.7 What students say about assessments based upon oral presentations

What this section contains:

- Background to assessments based upon oral presentations

- Positive student evaluations of making oral presentations

- Negative student evaluations of making oral presentations

- Ambivalent student evaluations of making oral presentations

5.7 What students say about assessments based upon oral presentations

◄ Background to assessments based upon oral presentations

Presenting work orally was often referred to by students as a current assessment mode or as an assessment mode that they wished to be assessed through. Many student respondents throughout the lifetime of the SPACE Project had been assessed using oral presentations although significant numbers had not.

The matrix of 47 assessment modes **(See Appendix 2: Matrix of assessment modes)** used to ascertain student choice of alternative assessment modes, lists a range of assessment choices that are commonly predicated upon making oral presentations, or could be so:

- ❖ briefings;

- ❖ coursework with discussion elements;

- ❖ crits;

- ❖ oral examinations;

- ❖ student-led seminars, presentations and discussions;

- ❖ viva voce examinations.

As described elsewhere **(See Section 5.5. Students' preferred choice of assessment modes)**, two of the above methods – coursework with discussion elements and oral examinations – made an appearance in the league table of top 10 choices of assessment mode. (See **Table Twenty-Four.**) Coursework with discussion elements was popular with all cohorts of students and consequently enjoys the penultimate position in the league table whereas oral examinations, which were also highly favoured, tended to be more popular with disabled than non-disabled students.

Given the popularity of these two modes of assessment and the overarching relevance of making an oral presentation as a common denominator for so many assessment related tasks, we have sought student evaluations of their experiences to assist in the planning process for assessment change.

5.7 What students say about assessments based upon oral presentations

During Phase Two and Phase Three of the Project students were asked to list their current assessment modes and making an oral presentation was a highly significant aspect for both disabled and non-disabled students. In Phase Two, 87 individuals mentioned oral presentations as a current assessment method (76% of the total of 114) and in Phase Three the number recorded was 69 students (80% of the total of 86). Student evaluations of orally presented work encapsulate as one might expect positive and negative views but there is a third, intermediate category, students who feel ambivalent.

✦ Positive student evaluations of making oral presentations

Opinions of the positive value of oral presentations come from disabled and non-disabled students studying a broad range of subjects.

* "I prefer to be assessed by oral presentations, but everyone can't be pleased all the time." (Non-disabled student, studying Social Sciences.)

* "Presentations allow me to shine but any written work lets me down." (Student with dyslexia, studying Business.)

* "Assessed oral presentations do suit me as I find written examinations very frustrating when I can't find the words to explain a particular point." (Student with dyslexia, studying Built Environment.)

* "Talking about my work has helped cement my ideas and express my views more clearly." (Non-disabled student, studying Arts.)

* "Learning through presentations can be very useful for your career. One of the more popular projects is actually presenting mathematics in public, when you have to go into a school for example." (Student who is blind or visually impaired, studying Engineering.)

5.7 What students say about assessments based upon oral presentations

As one might expect, offering students a presentation as a way of assessing their achievement of the learning outcomes has a particular attraction for those students who are strong on oral communication, and perhaps as a corollary to this, to students who feel they are relatively weak on the formal modalities of written assessed tasks, like assignments and essays. It is not that students feel that the two forms of production, written and oral, are radically divorced from one another, rather that the written element required for a presentation may be playing a supporting role rather than the lead role required of an assignment submitted for formative purposes.

Presentations also seem to offer the student a personal feedback loop, in their capacity to formalise ideas and tie thinking and analysis to the art of public speaking. As one student makes clear, this is a highly useful graduate skill for employment and career development. As a positively valued mode of assessment oral presentations appear to attract both disabled and non-disabled students.

5.7 What students say about assessments based upon oral presentations

🔶 **Negative student evaluations of making oral presentations**

Negative evaluations of making oral presentations come from both disabled and non-disabled students studying a broad range of subjects.

✳ "Oral presentations are not effective for me." (Student with dyslexia, studying Technology.)

✳ "Presentations are very stressful." (Student with dyslexia, studying Social Science.)

✳ "Presentations are intimidating." (Non-disabled student, studying Education.)

✳ "I find oral presentations are nerve-racking and stressful." (Non-disabled student, studying Built Environment.)

✳ "I am excused making presentations in front of other students. I only do them one-to-one with the tutor which helps a lot as the stress of it can be too much." (Student with mental health difficulties, studying Science.)

✳ "I do feel at a slight disadvantage when it comes to giving presentations." (Student who is blind or partially sighted, studying Social Science.)

✳ "I think presentations are useful but I find them difficult to deliver, relying heavily on my memory which is very nerve-racking." (Student who is blind or visually impaired, studying Business.)

✳ "If you don't like talking about yourself or your work and you have low confidence levels it is very difficult to say what you mean and what you want to say in a presentation." (Student with mental health difficulties, studying Art.)

✳ "When I look for a module I am always looking for the ones that don't involve a presentation because of my stutter and this means I limit myself." (Student with a disability not listed by the UCAS codes, studying Business.)

5.7 What students say about assessments based upon oral presentations

On the purely critical side students who do not relish oral presentations as a form of assessment tend to focus firmly on what they experience as a powerful set of uncomfortable emotions. "Stressful", "intimidating" and "nerve-racking", leading to avoidance and reflecting a subjective sense of "low confidence", these are the negative aspects that find expressive voice above amongst both disabled and non-disabled students. Reading these evaluations one is struck by the fact that for these respondents giving an oral presentation for assessment purposes does not in any way suit their learning styles or indeed their sense of self. **(See Section 5.5. Students' preferred choice of assessment modes.)**

➤ **Ambivalent student evaluations of making oral presentations**

It is perhaps not surprising, given the polarity of feeling between students who feel powerfully enabled by making oral presentations and those who feel the opposite, that there is strong evidence for a "middle view" reflecting feelings of ambivalence.

✳ "Presentations I find not too bad after a lot of hard work but I have to get help to proof read what I want to read out." (Student with dyslexia, studying Health and Social Care.)

✳ "Before our first presentation we had things explained to us briefly but we weren't told how to stand there and engage with the audience. It's just the first few minutes that I don't like and after that I'm ok." (Non-disabled student, studying Social Science.)

✳ "As a form of assessment the presentation was the one that I worried about. I couldn't sleep. I was going over in my head what I had to say. When I sat waiting to do it I just wanted to run away but now I see it more as a confidence boost, questioning what I do, etc." (Non-disabled student, studying Arts.)

5.7 What students say about assessments based upon oral presentations

* "For me presentations are the worst method of assessment followed by exams. I would like to tackle my difficulty with oral presentations by starting in front of a small group and then slowly increase the audience size." (Student with mental health difficulties, studying Science.)

* "Physically I am alright and I can stand up and do an oral presentation, although it is quite hard for me and it would be easier if I didn't. On my other course we had to do a PowerPoint presentation and that was fine." (Student with a disability not listed by the UCAS codes, studying Arts.)

* "I don't like the idea of giving presentations and I can get quite anxious beforehand. When it's all over I feel better about myself and get a positive feeling straight away. The instant feedback you get from giving a presentation is helpful and boosts my confidence for the rest of the module." (Non-disabled student, studying Social Science.)

There is a strong sense of constructive engagement with these apparently ambivalent student evaluations, a real feeling that the difficulty of the task of presenting is a challenge to be overcome. The individual is highlighted, in the limelight, and for some disabled students the challenge is exacerbated by mental health difficulties or physical or sensory impairments affecting communication skills and confidence. However, for some of the non-disabled students the challenge hardly seems less challenging and both cohorts seem reconciled to the value of undertaking presentations, however difficult, with a sense of stoicism. There is a palpable sense of individuals undergoing a kind of conversion, turning their anxiety into a confidence boost and a more reflexive approach to their learning. Long-term gains seem to be on offer, although it is clearly important that staff guidance should be available to help manage student anxiety, provide frameworks where required for students to take incremental steps in making presentations,

5.7 What students say about assessments based upon oral presentations

and facilitate the use of technology for those who require it as an aid to making their presentations more professional and perhaps a little less personal. **(See Section 5.8. What students say about staff feedback on their assessment performance.)**

Taken together these three approaches to oral presentations (positive, negative and ambivalent) show that disabled and non-disabled students hold considerably nuanced views. What the statements conceal, to a degree, is the fact that when regarded as distinct cohorts for Phases Two and Three for statistical purposes, disabled students are very marginally the more enthusiastic about the possibilities that giving a presentation might offer, by way of reflecting their learning styles. **(See Section 5.3. How student learning styles affect assessment performance.)**

5.7 What students say about assessments based upon oral presentations

Summary points

★ Oral presentations provide a highly significant modus operandi for a wide range of assessment methods including some of those highly favoured by the student cohorts participating in the SPACE survey.

★ Amongst the students surveyed for the Project highly significant numbers were studying on courses where oral presentations underscored the teaching, learning and assessment agendas.

★ Disabled and non-disabled student evaluations of oral presentations, reflecting a breadth of subjects studied, were nuanced: positive, negative and ambivalent.

★ On the positive side, students strong on oral communication favoured oral presentations as an assessment mode. It offers the potential of a personal feedback loop, develops the art of public speaking and has transferable value for employment. It is a useful element in the student repertoire of Personal Development Planning.

★ Negatively considered oral presentations conjure up uncomfortable emotions for students and highlight once again the importance of marrying assessment mode to learning style; mismatching is measured in student stress and anxiety.

★ For students who view oral presentations ambivalently there is a powerful sense of constructive engagement with a challenge to be overcome. This is further evidence of the fact that for many students oral presentations offer an opportunity to develop inherently useful skills that can be deployed in life generally and employment in particular.
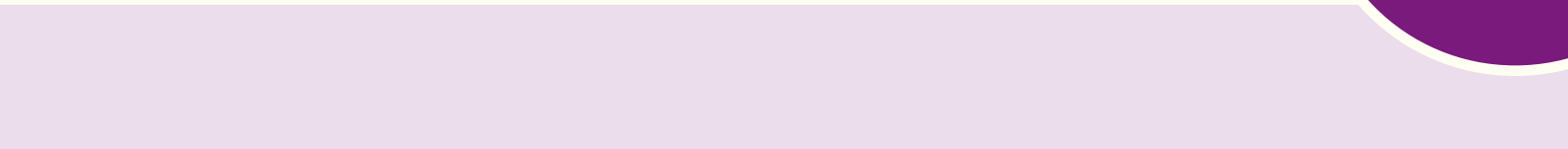
5.8 What students say about staff feedback on their assessment performance

What this section contains:

- Background to staff feedback on student assessment performance

- Positive evaluations of staff feedback on student on-course assessment performance

- Negative evaluations of staff feedback on student on-course assessment performance

- Evaluations of staff feedback on student examination performance

5.8 What students say about staff feedback on their assessment performance

◆ Background to staff feedback on student assessment performance

For Phases Two and Three of the Project disabled and non-disabled students were surveyed to ascertain their views on staff feedback as a facet of the assessment dialogue between students and staff. The same issue was also addressed through the student focus group meetings and the one-to-one in-depth interviews conducted for the Project. We were especially interested in the student evaluation of staff feedback because of the potential and indeed underpinning that such a dialogue offers for planning and delivering assessment change and piloting inclusive assessment modes.

Through the student questionnaires, respondents were asked to indicate whether or not they felt they received adequate staff feedback on assessment performance. In Phase Two, 44 students (39% of those surveyed) answered unequivocally "yes" to this question, whereas in Phase Three 27 students (31% of those surveyed) gave a clear affirmative reply. At best this represents a range of between 31%-39% satisfaction, a first indication that there is no real culture of staff feedback for summative assessment performance in HE.

However, there are grounds for thinking that these statistics are seriously inflated and that the situation is considerably more unsatisfactory. The vast majority of the students who felt satisfied with assessment feedback assumed that the question related solely to on-course assessment and not to unseen examinations. Generally students have no expectations of feedback being offered for the latter. Therefore, the answer "yes" in fact does not refer to the totality of assessment methods used on a course but simply to all those methods **excluding** unseen examinations. For this reason we have framed the first two sample boxes of student comments around the issue of on-course feedback, to make it quite clear that these student voices are not referring to feedback for examinations.

5.8 What students say about staff feedback on their assessment performance

Analysing the responses from both disabled and non-disabled student cohorts there is ample evidence of the importance students place on the receipt of properly targeted and timely staff feedback on assessment performance.

➤ **Positive evaluations of staff feedback on student on-course assessment performance**

Generally speaking, for about one-third of respondents, frameworks do appear to be in place to offer these students on-going feedback on their coursework assessment progress. Where staff feedback met student expectations it has been highly regarded by students as the following positive comments make clear.

* "We are given time slots to discuss our work with our lecturers." (Student with dyslexia, studying Social Science.)

* "My lecturers are extremely good at providing feedback." (Non-disabled student, studying Social Science.)

* "Feedback has been prompt and very thorough." (Student who is deaf or hard of hearing, studying Arts.)

* "All marks are explained by tutors in written format." (Student with dyslexia, studying Education.)

* "We are encouraged to talk to our lecturers about any comments they have written." (Student with a disability not listed by the UCAS codes, studying Science.)

* "We get feedback tutorials on how we should proceed, plus written information too." (Non-disabled student, studying Arts.)

* "The feedback from lecturers is excellent, giving constructive criticism where appropriate so you can really work to improve your grades." (Non-disabled student, studying Science.)

5.8 What students say about staff feedback on their assessment performance

Amongst those who felt that staff feedback was good, there is a unanimity amongst students that transcends courses studied and straddles the continuum between disabled and non-disabled students. There is ample evidence here that the time taken by staff to provide thorough feedback in a written, verbal or a combined form is time well spent in developing students' acquisition of the learning outcomes and developing their skills as higher level learners. Staff feedback as experienced by these students hints at meeting some of the seven principles of good feedback practice described by Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006):

1. Facilitates the development of self-assessment (reflection) in learning;

2. Encourages teacher and peer dialogue around learning;

3. Helps clarify what good performance is (goals, criteria, expected standards);

4. Provides opportunities to close the gap between current and desired performance;

5. Delivers high quality information to students about their learning;

6. Encourages positive motivational beliefs and self-esteem;

7. Provides information to teachers that can be used to help shape teaching.

The value of these principles can also, unfortunately, be even more clearly gauged where they are manifestly absent from student experience of staff feedback on their on-course assessment performance.

5.8 What students say about staff feedback on their assessment performance

✦ **Negative evaluations of staff feedback on student on-course assessment performance**

Student frustrations about staff feedback on their assessment performance during term time, takes several negative forms reflecting weaknesses in the structure of provision.

> ✳ "We never get feedback which has made my whole course thoroughly pointless. I have never had course work returned at a useful time." (Student with dyslexia, studying Social Science.)
>
> ✳ "In my thirteen week module, after you submit your first piece of work, you should get a ten minute personal tutorial. That's sadly lacking and I'm in a position for the first semester this year of having to hand in both pieces of work without any feedback or positive criticism at all." (Student with a disability not listed by the UCAS codes, studying Social Science.)
>
> ✳ "You get criticised but not corrected." (Student with dyslexia, studying Arts.)
>
> ✳ "I feel I don't get enough feedback at where I am going wrong which is frustrating." (Student with dyslexia, studying Arts.)
>
> ✳ "It would be helpful to be told in greater detail how to improve your answer – perhaps by being supplied with a model answer after the event." (Non-disabled student, studying Science.)
>
> ✳ "I had very little support and tutoring on essay writing and the feedback didn't really help me to improve." (Student with mental health difficulties, studying Arts.)
>
> ✳ "I get no feedback about presentation, especially talking in front of an audience." (Non-disabled student, studying Arts.)

5.8 What students say about staff feedback on their assessment performance

Obviously student dismay is at its greatest in those circumstances where individuals have recounted a complete absence of staff feedback on their assessment performance. This critical absence in the staff-student dialogue undermines the learning process and it is deeply discouraging and potentially de-motivating for students. This is intimately tied up with and exacerbated by rolling programmes of assessment submissions where students have no opportunity to engage in a tutor-focused evaluation of their work.

For other students the critical point falls on the level of feedback desired compared with the level received, or the focus of feedback neglects areas of activity where students evidently feel relatively weak and require constructive direction and perhaps reassurance. Students clearly want their learning to be reflexive and feedback on their assessment performance to facilitate better outcomes, closing the gap between expectations and achieved grades.

◆ Evaluations of staff feedback on student examination performance

The patchiness of staff feedback on student assessment performance becomes an absolute dearth of information when the important issue of unseen examinations is considered: the most traditional method of assessment being applied across the Project Partnership and of course the sector generally.

* "Feedback is usually a list of results on a notice board." (Student with dyslexia, studying Science.)

* "Exam feedback is a grade and no comment." (Student with mental health difficulties, studying Science.)

* "I have never seen a marked exam, I only get the results. I would like to see my marked answers, find the correct answers and find ways of improving my examination techniques." (Non-disabled student, studying Built Environment.)

* "The absence of feedback from exams doesn't allow for highlighting specific areas of weakness which can then be concentrated on." (Student with a disability not listed by the UCAS codes, studying Education.)

* "We don't get any feedback after exams other than a grade which seems a waste. One of the most valuable things in school was to get feedback after exams, look through them, go over the answers and learn where you went wrong or what you did well. That is completely lost at University. It seems like taking a step back because now exams really are just about what grade you get at the end of it, and no longer a way to learn and build upon work." (Non-disabled student, studying Social Science.)

5.8 What students say about staff feedback on their assessment performance

Given the importance placed by so many departments and institutions upon unseen examinations, distilled through the powerful concept of "finals", in shaping the undergraduate experience and indeed informing the general public perception of the legitimacy of the HE sector, the absence of a framework of staff feedback is a jarring and alarming contradiction. For some students it obviously comes as quite a shock and as one explained above, it was regressive compared with their schooling and experiences of studying for their A Levels. We might conclude that the absence of post-examination staff feedback is particularly acutely felt by students, because of the contrast this absence makes with the presence of the feedback available - albeit variable and patchily applied - for other assessed course elements.

The issue of staff feedback to inform and analyse student assessment performance takes on an even more critical central role when placed in the context of providing, as we recommend, inclusive assessments, with their reliance on flexibility and elements of student choice. As our research has shown, students in the current climate dominated by traditionalist assessment practice clearly require sound structures of staff feedback to inform their performance reflexively, identify strengths and weaknesses, and offer frameworks for improvement. Adding choice and flexibility to make assessment modes more inclusive presumes a more all encompassing staff framework of coherent and consistent procedures to support students' own understanding of their learning styles. This, of course, presumes that the converse side of the staff-student feedback dialogue will also be responsive and that feedback will provide information to staff that can be used to help shape their teaching (Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick, 2006).

5.8 What students say about staff feedback on their assessment performance

To this principle of good feedback practice we might also add the corollary that staff feedback should help shape assessment itself, especially where the parameters of choice and flexibility are employed as touchstones for relating assessment mode to the measurement of ability and the acquisition of the learning outcomes. Making students more self-aware, more able to judge accurately their strengths and weaknesses, will help inform the appropriateness of their assessment choices. This will necessarily influence the substance of best practice assessment feedback, which is timely, clear and constructive.

5.8 What students say about staff feedback on their assessment performance

Summary Points

★ Student perceptions of the adequacy of staff feedback on assessment performance are limited by the fact that students assume, through experience, that feedback is only likely to be proffered for on-course assessments and not examinations. Even in this circumstance only between 31% and 39% of students surveyed were in receipt of staff feedback.

★ Positive student evaluations of staff feedback on their on-course assessment performance indicated that the imperative of such feedback, as a vital element in student learning, was predicated upon some of the elements of best feedback practice.

★ Negative student evaluations of staff feedback on their on-course assessment performance indicated that the absence of adequate dialogue had a discouraging and potentially demoralising effect on students.

★ Student evaluations of staff feedback on their examination performance showed an absence of constructive dialogue, especially telling given the importance placed upon examinations as a traditionalist platform for the allocation of marks and ultimately degree classification.

★ The inherent potential of the feedback dialogue between staff and students should help define the parameters of assessment choice and help match learning styles to assessment mode to meet the measurement of students' acquisition of the learning outcomes.

★ We can conclude that there is a considerable way to go, as at present there is a limited culture of staff feedback on assessment performance in the HE sector and to manage assessment change staff feedback must be a key factor.

5.9 Alternative and inclusive assessment case studies – a staff development resource

What this section contains:

- Introduction to the SPACE Project case studies

- Alternative assessment case studies for disabled students

- Inclusive assessment case studies for disabled and non-disabled students offering more accessibility than traditional modes

- Inclusive assessment case studies for disabled and non-disabled students as an option in assessment choice

"Activities developed at the margins of organisations… provide an excellent seed ground for new 'home-grown' innovations… Valuing marginality and designing systems to use the experience gained from it requires commitment to the work at both strategic and operational levels"

(Stuart, M., 2002)

5.9 Alternative and inclusive assessment case studies – a staff development resource

✦ **Introduction to the SPACE Project case studies**

> ✳ "I think there ought to be more flexibility in the system to allow for different means of assessment to be used because at the moment it's a bit of a bureaucratic nightmare. Certainly trying to get this exam changed, so that it includes more visual aids, has been difficult. It is the going away and writing a letter and then having to have the idea submitted to a panel for approval that I find frustrating." (Student with dyslexia, studying Built Environment.)

The case studies in this section demonstrate a paradigm shift as the Project developed and the partnership conceptualised its approach to assessment practice as detailed in the Introduction to this resource. **(See Section 1. Introduction.)** We gave the three distinct approaches the following terms:

- ❖ **contingent approach -** (**"**Special arrangements" such as extra time, amanuensis, own room etc.) which is essentially a form of assimilation into an existing system;

- ❖ **alternative approach -** (e.g. a viva voce instead of a written assignment) offering a repertoire of assessments embedded into course design as present and future possibilities for a minority of disabled students;

- ❖ **inclusive approach -** (e.g. a flexible range of assessment modes made available to all) capable of assessing the same learning outcomes in different ways.

In Phase One of the Project, we began by exploring the possibility of reducing the ad-hoc nature of "special arrangements"; turning away from this **contingent approach** we evaluated replacing it with an **alternative approach**. Initially we aimed to add to work that had already been undertaken in the sector with regard to alternative assessments for disabled students, one example of which was a highly successful project documented by Herrington and Simpson (2002).

5.9 Alternative and inclusive assessment case studies – a staff development resource

We began developing alternative assessment case studies borne out of the review of assessment; universal design literature; the student surveys, interviews and focus groups; interdisciplinary staff debate across the network and sector dissemination events. We sought to evaluate these alternatives for disabled students and to consider the efficiency of embedding them into course planning, approval and annual or periodic course review as appropriate. They could then provide a measured and considered response to a minority of current and future disabled students studying that subject.

However, with the broadening remit of the project in Phases 2 and 3, to include tracking the assessment experiences of non disabled students in addition to disabled students, we began to push back the boundaries of the **alternative approach** to consider and discuss the possibility of piloting case studies offering a more **inclusive approach** to assessment. By our definition these were assessments that could be offered to benefit most learners without losing the requirement that assessment should aid learning and should demonstrate the acquisition of the module or course learning outcomes.

Being committed to offering equality of opportunity to our diverse student population, it is imperative to respond positively to the student voice with a systematic change in assessment thinking. As the Project's contribution to this cultural shift in assessment practice, we are recording eight of these pilot case studies **(see Tables 28 – 30 below)**. The pilots were often utilizing assessment methods not traditionally or commonly used in the piloting subject area. Each case study evaluates the validity of the new assessment modes whilst raising factors for departmental debate before they can be considered for integration at the planning and approval stages for new modules and courses or at course review. The layout style of a distribution table, a brief overview, student voice and the case study proforma is designed to provide a staff development resource.

5.9 Alternative and inclusive assessment case studies – a staff development resource

✦ Alternative assessment case studies for disabled students

Two case studies piloting and evaluating alternative assessment modes for disabled students were undertaken as shown in **Table Twenty-Eight**.

Whilst these alternative assessments still represent an exclusive and exclusionary provision for disabled students, their value lies in meeting the particular requirements of a minority of disabled students for whom the generic course assessment mode provides an insurmountable challenge and a less than equitable option.

They provide departments and disciplines with a case study framework for evaluating considered assessments that could form part of an alternative assessment repertoire embedded within a course module for future disabled students with particular learning requirements.

Table Twenty-Eight: Distribution of case studies of alternative assessments for disabled students only			
Case study 1			
New assessment method	**Standard assessment method**	**Students by type**	
Video portfolio	Portfolio and project	Disabled	Non-disabled
		1	0
Courses studied	Learning and Teaching in HE (PG Cert.)		
Case study 2			
New assessment method	**Standard assessment method**	**Students by type**	
Video presentation	Written assignment	Disabled	Non-disabled
		1	0
Courses studied	HND Fine Art		

5.9 Alternative and inclusive assessment case studies – a staff development resource

❖ **Case Study 1: an alternative assessment**

Case Study 1	New assessment method	Standard assessment method
	Video portfolio	Written portfolio

This alternative assessment highlighted the need for a clear format and remit for the students. Using video for recording has value, but this assessment mode aimed to use the video to express the learning through a visual mode offering a creative focus for a student who learnt in a more visual rather than a linear or lexical way.

Using video in the former capacity is less resource hungry and could be more widely adopted, but it was felt that with a large group this alternative would always remain an alternative for the few. Staff and the students involved felt it was more likely to be offered to particular disabled students, who could really only record in this way rather than becoming an assessment mode offered to all students.

In considering this as a mode to be embedded into the course for other future disabled students, the lessons learned and the solutions found for both the students and the staff would need to be harnessed.

Case Study 1: Video Portfolio	
Course: Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (PG Cert)	**Number of students in group:** 75 (1 disabled student undertaking alternative assessment)
Standard assessment method: Portfolio	**Purpose of assessment method:** Summative
Research method(s): Student Interview and Staff Survey	
This case study was developed with Educational Development and Learning Technologies and the Faculty of Education	

Description

A dyslexic student who found it difficult to express and organise his ideas in writing was given the option to produce a video portfolio as an alternative to a written portfolio. The video portfolio represented 50% of the assessed component with the remaining 50% made up of project work. The video provided an effective option for cross-referencing the project work and demonstrating the 10 learning outcomes that relate to learning, teaching and assessment in Higher Education including: designing programmes, supporting students and continuing professional development. However, an additional member of staff had to be employed to work with the student and in total 15-20 hours was spent supporting the student's assessment process, compared to the usual 3-4 hours. A further 18 hours was spent editing the video.

Resources required for the Video Portfolio

❖ An additional member of staff was employed to support the student.

❖ Video-suite time and specialist staff were employed to make the video.

Advantages of the Video Portfolio for staff

❖ The learning outcomes were easily transferable to the video format.

Case Study 1: Video Portfolio (cont.)

Advantages of the Video Portfolio for the student

❖ The student felt it was the most appropriate method for him to demonstrate the learning outcomes.

Issues arising for staff regarding the Video Portfolio

❖ 'Contact time' with the student significantly increased.

❖ Marking the video took considerably longer compared to the written submissions.

❖ The oral aspect of the Video Portfolio required new criteria that needed to be made equitable with the existing criteria for the written submissions.

❖ The transferability of the method, to offer as assessment choice, is limited due to the high level of resources necessary to support and produce the video.

What the lecturer said about the Video Portfolio

❖ "In this case the student's learning was enhanced because the student found it difficult to express his ideas in writing and organise his ideas in a traditional portfolio."

What the student said

❖ "This helped an incredible amount and other people would have found that useful as well, but whether this could ever be resourced is another thing."

5.9 Alternative and inclusive assessment case studies – a staff development resource

❖ **Case Study 2: an alternative assessment**

	New assessment method	Standard assessment method
Case Study 2	**Video presentation with BSL and voice over**	Written portfolio

The pilot acknowledged that resources needed to be planned and organised for such a new assessment method but demonstrates a solution that could be considered to meet our legislative duties and remove barriers for a minority of students. As such alternatives become central to a departmental response to students, the unit resource will reduce. Staff with BSL skills within the institution would further reduce the assessment costs and create a more inclusive and welcoming environment for such students.

Although this case study was an innovative alternative for a hearing impaired student, the video presentation of an assignment could also be used by other disabled students for whom a written assignment presents serious barriers.

Case Study 2: Video Presentation (using BSL with voiceover)	
Course: HND Fine Art	**Number of students in group:** 12 (1 disabled student undertaking alternative assessment)
Previous assessment method: Written assignment	**Research method(s):** Internet, articles, journals, etc.
This case study was developed with the School of Art & Design HE	

Description

The student in this case study had a significant hearing impairment. As a consequence of this he was having great difficulty in writing the contextual studies assignment to the required standard as he did not have an understanding of the English needed. The student's language of communication was BSL. This meant that he would fail his HND because of his lack of English at the required level. Rather than try to improve his English, in co-operation with the validating body it was felt better if he presented his assignment in BSL. This would be videoed, with an interpreter present and voiceover. It would have to be of the same standard and the marking would be looking for the same criteria as if it was written. Therefore there would have to be the same level of academic debate as with a written assignment; the only difference would be in the method of it being recorded.

Resources required for the Video Presentation

- ❖ Use of a BSL interpreter
- ❖ Use of a Communication Support Worker
- ❖ Recording equipment

Advantages of the Video Presentation for staff

- ❖ An oral translation of the student's assignment
- ❖ Following Equal Opportunity practice

Advantages of the Video Presentation for students

- ❖ Accessible and in the student's only language

Case Study 2: Video Presentation (using BSL with voiceover) (cont.)

Issues arising for staff regarding the Video Presentation

- ❖ Undertaking the recording
- ❖ A level of resources which would need to be planned for
- ❖ Difficulty in referring to the assignment whilst being marked
- ❖ Level and location of collaboration required

5.9 Alternative and inclusive assessment case studies – a staff development resource

★ **Inclusive assessment case studies for disabled and non-disabled students offering more accessibility than the traditional modes**

Two case studies piloting and evaluating inclusive assessment modes for all students offering more accessibility than the traditional modes were undertaken as shown in **Table Twenty-Nine**.

Table Twenty-Nine: Distribution of inclusive assessments for all students offering more accessibility than the traditional modes			
Case Study 3			
New assessment method	**Standard assessment method**	**Students by type**	
Portfolio	Extended essay	Disabled	Non-disabled
		14	126
Course studied	Extended Science		
Case Study 4			
New assessment method	**Standard assessment method**	**Students by type**	
Design report	Essay	Disabled	Non-disabled
		8	42
Course studied	BA (Hons) 3D Design for Sustainability BA (Hons) Spatial Design		

The SPACE research revealed that disabled and non-disabled students alike have distinct preferences for particular assessment modes and **Case Study 3** and **Case Study 4** responded to the strong student message that no single assessment mode suits all. Both case studies sought to better serve the majority of students by offering assessment methods that could provide opportunities for different learning and presentation styles. In addition to student feedback through the SPACE research, the new assessment methods were also a direct response to staff recognition that

the modules' traditional assessment modes were no longer acceptable for a variety of reasons as outlined in the individual case studies.

Instead of traditional essays, the new examples piloted in these case studies, namely:

❖ a portfolio with a combination of components and delivery methods to demonstrate the range of learning and learner skills **(Case Study 3)** and

❖ a design report with a combination of delivery methods including graphics and text **(Case Study 4)**

were an attempt to maximise differing students' strengths, learning styles and preferences in one mode. The combination of multi-modalities within the portfolio **(Case Study 3)** and the report **(Case Study 4)**, were designed to give more students an opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge base and apply skills necessary and relevant for the workplace, without relying on one form of delivery.

5.9 Alternative and inclusive assessment case studies – a staff development resource

❖ **Case Study 3: an inclusive assessment**

Case Study 3	New assessment method	Standard assessment method
	Portfolio	Extended essay

This module is designed to assist students in developing the necessary skills and strategies required for successful undergraduate learning. This new assessment mode, offered to all, enabled students to reflect on how they had developed over their first term and review what they needed to do next, in a way that the original essay had not allowed. Although the portfolio was designed around criteria based on the learning outcomes of the module, students had flexibility in how they met those criteria. This provided students with some independence in selecting ways of delivery best suited to demonstrate their strengths and abilities through articles, lab reports and coursework. It provided a student focussed assessment more suited to the increasingly diverse student group (on average 52% mature students and 12% disabled students).

Since the introduction of the portfolio, students' overall marks have improved. Also 80% of students reported that the portfolio had effectively supported their learning on other parts of the course and students felt they had been well supported in developing their portfolios. The portfolio also reduced plagiarism and marking time.

Time management was an issue for some students. The module leader built in time management sessions and portfolio development sessions into the module, recognising that portfolios require different skills to essay writing. Student feedback in the questionnaires and interviews confirmed that they needed time and guidance to undertake an unfamiliar assessment mode. It is envisaged that "staging points" will be given to students next time, to indicate which aspects of the portfolio need to be completed by when, to provide a time-line for those needing further guidance.

5.9 Alternative and inclusive assessment case studies – a staff development resource

For some students the portfolio could be submitted electronically if the compilation and ordering of paper based materials is a barrier.

The portfolio assessment has proved itself as a more inclusive assessment mode and is now embedded at school level. Currently portfolios are used in a number of modules where they have had a positive impact on the course delivery. They fit well with the ethos of many courses and have been cited as best practice for meeting student diversity.

* "I like the idea of a portfolio or a learning journal but personally I would need more feedback and the opportunity to talk with a tutor or other students." (Student with dyslexia, studying Science.)

▶ "We all need to take risks. Students don't always trust themselves to work in a new way even if the old way isn't working. We need to supply the trust." (Delegate contribution at the SPACE Conference Plenary.)

* "Compiling the portfolio really made me think and I learnt where the gaps were in my knowledge and skill. I'd like to do this again." (Non-disabled student, studying Science.)

Case Study 3: Portfolio	
Course: Extended Science	**Number of students in group:** 140 (10% disabled students)
Previous assessment method: Extended essay	**Purpose of assessment method** Summative
Research method(s): Ethnography and student questionnaire	
This case study was developed with the School of Earth, Ocean and Environmental Science	

Description

Study in Higher Education is a first term, year zero module designed to assist students in developing the necessary study skills and learning strategies required for a successful undergraduate career. Previously, the module was assessed by means of an extended essay but concerns about the increasingly diverse student population entering at stage zero in Science (on average 52% mature students and 12% disabled students); concerns about plagiarism and the fact that the essay form of assessment is rarely used in Science (therefore essay writing skills may be less well developed) led to a change to a portfolio assessment. The portfolio is designed around criteria, based on the learning outcomes of the module, but the means by which these criteria are satisfied are entirely flexible. Students are strongly encouraged to use pieces of coursework completed as part of their programme of study, which may include coursework which has been enhanced after marking as a result of feedback. The portfolio provides an early focus, during their first term at university, on the development of study and academic skills. The final submission includes an additional reflective piece which enables students to look back on how they have developed over their first term. This reflective component is based around a skills audit and personal action plan generated early in the term by each individual student. Students reflect upon their progress against their own action plan and the strategies and priorities they might need to adopt for the rest of the year as well as later, as they progress in their academic studies. This also provides the beginning of a Personal Development Profile for each student.

Case Study 3: Portfolio (cont.)

Since the introduction of the portfolio students' overall marks have improved. However, there have been no significant differences in marks for the "tail" comprising of around 20% of the cohort. The "tail" did not include a significantly different proportion of disabled students to non-disabled students. Indeed the majority of students who had a disability were not amongst those who failed to submit a portfolio. Most of the students who did not complete the portfolio on time tended to be those who were not well engaged with their programme as a whole, as reflected in their general submission of coursework and attendance records. There is some evidence to suggest that the portfolio was more likely to be submitted than, for example, a science practical or a piece of mathematics coursework. Students who missed the hand-in date tended to have done so because they had not attended the module regularly and it was rare for a student to fail on a completed portfolio. Indeed, those who had addressed the criteria and organised their submissions tended to pass. A small number of students (3%) scored between 40% and 53% and in each case at least one criterion had not been addressed at all.

This research showed that students' responded positively to the portfolio approach; with 80% of students reporting that the portfolio had effectively supported their learning on other parts of the course and 74% reporting that it had been an effective way of assessing their learning on the module. Students felt that they had been well supported in developing their portfolios and that this had helped them to improve their coursework marks in other parts of the course.

Resources required for the Portfolio

❖ Detailed guidance for students in constructing a portfolio, including tutorial support.

Advantages of the Portfolio for staff

❖ Reduced plagiarism on the module.

❖ Reduced marking time.

❖ More objective marking against well defined criteria.

Case Study 3: Portfolio (cont.)

Advantages of the Portfolio for students

- ❖ The portfolio was straightforward for students to compile and complete.

- ❖ Students were able to reflect on their learning experience in a supportive environment.

- ❖ The portfolio provided the opportunity to demonstrate learning from other modules and how learning skills had been applied.

- ❖ Students were able to work at their own pace.

- ❖ The portfolio eliminated the need for assessment provisions for disabled students.

Issues arising for staff regarding the Portfolio

- ❖ With only one assessment deadline it was inevitable that there would be students who did not hand in their portfolios on time and arrangements for assessment referrals needed to be in place. This would have been the same for any single assessment point strategy.

Issues arising for students regarding the Portfolio

- ❖ Time management, as some students reported that they did not start thinking early enough about the content of their portfolios (despite time management sessions in the module and those specifically dedicated to portfolio development).

What the lecturer said about the Portfolio

- ❖ "The portfolio as a form of assessment combines breadth as well as depth and shows quite graphically the stage of development of learners on the module. It gives me, and more importantly the learners themselves, confidence in assessing how well learning outcomes have been achieved as well as a wealth of examples I can call on in feeding back to individuals about their possible future development. I do not know of any other assessment form that is quite so rich."

Case Study 3: Portfolio (cont.)

What the students said about the Portfolio

❖ "The assessment method was well-balanced and effective."

❖ "The requirements of the portfolio were easy to understand and it gave me the chance to work calmly rather than the high pressure of an exam."

❖ "Much more hands-on work and more in-depth learning"

❖ "Helped me a lot in other areas of the course"

❖ "It contained actual work submitted for other modules, so showed what we had actually learned and applied."

5.9 Alternative and inclusive assessment case studies – a staff development resource

❖ **Case Study 4: an inclusive assessment**

Case Study 4	New assessment method	Standard assessment method
	Design report	Essay

This pilot evaluation of a design report with a combination of graphics and text was implemented as a pilot project on two courses to explore assessment methods in relation to working in art and design. It was offered to respond to the changes in art and design based degrees, to develop more practice-based assessment, and to be more congruent with the learning styles of the high numbers of dyslexic students studying arts courses. It provides another model of writing and assessment which was non-linear but could work alongside other models of writing, including the traditional academic essay. The new assessment mode was offered to all students and marks increased overall by 30%.

The pilot raised points regarding learning outcomes, assessment criteria and marking processes which the institution has addressed. The Design Report has been embedded into the framework of these courses as part of on-going curriculum development and is being considered as a more inclusive assessment mode at Masters Level.

✳ "My course has a lot to do with design processes so showing people how to express their ideas in different media for assessment would be extremely helpful." (Student with dyslexia, studying Arts.)

Case Study 4: Design Report	
Course: BA (Hons) 3D Design for Sustainability & BA (Hons) Spatial Design	**Number of students in groups:** 50 (including 8 disabled students)
Standard assessment method: Essay	**Purpose of assessment method:** Summative
Research method(s): Staff and Student Questionnaire and Interview	
This case study was developed with the Design Centre	
Description	
This case study is representative of the recent shifts in art and design-based degrees that include a move away from traditional academic writing methods towards new forms of writing that are more practice-based. In this case study, the decision to use the design report was specifically made in an attempt to bridge the gap between what was happening in the studio and academic writing. The expectation was for students to write in a critical way and evaluate the whole design process from concept through to design development and present their report in a similar way as they would to a client. The design report is delivered through a series of lectures, seminars and tutorials, which are aimed at supporting students' work from conception in the studio to formulating their ideas into the design report. The design report resulted in an overall increase in marks by 30% and has been successfully embedded into course development and review. Consideration is additionally being given to developing it as a component for a new Masters Level course in Design.	
Resources required for the Design Report	
❖ Specialist software (Adobe in-Development) to develop the online design report template.	

Case Study 4: Design Report (cont.)

Advantages of the Design Report for staff

❖ The inclusive format of the design report supports a combination of delivery methods (graphics and text) rather than relying solely on text.

❖ The design report is transferable and relevant to the workplace – it is used in industry by designers to reflect upon their professional practice.

Advantages of the Design Report for students

❖ Students are encouraged to write in a more critical, self-reflective way.

❖ Students are given the opportunity to create their own design report proforma encouraging a more independent and constructivist approach to learning.

Issues arising for staff regarding the Design Report

❖ The learning outcomes needed to be revised to link more directly to the assessment criteria. This in turn made the marking processes clearer and more focussed.

❖ The assessment method took longer to deliver because it was new to staff and students. However, once in place the implications on time should be minimal.

Issues arising for students regarding the Design Report

❖ The students really enjoyed the writing experience of the report and felt that the assignment had direct relevance to their development as designers. The writing experience in this context was specifically located in practice.

❖ The students found that the original design report template was inadequate for manipulating text and image within a single document. The template has now been modified and the institution is now considering further investment in professional publishing software such as Adobe InDesign to improve the experience of completing the report and developing the professional skills of the student.

Case Study 4: Design Report (cont.)
What the lecturer said about the Design Report
❖ "Really pleased – an enjoyable, teaching, learning and assessment process."
What the students said about the Design Report
❖ "The design report enabled me to clarify my thoughts and ideas within my project, and allowed me to identify the key points."   ❖ "The design report encourages structure within the project it also makes you question everything you do, therefore you begin to learn about your own work."   ❖ "I am dyslexic and the structure helped me understand and work in a better way."

5.9 Alternative and inclusive assessment case studies – a staff development resource

🡺 **Inclusive assessment case studies for disabled and non-disabled students offered as an option in assessment choice**

Four case studies piloting and evaluating inclusive assessment modes for all students offered as an option in assessment choice were undertaken as shown in **Table Thirty**.

The assessment choice was a progression of our collective attempt to recognise student difference, students' strengths and the impact of some disabilities on skills and to be more inclusive in our approach to assessment. Apart from pedagogic principles, the examples proffered in **Case Studies 5 - 8** are not without their practical issues for both staff and students.

Table Thirty: Distribution of inclusive assessments for all students offered as an option in assessment choice

Case Study 5			
New assessment method	**Standard assessment method**	**Students by type**	
Viva with supporting portfolio	End of module test	Disabled	Non-disabled
		8	112
Subjects studied	BEng Civil Engineering BSc Building Surveying and the Environment BA Architecture		

Case Study 6			
New assessment method	**Standard assessment method**	**Students by type**	
Taped seminar report	Written seminar report	Disabled	Non-disabled
		6	15
Subject studied	BA (Hons) Humanities		

Case Study 7			
New assessment method	**Standard assessment method**	**Students by type**	
Oral presentation of a research proposal	Written assignments	Disabled	Non-disabled
		1	8
Subject studied	MSc Health and Social Care		

Case Study 8			
New assessment method	**Standard assessment method**	**Students by type**	
End of module test or coursework or portfolio as assessment choice	End of module test	Disabled	Non-disabled
		14	132
Subjects studied	BSc Building Surveying and Environment BA Architecture BSc Construction Management		

5.9 Alternative and inclusive assessment case studies – a staff development resource

❖ **Case Study 5: an optional inclusive assessment**

Case Study 5	New assessment method	Standard assessment method
	Viva (supplemented with coursework)	Weekly tests and an end of module test

This case study was an assessment choice offered to all students to trial a new assessment mode in a formative way. A viva, in conjunction with a portfolio of their own work including formative tests, self study and class examples was offered as an optional assessment to the end of module test. In addition, because this was an unfamiliar assessment mode, students also undertook the end of module test to see which mode best suited their learning styles and learning experiences or to mitigate the impact of a disability or their learning experiences.

The new option was chosen by 8% of the group. One student with dyslexia who was able to undertake the new assessment without any extra time achieved an increase in marks of 11%. Others varied 3% up and down.

There were valuable lessons learned from this case study, not least that staff might benefit from staff development, if questioning, responding and marking a viva is unfamiliar. Whilst it is a method valued by some students, others may find it daunting if the questions are framed in complex ways. Being selective in their answers when trying to offer the interviewer all they know may also require practice. No students required special arrangements for the viva – those who chose this option undertook the viva in the same way.

5.9 Alternative and inclusive assessment case studies – a staff development resource

The feedback from the students and staff taking part in this case study was positive and student anxiety about the end of module assessment was significantly reduced. This pilot formed part of the action research used to inform the development of **Case Study 8**.

* "Assessment choice is a great idea as long as you have enough information to make the decision sensibly." (Non-disabled student, studying Health and Social Care.)

* "If only I could have had a viva. I wouldn't have needed a helper." (Student with visual impairment, studying Business.)

Case Study 5: Viva (in conjunction with a Portfolio of their own work)	
Courses: BEng Civil Engineering BSc Building Surveying and the Environment BA Architecture **Module:** Behaviour of Structures	**Number of students participating:** 120 (including 8 disabled students)
Standard assessment method: End of module test	**Purpose of assessment method:** Summative
Research method(s): Observation, staff and student surveys	
This case study was developed with the School of Engineering	

Description

This case study was developed to offer all students an oral option instead of the written test at the end of the module. Out of the 11 students who chose to take the viva, 1 was a dyslexic student who was able to undertake the assessment without any assessment provisions. This student achieved an 11% increase in marks compared to their previous exam-based performance in the same module, with no requirement for extra time. Overall marks for the remaining non-disabled students varied by 3% both up and down. The student feedback received from both the disabled and non-disabled students regarding the provision of an assessment option for all students was extremely positive and led to the development of the wider assessment choice case study **(see Case Study 8)**.

Resources required for the Viva

❖ Staff guidance on ensuring parity of standards between the viva and the written assessment.

❖ Less time required for managing students' anxiety about assessment.

Case Study 5: Viva (cont.)
Advantages of the Viva for staff
❖ No requests for assessment provisions were received for the viva.
❖ All students were able to undertake the viva in the same way.
❖ No amendments were necessary to the existing marking criteria.
Advantages of the Viva for students
❖ Students received increased and instant feedback.
❖ The viva provided variety to the traditional assessment methods deployed elsewhere on the course.
❖ Students experienced reduced anxiety.
Issues arising for staff regarding the Viva
❖ There was an increase in staff time by providing both the traditional and alternative method.
❖ Staff time increased through setting up, arranging and running the vivas.
Issues arising for students regarding the Viva
❖ None arising.
What the lecturer said about the Viva
❖ "It has become increasingly important to be able to offer students an optional form of assessment on this module and give all students the opportunity of demonstrating what they have learnt.
What the students said about the Viva
❖ "Oral assessment models should be utilised more to explore knowledge."
❖ "It was good to be provided with a choice."

5.9 Alternative and inclusive assessment case studies – a staff development resource

❖ **Case Study 6: an optional inclusive assessment**

Case Study 6	New assessment method	Standard assessment method
	Taped seminar report	Written assessment

This case study was developed in response to the diversity of the student group and to introduce variety into the traditional existing assessment method of four equally weighted assignments. Twenty-one students agreed to trial the taped seminar report, believing they performed better orally in seminars than in written assessments and closed written examinations.

Students then became reluctant to have the seminar presentation recorded live and favoured retrospective taping after the presentation. Student discussions led to the consideration of two other options – a PowerPoint presentation with a written or taped version of the commentary or a portfolio with a linked commentary as further pilots. It was felt this would be fairer to external examiners, useful for later professional practice and a more valuable learning tool. **(See Section 5.7. What students say about assessments based upon oral presentations.)**

Students and staff undertaking the pilot, as well as the Project Partnership Advisory Group recognised that, as with other case studies, the new skills such as audio-taping require different skills over and above the traditional writing of essays. Issues about the relationship between thinking, speaking, performing and the script have to be considered if the new mode is to better support some students than the one it is replacing. The students firmly believed the new option would need: clear criteria, aims and objectives of the mode, an outline framework, and some training with model examples of poor and excellent attempts.

5.9 Alternative and inclusive assessment case studies – a staff development resource

Using this pilot as research, responding to the student experience and recognising the need to develop supporting documentation, the department is considering the introduction of one assessment choice into this module. This will be offered to any student who believes the usual written assessment does not do justice to their full range of ability.

✴ "Electronic presentations, like PowerPoint, might be a good assessment method for some students because they can often allow you to stress your thoughts not only on paper but through images. It also opens up the space for you to demonstrate a wider knowledge that would be sometimes more difficult to convey on paper." (Student with dyslexia, studying Social Sciences.)

Case Study 6: Taped Seminar Report	
Course: BA (Hons) Humanities **Module:** Imperial Russia	**Number of students participating:** 21 (including 6 disabled students) out of 26 in group
Standard assessment method: Written seminar report	**Purpose of assessment method:** Formative
Research method(s): Questionnaire and Focus Group	
This case study was developed with the School of Society, Environment and Culture	

Description

This case study was developed to explore the possibility of introducing variety to the existing assessment methods used on the module. The taped oral seminar report was thought to be viable because it provided students with an equitable option to the written seminar report. Students responded positively to piloting the new assessment method with 21 out of the cohort of 26 agreeing to take part. However, they became reluctant when the time came around for them to record their reports on tape. This resulted in the taped oral report not being undertaken as a genuine option because many of the students ended up writing the report in full before dictating it onto the tape. This led to an interesting discussion between the students and module leader with regard to what would be the most appropriate assessment method, which would be manageable, more inclusive and introduce variety into the existing methods deployed on the module. The students considered that the main issue centred on them having a clear understanding of the expectation of any new/optional form of assessment. For instance, they had a clear understanding relating to the academic expectation of essays and examinations and suggested that any different method of assessment would need to have:

a) very clear assessment criteria/guidelines as to its aims and objectives and

b) a concise framework with examples of good and bad attempts.

Case Study 6: Taped Seminar Report (cont.)

Therefore, the students considered that a more appropriate option would be a **portfolio with a supporting commentary**. This would allow them to clearly demonstrate their understanding of different types of evidence and explore theoretical debates in a format with which they felt more comfortable.

The overall results of the students undertaking the taped seminar reports were broadly in line with those from the traditional assessment methods used on the module.

Resources required for the Taped Seminar Reports

❖ Student training in the use and application of audio equipment including transcription skills.

❖ Guidance for staff who may need training on marking audio/visual submissions.

Advantages of the Taped Seminar Report for staff

❖ The taped seminar report reduced the amount of assessment provisions for the disabled students on the module.

❖ This mode would provide an opportunity to engage in discussions and learn with other subject disciplines, like drama, art and design, regarding the development of presentations and portfolios.

Advantages of the Taped Seminar Report for students

❖ Students welcomed the opportunity of trying different methods of assessment and exploring their own learning styles.

Issues arising for staff regarding the Taped Seminar Report

❖ Students require clear guidelines outlining the specific expectations of any new/optional method of assessment.

❖ Individualising assessment carries with it implications on staff time in regard to marking, moderation and checks for plagiarism.

Issues arising for students regarding the Taped Seminar Report

❖ Students felt most comfortable being assessed by methods of which they have a working knowledge.

Case Study 6: Taped Seminar Report (cont.)
What the lecturer said about the Taped Seminar Report
❖ "I feel that introducing one innovative piece of assessment as an option to one of the existing 4 equally weighted assignments would be the best way forward, catering for those who feel their normal written assessments do not do justice to their full range of ability. I hope to see this embedded into our course in the future."
What the students said about the Taped Seminar Report
❖ "The optional assessment we tried would improve the module."   ❖ "Four pieces of coursework have been hard to achieve."   ❖ "I liked the quality of teaching and no exam!"

The full case study précised here was authored by Keys, R. (2005) and is available at: **www.plymouth.ac.uk/disability.**

❖ **Case Study 7: an optional inclusive assessment**

Case Study 7	New assessment method	Standard assessment method
	Oral presentation of a research proposal	Written assessment

This case study was developed with nine disabled and non-disabled students as an assessment choice option to one of the two written assignments of 3000 words, currently the traditional assessment mode for all students studying on the module. It was piloted as a learning tool to support students' research proposal writing. Whilst the majority of the grades for the non-disabled students were not notably different, one dyslexic student's grade rose from grade C for the written submission to grade A for the oral presentation.

Student feedback reiterated the need for practice to make an unfamiliar assessment mode viable, but the consensus was that it was an effective way to demonstrate knowledge for some students. It does not represent an easy option, as it requires learning how to present material, but it supports students' personal development in work related skills. **(See Section 5.7. What students say about assessments based upon oral presentations.)** Although original marking criteria could easily be transferred from the written report to the oral presentation, the oral assessment does not provide a "hard copy" record, apart from the marking sheet.

The advantages of increased contact time and feedback from the lecturer, plus no requirements for resources for special arrangements for disabled students choosing this option, makes this an assessment mode to be considered as one element of assessment choice.

Case Study 7: Oral Presentation of a Research Proposal	
Course: MSc Health and Social Care **Module:** Methods of Enquiry	**Number of students participating:** 9 (including 1 disabled student)
Standard assessment method: Written assignments	**Purpose of assessment method:** Formative
Research method(s): Observation and Focus Group	
This case study was developed with the School of Health and Social Sciences	
Description This case study was developed because an oral presentation was being considered as a possible future option to one of the written assignments used on the module. It was decided to explore this by piloting the oral presentation in a way that would support the students' written research proposals. Students were given 10 minutes to present their proposals by whatever method they preferred. The one dyslexic student in the group scored a much higher grade for their oral presentation (A) compared to their written submission (C). However, the non-disabled students in the group recorded no such noteworthy difference in grades for the two different assessment modes, although one student actually gained a lower grade for their oral presentation (C) compared to their written submission (B).	
Resources required for the Oral Presentation ❖ Audio-visual equipment made available for student use. ❖ Presentation guidance for students. ❖ An extra member of staff to facilitate and mark the oral presentation. ❖ Staff development on marking presentations.	

Case Study 7: Oral Presentation of a Research Proposal (cont.)

Advantages of the Oral Presentation for staff

❖ No assessment provisions were necessary to support the disabled student.

❖ The presentation could easily be extended to 20-30 minutes for summative purposes to replace one of the existing assignments.

❖ This mode enabled more contact time with students.

❖ There was opportunity for increased discussion and feedback.

❖ Original marking criteria could easily be applied from the written report to the oral presentation.

Advantages of the Oral Presentation for students

❖ The oral presentation increased contact time and feedback from the lecturer.

❖ This mode offered added variety to existing assessment methods.

Issues arising for staff regarding the Oral Presentation

❖ Transferring the oral presentation to a larger group could prove problematic.

What the lecturer said about the Oral Presentation

❖ "As is always the case with this type of assessment, once the presentation has been completed there is no hard record apart from the mark sheet and any handouts provided by the student. It is quite difficult to listen, mark and assess at the same time, but this can be overcome with having two assessors."

What the students said about the Oral Presentation

❖ "This is a brilliant alternative to demonstrate knowledge and understanding."

❖ "I do not feel I have had enough experience of giving oral presentations to consider this an effective or viable method for demonstrating my knowledge."

5.9 Alternative and inclusive assessment case studies – a staff development resource

❖ **Case Study 8: optional inclusive assessments**

Case Study 8	New assessment method	Standard assessment method
	End of module test or coursework or portfolio	End of Module Test

Learning from the experience gained by the earlier pilot of **Case Study 5,** these three assessment choice options were piloted in direct response to student and staff feedback from that case study. They were designed as an innovative way to engage students from three degree courses who historically have shared a joint module.

The module, which is both qualitative and quantitative in its approach, required students to be assessed previously by an end of module test, supplemented by formative weekly tests. The new assessment choices were evaluated by student self-reflection questionnaires to enable students to critically analyse how the assessment contributed to their learning. Interviews with the module leader as well as a student focus group to monitor progress, developments and issues, led to further refinements and an additional choice being offered for the next year.

The marks demonstrated an improvement in student performance and there were no requests for special arrangements for disabled students. Taking up the challenge of such a radical change to the assessment resulted in time consuming marking which will be reduced as the choices are embedded and the student examples will have precedents from previous cohorts.

The advantages were high levels of satisfaction; a proactive response to disability legislation which demands the removal of barriers for disabled students; the encouragement it offered students to adopt a more independent approach to their learning and the variety it brought to the module.

5.9 Alternative and inclusive assessment case studies – a staff development resource

This assessment choice received much encouragement from the external examiner and the Higher Education Academy Engineering Subject Centre and has been embedded into the course. It has raised a high level of interest at all dissemination events. In this current year, an additional option of a weekly summative test has been offered following student feedback. In the future the viva might be revisited in conjunction with the portfolio, as piloted in **Case Study 5**.

> ✳ "I am delighted to have this opportunity because in this way the system is also caring for my interests and needs and is also encouraging me to learn, but not to fail. It is providing a fair and balanced ground for all students with different disabilities to be assessed by. This makes me work around my schedule better and also enjoy my learning at University. Nothing could be better than a student choosing their own mode of assessment." (Disabled student, studying Science.)

Case Study 8: End of Module Test or Coursework or Portfolio as Assessment Choice	
Course: BSc Building Surveying and Environment, BA Architecture, BSc Construction Management **Module:** Behaviour of Structures	**Number of students participating:** 146 (including 14 disabled students)
Standard assessment method: End of module test	**Purpose of assessment method:** Formative
Research method(s): Staff and student surveys, questionnaires and interviews, data analysis, student focus group, and interviews with module leader	
This case study was developed with the School of Engineering	

Description

This assessment choice represents a quantum leap in assessment regime guided by a student self-reflection questionnaire survey, staff feedback and the refinement and development of an earlier pilot of one choice only **(see Case Study 5)**. The previous pilot had proved successful both in an increase in marks and student and staff satisfaction. Further options were developed to offer greater flexibility for the traditional, mature, disabled, non-disabled and international students that made up the student cohort. The concept of the three choices was introduced during the students' first lecture and further clarified in the introduction to the student survey questionnaire. Students were also invited to contact the lecturer if they had any further queries. Students were then given a further week to choose their preferred method of assessment and an additional five weeks when they could change their initial choice. Six students made use of this facility.

From an academic perspective, equity between methods was a key issue and the assessment modes were evaluated by a representative from the industry, an academic adviser for the Higher Education Academy Subject Centre (Engineering) and the School of Engineering.

Case Study 8: End of Module Test or Coursework or Portfolio as Assessment Choice (cont.)

Assessment choice was not developed and delivered without challenges. However, the improvements in the performance of students particularly at the lower and higher attainment spectrums, in conjunction with a student satisfaction rating of 99%, means that the assessment choice has been embedded into this module.

Further developments to the case study

As a direct response to student feedback the assessment choice has been expanded by an additional assessment of a **summative** weekly test as a balanced option between lengthy coursework and the end of module test. This provides an opportunity for further assessment learning. The test assesses students' knowledge and learning through feedback as the module proceeds. In some instances students have rejected this option after three or four weeks, choosing to change to coursework, demonstrating that choice has informed them about their best method of assessment. It is intended that this test will be further developed as an on-line assessment option. The School is considering assessment choice for other modules on their programmes.

Resources required for the three assessment choices

- ❖ Additional staff time to support student choice.
- ❖ Additional marking time for the unique examples which have to be marked without the assistance of model answers.
- ❖ Less resources for central services, i.e. the examination office and disability services, because of the absence of special arrangements for disabled students.
- ❖ Fewer resources for the department to carry out special arrangements for disabled students for in-class tests.

Advantages of the three assessment choices for staff

- ❖ Assessment choice brought variety to the module and better served the diverse student group.
- ❖ Higher levels of student satisfaction.
- ❖ A proactive response at school level to provide equality of opportunity for disabled students.

Case Study 8: End of Module Test or Coursework or Portfolio as Assessment Choice (cont.)

Advantages of the three assessment choices for the student:

- ❖ The number of students receiving lowest grades was substantially reduced.

- ❖ The number of students receiving grades of 60+% significantly increased.

- ❖ Students could choose an option which suited personal preferences, learning skills and personal circumstances.

- ❖ Disabled students did not have to seek special arrangements.

Issues arising for staff regarding the three assessment choices

- ❖ Marking was time consuming and submitted work required a careful appraisal because of its individuality.

- ❖ The need arose to have staged submission dates to reduce the volume of coursework and portfolios submitted at the end of the module and to better structure students' study.

Issues arising for students regarding the three assessment choices

- ❖ Students had to take responsibility for the choices they made.

- ❖ Students would have preferred some good and poor examples of each method.

What the lecturer said about the three assessment choices

- ❖ "At a personal level we have enjoyed the variety that assessment choice has brought to the module and in the way it has encouraged students to adopt a more independent approach to their learning."

What the students said about the three assessment choices

- ❖ "This has been good, it has given us the responsibility. I am 56 and disliked having responsibility taken away from me when I was 20."

- ❖ "This is a good idea because every person has their own likes and dislikes, ability and disabilities."

- ❖ "As a mature student choices are an important aspect of all education, rather than prescribed learning by others."

5.9 Alternative and inclusive assessment case studies – a staff development resource

The full case study précised here was authored by Easterbrook, D., Parker, M. and Waterfield, J. (2005) and is available at: **www.plymouth.ac.uk/disability**. The self-reflection questionnaire for students is also downloadable for adaptation and use by other departments or disciplines considering assessment choice.

This case-study pilot was joint-funded by the Higher Education Academy Engineering Subject Centre.

◄ Conclusion

The points raised by students and staff have a resonance with the criticism already voiced about the **contingency approach** to assessment, i.e. resource implications, the need for practice opportunities in oral or video presentation, new delivery methods requiring new skills etc.

> ✳ "Assessment choice is a good idea as long as you have enough information to make the decision sensibly." (Non-disabled student, studying Health and Social Care.)
>
> ✳ "I like the idea of a portfolio or a learning journal but personally I would need more feedback and more chance to talk with a tutor or another student who may help me." (Student with dyslexia, studying Science.)
>
> ❱ "We don't traditionally provide any training in oral or audio-visual delivery. Students are just expected to develop these skills. If it was to be evaluated on the basis of criteria, students would need a much clearer format and training." (Tutor, **Case Study 6**.)

Introducing new assessment modes requires preparation and practice and without this they may be as equally unsuitable as the assessment method they are replacing. These case studies demonstrate a reflective response to some of these concerns which can be addressed before they become integral to the course structure in part or in their entirety. If these assessment modes are embedded into the course all students have a better chance to develop their skills and receive a considered informed response from staff than if some are singled out to receive these modes as an element of special or alternative arrangements.

5.9 Alternative and inclusive assessment case studies – a staff development resource

None of the assessments are new. They build on work that has gone on before in other institutions and use assessments familiar to the sector. Their innovation lies in the fact that staff have examined the effects of unfamiliar assessments on disabled and non-disabled students taking the cue from the student voice in their choice of assessment. As a member of the Advisory Group commented:

> "…the advantages are that they are starting where most hard pressed academics are and involve students in devising ways forward."

The case studies demonstrate there are resource, pedagogic and regulatory considerations as well as staff development required in the design and marking of new and unfamiliar assessment modes, but if transformative practice is to become a reality, it will require "new learning environments and a break with tradition" (Stuart 2002). It is hoped these examples will provide a catalyst for institutional, departmental and subject debate as well as a continuing professional development resource for academic staff. These "snapshot" case studies from a student and staff perspective are intended as a photocopiable resource for departments to use in considering the realities of assessment change for their own disciplines and institutions. All of the pilot case studies provided opportunities for staff and student reflection so that the new assessment modes became learning tools in their own right.

The imperative for making the change arises out of the new equalities agendas, diverse student participation and the need to make the leap from assimilation to inclusion in a way that values differences. Not least, it comes from a significant student and staff voice for assessment change.

5.9 Alternative and inclusive assessment case studies – a staff development resource

◗ "We need to change the curriculum and become more student focused – we can't keep hiding behind the resource issue." (Staff contribution to the SPACE Conference Plenary.)

✴ "It's about respect for difference. When the inclusive choices began, the finger stopped pointing and now we are all the same. It's good to be marked in the same way as other students." (Student contribution to the SPACE Conference Plenary.)

6. Considerations for making assessments inclusive

What this section contains:

★ A matrix listing generic assessment issues set against considerations for inclusive assessments as a staff development tool

6. Considerations for making assessments inclusive

The following table is presented to counter pose generic assessment issues with a range of considerations for inclusive practice. The purpose of this matrix is to stimulate staff development activities and promote inclusive assessment change.

Generic assessment issues	Considerations for inclusive assessments
Key drivers	
The "positive duty" placed upon HEIs by the Disability Discrimination Act (2005) to promote disability equality.	❖ Produce a Disability Equality Scheme with reference to a non-discriminatory inclusive assessment policy.
Pressure on all HEIs to create summative assessment systems that are economical to deliver.	❖ The introduction of inclusive assessments will eliminate the need for the majority of "special arrangements" currently deployed for disabled students, which are costly to deliver and lacking equity.
Widening participation and diversity demands assessment systems that are inclusive.	❖ Inclusive assessment is merely a specific example of good practice, a flexible assessment regime based on student choice, backed by clear briefings and feedback. Inclusive assessment will improve the learning experience for all students.
HEIs have a growing responsibility for facilitating graduate employment.	❖ Design assessment modes capable of capturing a breadth of student learning in liaison with employers and students.
There is an increasing reliance upon electronic means of assessment.	❖ In-class CMAs increase the likelihood of "special arrangements" being required for disabled students which is undesirable. Consider forms of e-assessment that can be undertaken in the students' own time via the university intranet. ❖ Mature students often prefer assessment methods that are not e-assessment based.

6. Considerations for making assessments inclusive

Traditionalism	
The pressure of allocating marks and assessing for subject content and the fear of growing plagiarism reinforces traditionalism.	❖ Consider changing the balance between formative and summative assessments. ❖ Identify a range of assessment methods to offer student choice. ❖ Write learning outcomes that can be flexibly assessed to allow for the learning to be tested both orally and/or in written form. ❖ Creatively designed elements can form part of portfolios and course work which can overcome plagiarism. **(See Section 5.9. Alternative and inclusive assessment case studies.)**
Curriculum areas relying on student originality of thought are often under-represented in examinations where reliability is the prerequisite.	❖ Create a clear assessment strategy that considers both formative and summative assessments as part of a continuous assessment strategy designed to give students ongoing feedback on their performance towards improvement. ❖ Set problem-based assessments to encourage and judge student creativity. ❖ Identify links between subject content, graduate skills and employer demands.
The use of unproven systems of equivalence, such as a three-hour paper being "equivalent" to a 3000-word assignment does not lead to equity.	❖ Critically examine existing systems of assessment equivalence to establish tried and tested criteria for the validity of different assessment modes and for the majority of students eliminate the requirements for alternatives. **(See Section 5.9. Alternative and inclusive assessment case studies.)**

6. Considerations for making assessments inclusive

The use of written examinations, tests, computer marked assignments and closed problems dominates assessment regimes.	❖ Try pragmatic solutions such as combining "highly objective" approaches with "open ended" ones. ❖ Write learning outcomes that can be flexibly assessed to allow for the learning to be tested both orally and/or in written form.
Staff and students are overloaded.	❖ Plan coherent programmes of assessment based upon evaluating student and staff workloads. ❖ Consider changing the balance between formative and summative assessments. ❖ Extend assessment into the areas of peer and self-assessment. ❖ Where assessment modes meet student learning styles, student anxiety is reduced. ❖ Where staff have considered inclusive assessments the volume of "special arrangements" for in-class assessments are reduced considerably.
As little as 5% of the current volume of marks may produce the same degree classification in some subject areas.	❖ Cut back on the amount of assessment in favour of more developmental learning activities.
Students have too little time to do their assignments. Too many assignments have the same deadline.	❖ Offer inclusive assessments that provide choice to students, reducing the impact of disability and matching a range of learning styles. ❖ Allow students to monitor their own workloads and select assessments that are manageable given their work and academic pressures (e.g., work, family commitments, etc.). This also promotes student responsibility for their own learning.

6. Considerations for making assessments inclusive

Student experience	
There are increasing demands for transparency and accountability in assessment.	❖ Be clear about learning outcomes and provide learning opportunities, assessment criteria, judgements against those criteria in course development and review, and course handbooks. This should lead to an increasingly flexible assessment strategy which tests the learning outcomes rather than conforming to tradition.
There are more student complaints about unfair assessment than in any other area.	❖ Encourage students' metacognitive skills and ability to monitor and direct their own learning. ❖ Provide clear assessment briefs that outline what the assessment is designed to achieve.
Feedback to students is often inadequate or superficial. Students often ignore feedback that staff have spent a long time working on.	❖ The intrinsic importance of feedback should be explained to students and student motivation be recognised through providing detailed and substantive feedback on assessment outcomes. ❖ Link feedback to assessment choice and involve students in evaluating the applicability to them of different modes of assessment.
Student performance in summative assessment may be affected because some groups of students perform better with some forms of assessment than others.	❖ Evaluating whether different modes of assessment have differential effects on different groups of students is one basis on which to consider whether a subject group/ programme assessment method needs to be changed and how. ❖ A repertoire of assessment practices could be developed in order to increase equality of opportunity.

6. Considerations for making assessments inclusive

At present, because of the emphasis placed on formative assessment, students take their cues about what and how to learn from the assessment rather than from the teaching received. How students are progressing on the course is another key factor in determining what and how students learn.	❖ Learner confidence is built by a sound developmental assessment strategy being deployed. ❖ Detailed, substantive and timely feedback on assessment outcomes should be provided. ❖ Seek collaboration rather than competition between students. ❖ Encourage students' metacognitive skills and ability to monitor and direct their own learning.
There is some evidence that non-disabled students view the "alternative arrangements" for disabled students as opportunities that should be open to all.	❖ The introduction of inclusive assessments will eliminate this perception.

For further background reading on the above issues see the following: Elton and Johnson (2002); Gibbs (1998); York (2001); Moon (2002); Mutch and Brown (2001); Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) and University of Plymouth (2002).

Appendix 1: Useful World Wide Web addresses

What this section contains:

- Some websites relevant to inclusive assessment issues

- Some specific disability websites

Appendix 1: Useful World Wide Web addresses

◆ Some websites relevant to inclusive assessment issues

Centre for Applied Special Technology (CAST)

www.cast.org

An organisation promoting ideas and technologies for universal design in learning (USA based).

DeLiberations

www.londonmet.ac.uk/deliberations

Resource of articles related to assessment and other relevant issues.

Directgov – Disabled People

www.disability.gov.uk

The site includes the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 Parts II and III and the Disability Discrimination Act 2005.

Disability Rights Commission

www.drc-gb.org

Contains a Disability Equality Overview and Codes of Practices including for trade and qualifications bodies.

Disabled Students' Allowances (DSAs)

www.dfes.gov.uk/studentsupport/uploads/Bridgingthegap2005.doc

An online version of the Bridging the Gap document explaining the scope of the DSAs.

Equality Challenge Unit

www.ecu.ac.uk

An organisation raising a range of equality issues and offering relevant publications covering the implications of anti-disability discrimination legislation for the HE sector.

Appendix 1: Useful World Wide Web addresses

Higher Education Academy

www.heacademy.ac.uk

Offers discipline-based support through the subject network. Also supports a programme of events and activities including the theme of assessment and student learning.

Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ)

www.jcq.org.uk

On behalf of the awarding bodies offering qualifications, sets out the regulations and guidance for candidates eligible for adjustments in examinations, "access arrangements" and "special conditions".

Joint Information Systems Committee

www.jisc.ac.uk

Strategic guidance for further and higher education on Information and Communications Technology (ICT).

JSET (Journal of Special Educational Technology)

jset.unlv.edu/15.4/asseds/rose.html

The Universal Design for Learning Associate Editor Column covers issues of universal design for learning in assessment tasks (USA based).

The Open University

www.open.ac.uk/inclusiveteaching

Offers practical advice about teaching inclusively and meeting the requirements of the DDA.

National Academic Mailing List Service

www.jiscmail.ac.uk

Supports mailing-list-based discussion networks including the Accessible Assessment Forum.

Appendix 1: Useful World Wide Web addresses

National Disability Team

www.natdisteam.ac.uk.

Publishes statistical tables from HESA showing the participation of disabled students in HE.

Plagiarism.org

www.plagiarism.org

Offers an online resource and information on anti-plagiarism tools and technologies.

SCIPS (Strategies for the Creation of Inclusive Programmes of Study)

www.scips.worc.ac.uk

Reports on a HEFCE-funded project aimed at supporting academic staff to improve disabled student access to the curriculum.

Scottish Funding Council

www.sfc.ac.uk/library/sfc/circular/2005

Contains a self-evaluation tool for the Disability Equality Duty under the Disability Discrimination Act (2005).

SKILL: National Bureau for Students with Disabilities

www.skill.org.uk

Useful information site on a range of issues relating to disability and post-16 education, including diverse links to relevant sites.

Staff and Educational Development Association (SEDA)

www.seda.ac.uk

A membership organisation promoting innovation and good practice in the UK with relevant publications.

Appendix 1: Useful World Wide Web addresses

TechDis

www.techdis.ac.uk

A service aimed at enhancing access for disabled people to learning, teaching, research and administration.

University of Plymouth

www.plymouth.ac.uk/pages/view.asp?page=3243

'SENDA Compliance in HE' contains the publication of the SWANDS Project which includes a useful and detailed checklist on assessment practice.

Some specific disability websites

International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment

www.icevi.org/publications/ICEVI-WC2002/papers/01-topic/01-cobb2.htm

Contains a useful introduction to the modification of examination questions for those with a visual impairment.

British Association of Teachers of the Deaf

www.batod.org.uk

Insights into strategies for teaching and assessing deaf students, including publications.

British Dyslexia Association

www.bdadyslexia.org.uk

One of several general sites for dyslexia related information.

MIND – National Association for Mental Health

www.mind.org.uk

General site for all mental health issues.

Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB)

www.rnib.org.uk

Offers advice on accessible documents and a publication on preparing and modifying examination materials.

Learning and Teaching about Mental Health in HE

www.mhhe.heacademy.ac.uk

A range of relevant issues are discussed.

Appendix 2:
Matrix of assessment modes

Appendix 2: Matrix of assessment modes

- [ ] Analytical exercise
- [ ] Briefings
- [ ] Computer-based assessments and exercises
- [ ] Continuous assessment
- [ ] Coursework with discussion elements
- [ ] Critical diaries, learning logs and journals
- [ ] Crits
- [ ] Data interpretation exercises
- [ ] Design tasks
- [ ] Dissertation
- [ ] Documentation
- [ ] Electronic presentations: CD, web pages, etc.
- [ ] Essay assignments
- [ ] Examinations (open book)
- [ ] Examinations (seen)
- [ ] Examinations (take away)
- [ ] Examinations (unseen)
- [ ] Exhibition and poster displays
- [ ] Extended investigations (e.g. statistical)
- [ ] Field-work reports
- [ ] Finding primary source material
- [ ] Geological mapping
- [ ] "In class" and module tests

- [ ] Internship diaries
- [ ] Laboratory examinations and practical tests
- [ ] Laboratory practical reports
- [ ] Multiple choice testing
- [ ] On-line assessment
- [ ] Optical Mark Reader assessments
- [ ] Oral examinations
- [ ] Peer and self-evaluation
- [ ] Personal research projects
- [ ] Placement or exchange reports
- [ ] Portfolios and sketchbooks
- [ ] Practical reports
- [ ] Problem based learning
- [ ] Projects, independent or group
- [ ] Sandwich year reports
- [ ] Simulation exercises
- [ ] Slide and picture tests
- [ ] Student-led seminars, presentations and discussions
- [ ] Synoptic examinations
- [ ] Treatment reports
- [ ] Video formats
- [ ] Viva voce examinations
- [ ] Work books
- [ ] Work experience report

The matrix above is derived from the QAA Benchmark Statements.

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