PROVISION FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

UNESCO

1999
The survey 'Provision for Students with Disabilities in Higher Education' was carried out by UNESCO's Section for Special Needs Education as a contribution to the World Conference on Higher Education, in Paris, France, 5 – 10 October 1998. Thirty-five universities from thirty-five countries responded to the questionnaire sent out by UNESCO. Although the survey is not comprehensive by any means, it highlights some of the efforts made in all world regions in providing study opportunities for all students. It also highlights the need for wider awareness raising regarding the situation of students with disabilities in higher education.

The Declaration of the Conference recognizes the fundamental role of education in the promotion of human rights, democracy, sustainable development and peace, and shall therefore become accessible to all throughout life. In shaping a new vision of higher education, Article 3 (a) in the Declaration stipulates, in concordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, that admission to higher education should be based on merit, capacity, efforts, perseverance and devotion, showed by those seeking access to it. Therefore, no discrimination can be accepted in granting access to higher education on grounds of race, gender, language or religion, or economic, cultural or social distinctions, or disability. The access of some special target groups, including persons with disability, must be actively facilitated. Special material help and educational solutions can help overcome the obstacles that these groups face, both in accessing and in continuing higher education.

UNESCO wishes to acknowledge Dr Seamus Hegarty's (Director, NFER, UK) assistance in compiling this report.
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**Introduction**

Very few students with disabilities receive higher education. As long as higher education was the preserve of a privileged minority the absence of students with disabilities was little noticed. However, the recent growth in higher education, encompassing one-third or more of the age cohort in many countries, combined with the improved schooling on offer to students with disabilities, focuses attention on the disparity in access to higher education.

This survey, conducted in summer 1998, seeks to present information on provision for students with disabilities in universities in the different UNESCO regions. It builds on the experience of conducting a survey on students with disabilities at English-speaking universities in Africa in 1997 (UNESCO, 1997). A questionnaire (see Annex 1) was sent to 50 universities selected on the basis of information provided by UNESCO regional officers and other informed sources. The aim was to target universities likely to have developed some services for students with disabilities rather than to establish a representative picture on the basis of a random sample. Responses were received from 35 universities – 70 per cent – in time for this analysis.

The findings are summarised under eight headings:

1. Number of students with disabilities
2. Support to students with disabilities
3. Entrance procedures
4. Environment
5. Academic support
6. Social activities
7. Transition to adult life
8. Future plans.
1. **Number of students with disabilities**

The information given on the number of students with disabilities at the universities is summarised in Tables 1 and 2. The data provided were generally undated but have been assumed to refer to 1997/98 or 1996/97. The exceptions are Athens and Sao Paulo where the figures are from 1992/93.

Practically all universities had some students with disabilities. Mostly the number reported was quite small: where percentages could be calculated, students with disabilities represented less than one per cent of the student body in all except two cases (Sydney, 1.31% and Rabat, 1.14%). In absolute terms, the reported number of students with disabilities was less than 100 in all but eight universities.

**Table 1** Distribution of students with disabilities, by percentage of student body

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Less than</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.2 - 0.4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.4 - 0.6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.6 - 0.8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.8 - 1.0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 1%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These figures must be regarded as tentative because of variations in the collection of data on student disabilities. In some cases, they underestimate the true incidence of disability – for different reasons. Eotvos Lorand has no disability-related information on students because of Hungarian legislation on personal data protection. The Philippines has no data because the number of disabled students is believed to be so small that it would not be worth the effort ‘to come up with a profile of the disabled population in the university’. In a
comment echoed by other respondents, Dakar states that many students with disabilities elect for personal reasons not to register as disabled. FU Berlin represents a particular case in that the university does not register students’ disabilities but draws on nationally representative surveys of students in Germany; by extrapolation this gives an assumed profile of the student population at FU Berlin.

When categories of disability were recorded, physical impairment was by far the most common. Because of the visible nature of physical impairment such students were more likely to be registered. Visual impairment was the next most common category, and some universities had a sizeable number of blind and partially sighted students. Even after one has allowed for underestimates, the actual numbers reported and the wide variation in them suggest that the provision available for students with disabilities is far too little. Many universities recognise this in their declarations of intent and, in some cases, action planning.

Two general points may be made. First, the absence of reliable, comprehensive information is a considerable barrier to the planning and monitoring of provision. Students’ reluctance to be identified as disabled must be respected but it is not an excuse for failing to attempt to establish a systematic database. Secondly, the task of improving access to higher education is not just for universities; schools and the larger community have important roles to play as well.
### Table 2 Number and percentage of students with disabilities in each university

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University</th>
<th>Total number of students</th>
<th>Number of students with disabilities</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Africa</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addis Ababa</td>
<td>No data</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burundi</td>
<td>4 500</td>
<td>No data</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cape Town</td>
<td>No data</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cocody, Ivory Coast</td>
<td>No data</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dakar</td>
<td>40 000</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>0.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ibadan</td>
<td>20 905</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>0.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kigali, Rwanda</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zimbabwe</td>
<td>No data</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Arab States</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cairo</td>
<td>No data</td>
<td>4 517(^1)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>26 000</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>0.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King Saud</td>
<td>51 892</td>
<td>No data</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuwait</td>
<td>No data</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rabat</td>
<td>9 711</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>1.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Asia &amp; Pacific</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>28 992</td>
<td>No data</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sydney</td>
<td>34 430</td>
<td>451</td>
<td>1.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tokyo</td>
<td>No data</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Europe</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athens</td>
<td>No data</td>
<td>387</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles, Prague</td>
<td>34 000</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>0.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coimbra</td>
<td>21 000</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eotvos Lorand</td>
<td>20 000</td>
<td>30-40</td>
<td>0.15-0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FU Berlin</td>
<td>42 292</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>0.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghent</td>
<td>20 000</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>0.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helsinki</td>
<td>33 000</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>0.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limerick</td>
<td>8 317</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>0.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Savoie/Chambery</td>
<td>12 000</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>0.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Latin America</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austral, Chile</td>
<td>9 369</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Costa Rica</strong></td>
<td>26 191</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>0.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CUYO, ArGhentina</td>
<td>No data</td>
<td>110(^2)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French Guyana</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honduras</td>
<td>55 000</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managua</td>
<td>4 604</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>272 338</td>
<td>No data</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Marcos, Peru</td>
<td>33 000</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sao Paulo</td>
<td>60 000</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Indies</td>
<td>10 540</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>0.59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^1\) Of which 4 094 recorded as students with ‘psychological problems’

\(^2\) Of which 80 recorded as students with ‘psychological problems’
2. **Support to students with disabilities**

**General student counselling services**
Most universities (27 out of 35) had general student counselling services. These included counselling, psychological support and information provision. In some cases there was a formal student counselling centre.

**Special counselling services for students with disabilities**
Less than half (15 out of 35) had special counselling services for students with disabilities. Some of those without special services said that students with disabilities could use the general counselling services and received special attention within them.

Responses varied in the amount of detail provided but provision seemed to range from minor adjustments to the general student counselling services to a comprehensive suite of services targeted on students with disabilities. Newly enrolled students with disabilities in Addis Ababa are given a personal orientation to university life and the help available to them should they encounter problems. Cairo reported a range of services for students with disabilities covering social welfare, student activities, physical and psychological health care, as well as a specific service for students with visual impairment. Costa Rica provides special services as part of the services provided for all students but takes care to link them up with other services – reception, scholarships, sports, student well-being and health. Other examples are described below: Charles and Sydney illustrate contrasting approaches, while FU Berlin has a particularly extensive service.
Charles
There is a special guidance bureau for students with disabilities within the advisory and information services available to all students. Students with disabilities also have access to a psychologist. There are specific additional services for students with hearing impairments and for those with visual impairments. The latter provides technical support for blind students plus computer and laboratory training.

FU Berlin
1. There is a Commissioner for Disabled Students at the university. His function is to ensure that conditions at the university are adapted to the special needs of students with disabilities. This covers matters of access, special requirements during seminars and practical exercises, and examinations. He also assists in the planning and completion of construction work and in technical and organisational measures.

2. The Advisory Board for Disabilities and Chronic Diseases gives advice concerning social conditions during studies, for example how to deal with the various public institutions which offer financial or technical help, how to secure transport services, how to get a wheelchair adjusted and so on. The centre has recently established a pool of equipment where students can borrow computers, hearing aids, Braille equipment and so on.

3. The Counselling Centre is organised by students of the University Student Board. Through it students give advice to students with disabilities concerning any matters that pertain to their studies. It also organises a self-help group.

4. The Service Centre for Blind and Visually Impaired Students offers help in preparing literature and study papers for the students. They transcribe scripts into Braille, prepare them on diskettes, read them onto cassettes and produce enlarged photocopies.
Preparation of staff

Half (17 out of 35) of the universities provided some preparation of staff to assist them in responding to the needs of students with disabilities. With a few exceptions, this preparation did not appear to be particularly extensive. In Ghent staff are informed, by letter at the beginning of the academic year, of the presence of a student with disabilities. FU Berlin and Sydney distribute written information on the problems students with disabilities may face and strategies staff may find useful in dealing with them. Cape Town prepares individual staff members who will be required to respond to the needs of individual students. There is also a continuing education plan to help sensitise the university and its staff members to the concerns of people with disabilities. Procedures adopted in Costa Rica and Limerick are described below.
One regional pattern which emerged is that universities in Latin America, with the notable exception of Costa Rica, did not in general provide special services for students with disabilities nor any particular preparation for staff.

**Costa Rica**

A special training programme, ‘Access and Equalisation of Opportunities in Higher Education’, is organised for 40 administrators from four state universities. Students with disabilities participate in this programme, describing the main problems they experience within the universities. There are also training and assessment programmes for teachers who have students with disabilities in their courses; these are provided by a team formed from Student Services and other specialists.

**Limerick**

At the beginning of each semester information is passed to academic staff which alerts them to the fact that they have a student with a disability in their class. With the student’s permission a profile of the student is sent to the academic with a list of the student’s needs and how these can be accommodated. The student is then invited to meet the academic to make any specific arrangements necessary. Examination staff are also alerted to the examination requirements of the students and any accommodations they may require.

**Financing the support services**

As shown in Table 3, most funding for the support services came from the state or the university; it was common for funding support to be received from both. State funding was based on social insurance arrangements in FU Berlin and Helsinki. Equity programmes were a source of state funding in Sydney. European funding, referred to by Athens, is included here since this is part of governments’ net
contributions to European Union budgets. Funding can be limited to specific groups; thus, in Addis Ababa there is a government grant which contributes to living expenses for blind students only and pays for readers. University support included reduced tuition fees as in Jordan.

Table 3 Sources of funding for the support services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO/Charity</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-financed</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None/No data</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NB Some universities reported more than one source of funding.

A limited amount of funding came from voluntary bodies or private sources. Of the three universities referring to self-financing, two – Cape Town and West Indies – sought to raise funds, presumably from charitable sources, to fund disability support activities. In Athens, volunteers were used to support students with disabilities; while this is not funding as such, it can be an important element of support and one that may occur more widely than reported.
3. **Entrance procedures**

A majority of universities (24 out of 35) reported no specific admission procedures or restrictions for students with disabilities, though some referred to assisting students in choosing an appropriate course. The remaining universities referred either to policies of affirmative action or to some restrictions placed on students with disabilities. Affirmative action included modified entrance criteria and preferential treatment in choice of subjects. Modified entrance criteria entailed a lower exam score threshold for admission (Sydney, Helsinki) or exemption from certain subjects (in Addis Ababa, blind students are not required to have passed mathematics in the school leaving certificate). Preferential treatment is cited by Addis Ababa (students with disabilities are assigned to the department of their first choice provided they meet the minimum requirements) and Savoie/Chambery (applications from candidates with hearing impairments received priority attention). Three universities (King Saud, Coimbra, FU Berlin) referred to certain restrictions placed on choice of course by students with disabilities but did not elaborate.

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**Sydney**

There are two special admission schemes which apply to students with disabilities.

(i) *The Broadway Scheme.* School leavers who have not achieved the education level necessary to be admitted to a particular course may be offered a place if they have achieved a score close to the cut off mark and can demonstrate that they have suffered significant educational disadvantage, including disability. Approximately ten per cent of course places are filled in this way.

(ii) *Educational Disadvantage Admission Scheme.* Persons who have suffered educational disadvantage through illness, trauma or disability may apply for direct entry into the degree of their choice through this scheme.
4. **Environment**

Information was sought on the extent to which students with disabilities had access to study and living environments and what adaptations had been made to facilitate them. Responses necessarily reflected the number of students with disabilities on campus and the pattern of their disabilities as well as the physical nature of the campus and the buildings on it; blind students and those with physical disabilities have different requirements.

Responses are grouped by study environment, other environmental factors, living accommodation, transport and catering. A number of universities referred to aspirations or even plans to improve the environment for students with disabilities. One – Sydney – had recently conducted an access audit of the entire campus which identified the areas which were problematic for students with disabilities with regard to access, signage, tactile indicators, hearing loops and so on. It was intended that the results of this audit would be used to inform the university about required future work.

**Accessibility of study environment**

Table 4 shows the extent to which students were able to access lecture halls, laboratories, libraries and so on. It will be seen that full access was available in just over a quarter of cases.

**Table 4 Accessibility of study environment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Full/ special access*</th>
<th>Partial access</th>
<th>Limited/No access</th>
<th>No information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lecture halls</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laboratories</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Libraries</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Special arrangements to secure access included lifts, wheelchair slides, ramps, special rooms, assistants in libraries and work stations for the blind.
Other environmental features

Table 5 shows the extent to which students had access to toileting, parking, telephones and campus cafés. Other modifications such as adapted sports facilities were mentioned in four cases.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Full/special access</th>
<th>Partial access</th>
<th>Limited/No access</th>
<th>No information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Toilets</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parking</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephones</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cafés/restaurants</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Living accommodation

Adapted living accommodation was reported to be available in 13 universities, and personal assistants were available in six universities.

Transport

Nine universities reported special transport arrangements to and from the campus, and five provided special transport within the campus.

Catering

Seven universities provided special menus for students with disabilities as necessary.
5. **Academic support**

Academic learning is the primary activity of universities and is therefore a key focus for support. Responses to questions in this area were rather brief but a reasonably clear outline picture emerges. Approximately one-third of universities allow students with disabilities extra time for their studies. About a quarter allow some variation of course content, though several drew attention to the need to ensure that the degree awarded to a student with disabilities was comparable to a standard degree. Half of the universities cited the availability of technical equipment and the same number described modification to examination procedures.

Personal assistance can be a very important means of enabling students with disabilities to have a successful university career. This can entail reading and mobility support for blind students, interpreting for students with hearing impairment, and personal care and mobility support for students with physical impairments. Twelve universities reported some personal support but, from the information given, it seemed to be generally fairly limited.

The responses to the questions are presented below, grouped under study adjustments and pedagogical support.

**Study adjustments**

a) **Flexible time frame**

Thirteen universities reported various arrangements by which students with disabilities were allowed extra time for their studies. Sometimes this is incorporated within the modular structure of courses which allows all students to study within a flexible time frame. In other cases, such as the Philippines and Sydney, there is a specific extra allowance of time for students
with disabilities. In Costa Rica, students can by agreement arrange to cover less material in a given period of time.

b) **Flexible content**

Nine universities referred to the possibility of students with disabilities varying the content of their courses. Thus, in Jordan and Costa Rica some subjects can be replaced by other subjects, and activities and visits can be modified. Limerick referred to substituting research activities for work-experience placements. The Philippines reported alternative physical education courses for some students.

c) **Examinations**

Table 6 describes the modifications to examination procedures reported for students with disabilities. A few universities reported in addition giving students permission to move about, toilet breaks and the provision of special rooms for examinations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 6 Modifications to examination procedures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Additional time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral examination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Papers in large print, Braille, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical equipment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Pedagogical support**

a) **Tutor/assistant**

Twelve universities referred to the availability of tutors or personal assistants to facilitate students with disabilities in their learning. Thus, Ibadan has facilitators who are specially trained teachers in the Department of Special Education who assist students with disabilities when requested.
b) **Adapted texts**

Twelve universities referred to the availability of adapted texts and materials for students with disabilities. Most often, these referred to materials for students with visual impairment, either Brailled texts or recorded material.

c) **Technical equipment**

The availability of technical equipment is described in Table 7. Additional facilities described included adapted wheelchairs for viewing medical operations at FU Berlin.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 7 Availability of technical equipment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Computers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Braille software</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Braille printers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perkins Braille etc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech synthesizers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recording devices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CD ROM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scanners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearing aids</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

d) **Training in use of equipment**

Eleven universities referred to the provision of training in the use of technical equipment for students with disabilities. Thus, Zimbabwe provides a week’s training in the use of computers for students when they arrive at university; in Ibadan students with visual impairment are taught to use Perkins Braille individually and students with hearing impairment are taught to operate audiometers.
6. **Social activities**

Only a few universities responded to the question asking about initiatives to encourage students with disabilities to participate in social activities. The initiatives reported included sporting activities (FU Berlin, Charles, Mexico), a music group (FU Berlin), a disabled friends club (Jordan) and structured social activities provided by the Students Union (Sydney). Two examples of the provision made are described below.

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**FU Berlin**

The university provides sports programmes for all students and staff. There is a staff member responsible for encouraging students with disabilities to participate. There are many activities suitable for both persons with and without disability, such as wheelchair tennis, wheelchair dancing, swimming, sailing and skiing. Students with disabilities have formed a group which organises an annual congress on various topics. The Commissioner for Disabled Students and the Counselling Centre of the student body cooperate with this group and support their work. The student body also offers open groups for students with disabilities where they can for example learn creative writing, make music together or exchange their experiences of university life.

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**Mexico**

The university has a special association offering activities such as swimming, football, basketball, table tennis and athletics. Particular attention is given to physical, psychological, technical and methodological preparation.
7. **Transition to active life**

Less than half (15 out of 35) of the universities provided information here. The tendency was to include students with disabilities within the general careers service provided by the university. Six universities referred to specific support for students with disabilities provided either within the university or in association with it.

**Cairo.** The Disabled Students Social Welfare Department has a specialist careers officer.

**Sydney.** The university's Disability Services liaise closely with the careers centre and have established a single point of contact for all work-related information. The services provided include personal careers advice, workshops in job search techniques and an extensive careers library.

**Athens.** Specialist career counselling and psychological counselling are available. A careers centre is being established to facilitate all students with disabilities in securing permanent employment. The university belongs to the 'Work Able Centre Network', a European network of careers support centres for students with disabilities at universities.

**FU Berlin.** The university does not have career services but the public labour service has a specialist placement centre for university graduates who are disabled. The university provides information for students about this centre.

**Ghent.** The university liaises with a service which specialises in finding work for people with disabilities.
Savoie/Chambery. The university has agreements with certain companies regarding the recruitment of students with hearing impairment.
8. **Future plans**

Plans for improving services for students with disabilities were in general described briefly. Two key points recurred: the need to improve physical accessibility; and, particularly from those universities in poorer regions, concern over lack of sufficient resources. Other initiatives described include: the establishment of a committee to identify the number of students with disabilities, the services on offer and required, and steps to be taken for the future (Addis Ababa); improvements in the careers and counselling centre (Ibadan); study of pedestrian movement on campus with a view to eliminating physical barriers (Philippines); preparation of teaching staff (Ibadan and Rabat); preparation of a disability action plan to address the future needs of both students and staff with disabilities (Sydney); regular meetings with students to discuss improvements of their situation at the university (FU Berlin); capitalising on developments in ICT (Savoie/Chambery).

Some examples are given of more extended statements of future plans.

**Honduras**

The plan for improving services covers

- computerisation of all services
- improving the skills of our staff
- creation of self-sustainable courses such as sign language and Braille
- adaptation of all buildings
- promotion of organisations of persons with disabilities
- promotion of deaf culture in Honduras
- improving employment opportunities for students with disabilities
- extending this programme to all regional study centres and all universities in Honduras.
Cocody

To make the university more accessible it is necessary
- to join forces with the Association for Disabled Students when taking
decisions concerning them
- that the state reinforce its aid to students with disabilities by adjusting
the infrastructure at the university to their needs, in particular, lecture
rooms, laboratories, libraries, lodgings, cafeteria and telephones
- to take the disabled students into consideration in every activity relevant
to the student
  - facilitate the inscription of disabled students at the university, by for
    instance setting up a counter they may access more easily
  - prepare the teaching staff so that they can respond to different needs
  - take the student with disabilities into consideration when elaborating
    programmes
  - modify the collective transportation in order to transport them to the
    university
  - facilitate movement around the campus
  - make specialised teaching material available
  - train teachers in working methods and body language.

Charles

It is planned to make most of the main university buildings accessible to
students with disabilities. Because the university has many old buildings
spread across Prague, the process of making them more accessible is gradual
and is related to the renovation of old buildings.

An electronic library of study materials is being prepared. All new study
materials published by the university press should also be in electronic form.

The programme of personal assistants is being extended, both by using
fellow students and by using young people doing civil service.
A final comment from Limerick is worth noting: 'as the population of students with disability increases it allows us to experience the diversity of their needs, and our services are evolving to meet these needs'. This suggests that increases in student numbers will generate a momentum of their own, irrespective of other factors, that should lead both to greater awareness and to improvements in provision.
Conclusion

The purpose of this exercise has been to highlight issues involved in making provision for students with disabilities in higher education and to illustrate some of the steps being taken in practice. It was not the intention to conduct an exhaustive survey which would ground definitive statements about current practice. It is possible, however, to point out some key issues and highlight challenging practice.

First, the numbers of students with disabilities in higher education remain extremely low. Unless one subscribes to the – extremely implausible – view that most of those with disabilities likely to benefit from higher education are already receiving it, this represents a significant challenge not only to universities but also to schools, support systems and of course the young people themselves and their families. Universities need to scrutinise the barriers, and not just the physical ones, that keep students with disabilities at bay and take the necessary steps to removing them. Eliminating barriers is merely a first step, however. Universities need to become the sort of teaching and learning institutions where students with disabilities feel at home and have a sense of belonging to an intellectual and social community as of right. If universities with their concentration of intellect are slow to grapple with these issues, what hope is there for other institutions and workplaces?

Schools too must play a part here, in encouraging young people to see higher education as an option and ensuring they are prepared for it as appropriate. Some students will continue to require particular support but the way in which this needs to be provided is likely to be different when they are at university. Needless to say, young people with disabilities and their families face challenges too: university and school attitudes will not change overnight, and they are likely to require unswerving determination if they are to secure a university education.
Secondly, the elimination of physical barriers and the provision of material support rightly loom large in universities’ concerns. If students cannot move around the campus or gain access to a laboratory, they are effectively denied higher education. Likewise, they need access to adaptive technology as a matter of routine. Once again, however, these are merely first steps. The physical or material environment merely provides a context for teaching and learning, and the most potent barriers are those which inhibit the teaching/learning process. These can be embedded in teachers’ attitudes or teaching approaches, the structuring of courses or the means whereby they are assessed. Academic support for students with disabilities is for many a prerequisite for a successful experience of higher education; physical access may be important but personal assistance is what makes the difference between success and failure at learning.

Finally, there is an unresolved tension with regard to how support is provided. Some support for students with disabilities – and it has to be acknowledged that it was among the most comprehensive reported – was provided on a separate basis, whereas in other cases the effort was to provide support within the framework of support for all students. This is a tension familiar from the school and other sectors. Its current visibility in higher education may simply reflect the relative newness of systematic support for students with disabilities there. The fact that some universities have established effective support on an integrated basis does suggest that integrated models of support are possible and should be the option of first choice in all cases.
References


Annex 1

HIGHER EDUCATION AND STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Survey

The increasing diversity of populations in many countries places demands on institutional structures to be responsive to the needs of diverse groups in communities. Universities today are expected to be open to these new challenges.

Although some existing higher education institutions are already providing for a range of students with different needs, others are looking into ways of creating a more supportive learning environment within their institution. Universities also vary in terms of their financial and human resources to respond to this challenge. It seems, however, that the first step to equal access for all students is the will to address the diversity of needs of students and create a supportive environment to meet their needs.

One group, which will be the focus of this survey, is students with disabilities. With the growing opportunities for children and youth with disabilities at the primary and secondary level, institutions of higher education are called up to take up the challenge of ensuring equal access to education at the tertiary level.

While we do recognize the great disparities that exist among universities in a given region, as well as between regions, in addressing this issue, we equally recognize that with growing social and technical progress people with disabilities today should be offered equal opportunities as other students to pursue their higher education.

Enabling mechanisms will need to be in place to facilitate provision of appropriate responses to these diverse needs and minimize the barriers to learning.

The purpose of this study is to disseminate information on developments in number of countries that will hopefully sensitize universities and encourage them to take appropriate action to secure equal access for students with disabilities.

Higher Education and Students with Disabilities

QUESTIONNAIRE

In this questionnaire ‘disability’ refers to a diversity of conditions resulting from any of the following: physical/sensory impairments, disabling conditions caused by e.g. chronic disease (physical or mental), accidents, neurological dysfunction and communication disorders.
PROVISION FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A SURVEY

Questionnaires to be returned:

UNESCO
ED/BAS/SNE
7 place de Fontenoy
75352 PARIS 07 SP
France

All enquiries:

UNESCO
Special Needs Education
Tel: 33-1-45.68.11.95
Fax: 33-1-45.68.56.27
E-mail: s.vayrynen@unesco.org

Information about the university

Name
Address
Telephone
Fax
E-mail

Total number of students

University’s experience regarding students with disabilities

1. Information about students with disabilities at the university

Number of students with disabilities in total

of which number of
- blind
- other visual impairments
- deaf
- other hearing impairments
- physical impairments
- other disabilities (e.g. neurological dysfunction, psychological problems, communication disorders, chronic disease), please specify.

2. Support to students with disabilities

a) General student counselling services, please elaborate.
b) Do you have special counselling services for students with disabilities? If yes, please elaborate.
c) How do you prepare the university staff to respond to the diversity of needs of students with disabilities? Please elaborate.

3. Financing the support services

How are the services for students with disabilities funded?
PROVISION FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A SURVEY

Entrance requirements / procedure

4. Are there any specific clauses / procedures / restrictions for students with disabilities when applying for admission at the university? If yes, please elaborate.

Environment

Please elaborate on the following aspects:

5. **Accessibility - study environment**
   - lecture halls
   - laboratories, etc.
   - libraries
   - campus

6. **Other environment adaptations**
   - toilets
   - parking
   - telephones
   - cafeterias/restaurants
   - other

7. **Accommodation**
   - adapted rooms
   - assistance for daily living (e.g. household assistant, nurse, transport assistant)

8. **Transport**
   - to and from campus
   - in campus

9. **Catering**
   - Are special menus available?

Studies

10. **Adjustments**
    a) Is it possible for a student with disability to set a flexible time frame for his/her studies? If yes, please elaborate.
    b) Are the contents of education followed by the student with disabilities adjustable? When study modules cannot be followed due to the student’s disability, is it possible to choose/substitute modules?
    c) Exams Which of the following adaptations are possible?

        (Please tick)

        - additional time (printing in Braille, rereading, etc.)
        - replacement of a written exam with an oral exam or vice versa according to the student’s needs
        - accessibility of exam papers and questionnaires according to student’s needs (large print, Braille, sign language, etc.)
PROVISION FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A SURVEY

☐ facilitators (secretary, interpreter with a knowledge of the subject)
☐ technical equipment facilitation (computing, special / accessible room)
☐ other, please specify

11. Educational support

a) Do students with disabilities have the possibility of having a tutor / personal assistant to facilitate their learning? If yes, please elaborate.

b) Are study materials available in large print, Braille, audiocassettes, diskettes, etc.? Have you adapted texts of educational materials to forms more suited to students with disabilities? Do you have sign language interpreters or cued speech interpreters? Please elaborate the above.

c) Availability of technical equipment. Tick, if available

☐ computers
☐ Braille software
☐ Braille printer
☐ Perkins Braillers ☐ electronic machines in Braille writing
☐ speech synthesizer
☐ recording devices ☐ dictaphones
☐ CD ROM drives
☐ scanners
☐ hearing aids
☐ other, please specify

d) Do you provide students with disabilities with individualized training in the use of technical equipment? If yes, please elaborate.

Social activities

12. How does the university encourage student with disabilities to participate on an equal basis in academic and/or social activities? Please elaborate and give examples.

Transition to active life

13. Do you have careers services / counselling in general? For students with disabilities? If yes, please elaborate the following aspects, if possible:

- Who is involved in the counselling
- Content of the counselling
- Facilitating in finding employment
- Follow-up during transition

Future plans

Please elaborate the following:

14. Making the university more accessible.
15. Improving services