

LTC09D137

Disability Services Report Academic Year 2008/9

Disability Services

Staff:

Disability Co-ordinator, Jane Abson
Mental Health Co-ordinator, Beckie Davies
Dyslexia Tutors, Ellie Baker and Anyesa Sorrentino (5 days per week, term time and reduced hours in vacation periods)
Disability Team Administrator, Marean Daniels

Summary

1. Admissions

Disability Co-ordinator conducted 26 individual appointments for applicants for academic year 2009/10 including visits to accommodation, liaison with schools of study and external agencies and reviewed 796 applications by disabled people which converted to 288 entrants. One application was rejected.

Liaison with Admissions Officers was improved as was turnaround time of applications.

2. Services for current students

Together, the Disability Co-ordinator, Mental Health Co-ordinator and Dyslexia Tutors worked with 797 students¹.

The Disability Co-ordinator undertook 474 student appointments. Students with Asperger Syndrome, Specific Learning Difficulties (most usually AD(H)D and dyspraxia), mobility impairments, unlisted disabilities/medical conditions and those with more than one impairment required ongoing support and presented the greatest challenge to the Disability Co-ordinator in terms of resource to meet their support needs.

1356 hours of dyslexia support were provided (208 screenings, 162 feedback sessions and 710 tutorials).

Students seen by the Mental health Co-ordinator were predominantly home students (188) and twice as many female students (157) as male.

Of the range of mental health difficulties, stress (118 incidents), anxiety/panic (160 incidents) and depression (226 incidents) were the most frequently reported. 61 students reported an eating disorder, 17 self harm and 29 suicidal thoughts. 78 incidents of psychosis occurred.²

3. Disabled Students' Allowances

Disabled Students' Allowances (DSAs) support service provision (note takers, mentors, dyslexia tuition, study skills support, assistive technologies for example) for UK students. The table below shows that the number of awards has continued to increase each academic year.

¹ NB: data collection method does not allow us to determine how many of this number were 'shared clients'. Students may thus be counted more than once. This will be refined from 2009/10.

² 1 incident does not equal 1 student: students can report a number of aspects of their mental health difficulties within one appointment and over time.

However, the change of provider to Student Finance England is anticipated to have an adverse effect on processing of DSA applications in 2009/10.

DSA awards

Year	2004/5	2005/6	2006/7	2007/8	2008/9
Number	126	162	137	175	207

4. Service Developments

- Notification of the reasonable adjustments required to support students' study is now sent routinely to Schools and further improvement in access to information, moving away from reliance on paper copies and manual file access to use of the SITS information system will be pursued in the academic year 2009/10.
- Disability Liaison Officers were nominated by most Schools and 3 meetings were held over the year. An online discussion forum has been established.

This has been a preparatory year. The aim of the role is to move towards more even provision of disability knowledge and support across the university. The effectiveness of the role and its incorporation into the structure of Schools and their services to students will be better evaluated at the end of the coming academic year 2009/10.

- The incorporation of the 'living library' into Well-Being week where individuals recount their own stories as information/inspiration to others was very well received and the aim of the Mental Health Co-ordinator is to build on this resource in future years.
- Towards the end of the year, the Mental Health Co-ordinator became a Mental Health First Aid Trainer and this programme will be rolled out in the coming academic year
- Services for students with Autism Spectrum Disorders will be reviewed in light of the research report to be provided in the summer 2009.

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Who we provide services for

We provide services to students with: mobility impairments; sensory impairments; specific learning difficulties e.g. dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia, dyspraxia, AD(H)D; mental health difficulties; unseen disabilities e.g. asthma, epilepsy, heart conditions, diabetes; autism spectrum diagnoses; cancer – from the point of diagnosis; HIV/AIDS – from the point of diagnosis; Multiple Sclerosis (MS) – from the point of diagnosis; Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (ME); Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (C.F.S.) and any other condition which "...has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on [the] ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities".

Services provided by the Disability Co-ordinator

1) *For prospective applicants*

Discussion by telephone, e-mail and/or arranged visits to discuss and evaluate the accessibility of the University for the prospective applicant and their intended course of study. Young people with needs for care assistance, blind and deaf young people and those with autism spectrum diagnoses are most often represented in this group of service users.

Although not many in number (26 in 2008/9), visits can be time-consuming, involving liaison with academic colleagues and accommodation staff prior to the visit and, on the day, tours of the campus, a visit to accommodation, a discussion with an academic in the visitor's prospective school, and an extended discussion about support arrangements. They are however, very useful in establishing first contact with prospective students and promoting the University.

2) *University admissions and services to applicants*

The role of the Disability Co-ordinator in the admissions process has 2 primary purposes:

1) To be aware of applicants in order that relevant information and guidance on services can be made available to them.

2) To determine whether there is a need for an early stage discussion with the applicant and the School about 'reasonable adjustments' to determine whether these can be made to enable the applicant to potentially meet the core competency requirements of the course.

To enable this practice, Admissions Officers provide copies of applications where a disability has been declared for review and recommendation.

Historically, the 'turn around' of applications by Disability Services has been of concern to Admissions staff. In 2008/9, significant improvement in speed of turnaround was made and close liaison with admissions colleagues developed. This is enhanced by the

Disability Co-ordinator and Dyslexia Tutors' involvement in the CSED programme, providing training to admissions staff on Disability in Higher Education.

Concern to ensure that applicants to the MB/BS course with declared disabilities had the opportunity to explore 'reasonable adjustments' for study and practice resulted in the development of a multi-disciplinary team (including the Disability Co-ordinator, Occupational Health, the MED Disability Liaison Officer, MED Clinical Skills Director) all available offer early advice to applicants. The instigation of this group lead to consideration of implementation of similar opportunities for applicants to AHP courses to be provided for applicants for 2010/11.

Applicants with declared disabilities for 2009/10 entry were³:

782 undergraduate (+ 39 deferred entry applications)
112 postgraduate
43 PGCE
19 visiting/exchange

Total: 956

These converted to the following entrants:

177 undergraduates
72 postgraduates
21 PGCE
18 visiting/exchange

Total: 288

The total number of applications requiring review by the Disability Co-ordinator was 796. 1 application was rejected because the University could not support the applicant's disability in study and University life.

3) *Services for current students*

The Disability Co-ordinator undertook 474 student appointments in 2008/9 comprising 167 individual students.

Students in particular categories show a higher level of need for regular and continuing support than do others as indicated by the higher number of appointments in relation to students seen (Figure 1 below).

Students with Asperger Syndrome, Specific Learning Difficulties (most usually AD(H)D and dyspraxia), mobility impairments, unlisted disabilities/medical conditions and those with more than one impairment require ongoing support and present the greatest challenge to Disability Services in terms of resource.

³ NB: figures do not include students applying via Clearing.

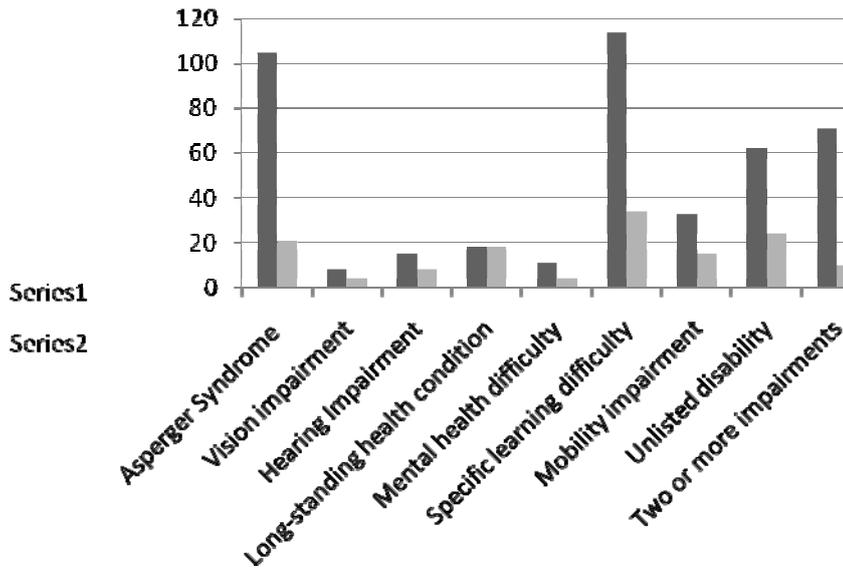


Figure 1: Number of student appointments (series 1) in relation to number of students seen (series 2) by disability category⁴

In terms of 'reach' of the service: Figure 2 below shows the number of students seen by the Disability Co-ordinator as a percentage of the total number of students recorded on SITS in each category

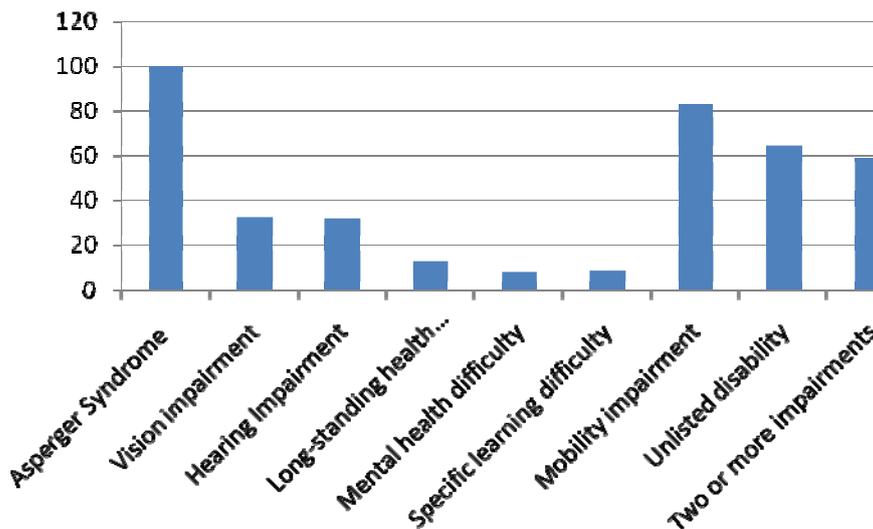


Figure 2: percentage of students in each disability category seen by the Disability Co-ordinator.

It is anticipated that the use of the Appointments Pro software in DoS will enable us to interrogate the demographic and disability data for appointments more thoroughly, enabling us to identify key users and non-users of the service amongst the student population and key issues with which they present. The review of 2009/10 academic year should then facilitate the development of better targeted information and the opportunity to identify and reach out to those students who currently under-use Disability and Dyslexia services and the services which we need to target and enhance.

⁴ This table does not include 37 appointments made by 29 students who have not declared a disability to the University.

The range of advice and action for students meeting the Disability Co-ordinator has been:

- advice to students about 'reasonable adjustments': i.e. what the University can reasonably do to 'level the playing field' for disabled students together with liaison with academic and administrative colleagues to facilitate their implementation
- advice and guidance to students on intercalation, appeals, examination arrangements and liaison with colleagues and Students' Union as appropriate
- advice about accommodation together with arrangement for changes to accommodation and minor works to improve accessibility in close liaison with Accommodation Office and Estates colleagues
- liaison with external agencies (Student Finance, Disabled Students' Allowance Assessment Centres, Social Services Departments, for example) to facilitate the provision of services
- advice about assistive technologies (hardware, software and 'low-tech')
- advice about funding for disabled students (Disabled Students Allowances)
- assistance with the application process, claiming allowances, organising delivery of equipment and arranging for the provision of services
- advice and guidance on managing University life (particularly important for students with M.E., C.F.S and other fatigue-related conditions)
- signposting to other UEA sources of assistance (e.g. Medical Centre, Chaplaincy, academic support, Counselling, Students' Union, Teaching Offices)
- advice, guidance and liaison with appropriate third parties in relation to work or study placements in the UK or overseas

In addition to general advice giving, the Disability Co-ordinator's work has included meetings with students to mentor them as they encounter academic and personal barriers to study. Such work has been required on an on-going basis for a number of students and on an ad-hoc basis over a shorter term for others. This has been an increasingly significant part of the role.

4) *Disabled Students' Allowances (DSAs)*

Work to encourage students to apply for DSAs is vital as these are the funds which support service provision (note takers, mentors, dyslexia tuition, study skills support, assistive technologies for example) for UK students. The number of students with the allowance (below) is not likely to be equivalent to the number eligible for application who would benefit from the additional provision.

DSA awards

Year	2004/5	2005/6	2006/7	2007/8	2008/9
Number	126	162	137	175	207

The Disability Co-ordinator has increased contact with applicants with firm and insurance acceptances to outline the benefits of the allowance to them and to encourage them to apply and DSAs are promoted within Disability and Dyslexia Services.

Jane Abson, Disability Co-ordinator, 2009

The transfer of management of DSA applications from Local Authorities to Student Finance England has been anticipated to present difficulties with the application process for 2009/10 entrants.

5) *Information on students' support requirements and 'reasonable adjustments'*

In order to improve the flow of information from Disability Services to Faculties and Schools about students' requirements for reasonable adjustments, the Disability Co-ordinator instituted a summary pro-forma identifying services to be provided by or via DoS and those which are Faculty/School responsibility. The information is taken from students' DSA study needs assessments⁵ primarily: an electronic pro-forma is completed with additional necessary information from the DSA report scanned to accompany. The summary is then e-mailed to Faculty managers for dissemination as appropriate. This is a cumbersome system which is difficult to provide.

In order to improve speed of availability of data to appropriate staff in Faculties and Schools, the Disability Co-ordinator has approached the SIS team to request investigation of the 'Accessibility Module' for SITS (in use in other Universities) which will allow the recording of student information more readily and make it immediately accessible to colleagues enhancing our ability to meet our legislative requirements.

6) *Disability Liaison Officers (DLOs)*

Over the course of the academic year, most schools nominated a Disability Liaison Officer whose role it is to provide a point of contact between Disability Services and Schools, providing a two-way conduit for information on individual students and disability issues/questions. In addition, DLOs now are available to assist disabled students in schools with academic-related concerns.

3 meetings of DLOs were held in the year and were most productive, with engaged discussion and active involvement of members. Particular issues which emerged over the meetings were:

- Issues of confidentiality and disclosure
- Information on students' requirements for reasonable adjustments: dissemination and safe storage
- Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans
- Risk assessment
- Meeting legislative requirements and changes to the Quality Assurance Agency Code of Practice
- Contact between DLOs

A discussion forum for DLOs has been provided to enable information sharing and each of the above has been addressed over the year, though it is fair to say that further consolidation is required in 2009/10.

7) *CSED*

Over the course of the year, the Disability Co-ordinator, the Mental Health Co-ordinator and Dyslexia Tutors presented training courses to Post-graduate teaching assistants, admissions officers, front-line staff, placement officers and academic staff. Courses were well received and participants judged them to be illuminating and helpful in their work. In addition, ad-hoc workshops were arranged which enabled staff to focus on specific aspects of their work with disabled students.

8) *Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders*

⁵ Information is only sent from the office when the student has agreed that it can be shared.

Towards the end of the academic year, the Deputy Dean of Students commissioned research on our service provision to students with Autism Spectrum Disorders (including Asperger Syndrome). The report will inform the work of the Service from the academic year 2009/10 onwards.

Specific Learning Difficulties: services provided by the Team Administrator and Dyslexia Tutors

As a service to students which is not funded by the University⁶, but by Disabled Students' Allowances, provision by the Dyslexia Tutors is inevitably closely focussed on providing Specialist Tuition in chargeable hours. However, making a wider contribution to the University and to prospective students are also important elements of the role. Advice and guidance to academic staff and colleagues in other service departments is a regular part of the work as is providing information and guidance on service provision to prospective students and their families.

The total number of students seen by specialist Dyslexia Tutors increased this academic year to 395 – compared with 352 last year. Between them they provided 1356 hours of dyslexia support which comprised 208 screening sessions, 162 feedback sessions and 710 tutorials. 68 students missed booked appointments.

Initial screening and preliminary testing for dyslexia by the tutors is, in the majority of cases, followed by a full assessment by an Educational Psychologist (EP). For each student who received a full EP report, 3 visits to DoS would have been entailed: initial visit to discuss issues, screening and EP appointment, making at least 600 student visits to Dyslexia Services.

If the screening indicates dyslexia, special examination arrangements are recommended so that the student is not disadvantaged and the student can also immediately book tutorials.

Subsequent to the EP report, each student is invited to attend for feedback on their Assessment Report to ensure they fully understand their strengths and weaknesses and to minimise any concerns they may have over a recent and possibly unexpected new diagnosis.

At this meeting, highlighted areas for development are discussed and the tutor will explain the ways in which new strategies can be learned within one-to-one tutorials, in order to build on academic performance.

Tutorials are not compulsory although students are encouraged to attend as the tutors believe that those who use them on a regular basis make the greatest progress. An Individual Learning plan is drafted and signed and the student is reminded about the examination sticker system. Also within this meeting, an application form for the Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) will be completed and the process of this funding fully explained.

A range of multi-sensory teaching strategies for the development of study skills are used with students. Interventions also include teaching of handwriting, phonics and spelling. Students presenting to the service are not limited to those with dyslexia. Dysgraphic and dyspraxic students, those with AD(H)D and autism spectrum diagnoses are also supported. Close liaison with colleagues in DoS for students with a combination of disabilities and specific learning difficulties is also a significant part of the role: ensuring that students receive coherent and well-directed support.

As last year, students from NAM took up the greatest number of appointments, followed by those from AHP, CAP and MED. There was an increase in the number of students from BIO

⁶ International and EU students are provided dyslexia tuition funded by the University. Tuition is instituted for students prior to the receipt of a DSA award with charges being retrospectively made to Local Authorities.

(from 12 to 21). It is unclear whether the high numbers of students seen from some schools are a reflection of the interaction dyslexia tutors have with each of these schools.

There is now a member of staff in MED who is seen as a contact for students with dyslexia and the Disability Liaison Officer for MED is very active within the school. There are close ties between DOS and schools of NAM and AHP. Each year group tutorials are offered to dyslexic students from AHP to help them to prepare for their final viva assessments.

In addition to these duties, Dyslexia Tutors liaise with members of teaching staff, admissions staff and the Students' Union as necessary in cases of appeal.

In an effort to reduce the numbers of final year students registering with the Dyslexia Service, all Senior Advisors were contacted at the end of April by Dyslexia Tutors who offered to give a short presentation about the Service to their new student intake. This was taken up by MED, ENV and LAW and in September, annual presentations were also given to new students in NAM and CAP.

With the current level of staffing, the Service is able to provide fortnightly sessions for students who make advance requests for regular tutorials. The waiting list for appointments in the Autumn Semester is between two and three weeks.

The system of coloured stickers to alert markers of examination scripts that the author has a specific learning difficulty (dyslexia or dyspraxia) was used for the second year this summer. There remains debate over whether or not this system should be applied to anonymously-marked coursework.

The Disability Coordinator, Dyslexia Tutors and the Mental Health Coordinator continue to contribute to the CSED staff development programme, with dedicated Disability Awareness courses aimed at support and frontline staff, admissions staff and members of teaching staff. A session for Estates has been requested via Helen Murdoch, Equality and Diversity Officer, and will take place in the Spring Semester. Three sessions are provided annually for the Postgraduate Teaching Skills Programme. Additionally, similar sessions are provided twice-yearly for advisors within MED. Attendance at all courses is optional (other than for postgraduate teaching assistants).

The Dyslexia Tutors have contributed to the teaching programme on the BA Educational Studies for the past two years and in 2010 Ellie Baker will provide workshops about dyslexia for PGCE students training to teach in Primary Schools. In addition to this Ellie will promote Student Services and the Dyslexia Service to young people from Years 10 and 11 at the Higher Education Information Day for Students with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities, students who might otherwise not consider a University application.

Ellie Baker
October 2009

Services provided by the Mental Health Co-ordinator

As does the Disability Co-ordinator, the Mental Health Co-ordinator reviews applications for candidates with offers from the University and liaises with colleagues over any reasonable adjustments which may be required to facilitate study. This is ongoing from mid-October each academic year.

Over the course of the year, the Mental Health Co-ordinator worked with 235 clients, predominantly home students (188) and twice as many female students (157) as male.

Of the range of mental health difficulties, stress (118 incidents), anxiety/panic (160 incidents) and depression (226 incidents) were the most frequently reported. 61 students reported an eating disorder, 17 self harm and 29 suicidal thoughts. 78 incidents of psychosis occurred.⁷

Response to students' mental health difficulties varies from guidance in self-management, reassurance and anxiety reduction to crisis intervention, including ad-hoc, one-off meetings through to planned therapeutic work over time.

Close liaison with colleagues in Schools, the Counselling Service, University Medical Centre and local voluntary and statutory agencies is essential and ongoing.

In addition to direct work with students, activities aimed towards promoting good mental health in the University Community is also a strong part of the role, with 'Well-Being Week' being the most visible event. Last year attendance was strong and a wide variety of self-help interventions and other services were represented. Of particular interest was the 'Living Library', where an individual is available to recount their own story from which others can take information and/or inspiration and potentially points of identification which can be supportive to them.

Throughout the year, the Mental Health Co-ordinator contributed to the CSED training programme with additional training for staff provided as required.

Towards the end of the year, the Mental Health Co-ordinator became a Mental Health First Aid Trainer and is aiming to role out a programme of training for staff over 2009/10. The aim is to improve knowledge of mental health issues and enable staff to respond effectively to students and peers when required.

The appointment of Luke Jefferies to the role of Disability Adviser for Mental Health and Disability (commencing September 2009) was welcomed and is anticipated to enable some development of the Mental Health service to students and the University community more widely.

Beckie Davies, Mental Health Co-ordinator, Oct. 09

⁷ 1 incident does not equal 1 student: students can report a number of aspects of their mental health difficulties within one appointment and over time.