



# **Disability in Higher Education**

## ***Project Report***

**Report of the FOTIM Project conducted 2009-2011.**

**Funded by the Ford Foundation.**

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## FOTIM AND DISABILITY

The Foundation of Tertiary Institutions of the Northern Metropolis (FOTIM), is a higher education academic consortium in South Africa which actively promotes collaboration amongst its members. It has a membership of nine universities and universities of technology in the Gauteng, Limpopo and North West provinces. FOTIM encourages debate, best practice and capacity building through the sharing of knowledge and commitment to academic excellence in the region.

Over the years, FOTIM has initiated and developed several successful projects that add value and provide tangible benefits to its members. The success of its projects is mainly attributable to the hands-on approach FOTIM takes in obtaining grant funding for projects and then managing them through committees/teams of representatives of member institutions.

The FOTIM Disability Interest Group was established in 2001 and met regularly until being disbanded at the end of 2005 due to merger pressures. At the request of some member institutions, the group was restored in 2007 and was instrumental in forming a national collaborative initiative, which culminated in the establishment of the Higher Education Disability Services Association (HEDSA) in November 2007. Regional activities continued in parallel under the auspices of FOTIM. In 2009, Dr Zodwa Magwenzi, the then Director of FOTIM, recommended that an investigation into the needs of university students with disabilities throughout South Africa be conducted. A proposal was compiled and submitted to donors for consideration, and in September 2009, the Ford Foundation generously awarded FOTIM a grant of \$60 000 to conduct the investigation. It was envisioned that the project would assess the actual provision of services to students with disabilities within South African public higher education institutions, particularly in the areas of accessibility, awareness and responsiveness, programme provision and teaching and learning arrangements, and to benchmark these services against international universities.

Dr Zodwa Magwenzi resigned from FOTIM in February 2010. At the same time, the FOTIM Board commissioned a Review of FOTIM. On 24 July 2010, the Board took the decision to close FOTIM as an organisation in its current form. The decision was taken in light of the continuing financial pressures on institutions, the duplication of effort pertaining to activities in the sector and the creation of new national structures. With the recent establishment of HEDSA and the existence of regional groups under HEDSA, the FOTIM Board agreed that the FOTIM Disability Interest Group be disbanded. Regional activities and collaboration would continue under the auspices of HEDSA, and the continuation of the FOTIM Disability Interest Group would be an unnecessary duplication of effort.

It is hoped that the results of this investigation, commissioned by FOTIM, will guide disability practitioners at South African universities in appropriate institutional structures, systems and processes that will enhance the quality of services to all students with disabilities.

It was originally expected that FOTIM would submit a further funding proposal to address the recommendations of the study undertaken in 2010. As this will no longer be possible, FOTIM appealed to the Ford Foundation to consider any applications for funding that might be forthcoming from HEDSA. It is sincerely hoped that this investigation represents only the start of on-going activities that will assist institutions and practitioners to implement relevant strategies to best support students with disabilities at South African universities.

## PROJECT OVERVIEW

Shortly after the funds from the Ford Foundation were received by FOTIM, project activities commenced with the formation of a Project Reference Team to guide the project activities. In November 2009, a call for expressions of interest was distributed to academic, researchers and consultants, to establish a list of experts to support the project activities. In January 2010, responses to the call were deliberated and in February, Disability Management Services (DMS) was appointed to conduct the research. DMS renders a wide array of disability and human resource related professional services in South Africa. A letter of support for the project was received from the Council on Higher Education for the project.

By mid-2010, DMS was in the process of collecting data from participating institutions. Initial findings of the research were presented at the HEDSA Symposium held in Bloemfontein in September 2010. By November 2010, all the data had been collected and was thoroughly analysed. A letter of extension for the project was submitted to the Ford Foundation, and the project deadline was extended to February 2011.

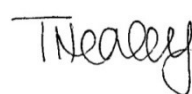
The draft findings were presented to representatives from participating institutions for verification and discussion at two workshops. The first was held in Johannesburg on 13 January 2011, the second in Cape Town on 21 January 2011. The discussions from both workshops were incorporated into the final DMS report, which is included in this report.

As part of this project, a benchmarking exercise was conducted by members of the Reference Team, who visited universities and organisations in the United Kingdom during October 2010. The aim of the visit was to identify and then implement best practice. The benchmarking report is included in this report.

The project has been a resounding success due in most part to the hard work and commitment of all involved: the Reference Team, DMS, FOTIM staff and of course, the research participants. We would like to take this opportunity to express our heartfelt gratitude to all who have supported and participated in this project. We sincerely hope that this was just one step of many that will improve the experience of students with disabilities.




Anke McCallum  
Acting FOTIM Director





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 Project Reference Team

 Disability Management Services

 Participants, disability practitioners and students with disabilities

 Higher Education Disability Services Association

 Council on Higher Education

# Disability in Higher Education



## Prepared for FOTIM

(Foundation of Tertiary Institutions  
of the Northern Metropolis)

February 2011

Prepared by  
Disability  
Management  
Services (DMS)

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This document sets out the findings of the Disability in Higher Education Project mandated by FOTIM. It includes a discussion with recommendations on the functioning of Disability Support Services Units at South African tertiary institutions.

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## 1 Executive summary

Traditionally limited attention has been placed on addressing issues of access, retention, progression and participation of students with disabilities within the South African tertiary environment. This is notwithstanding the fact that students with disabilities have been identified in various governmental policy documents as being historically disadvantaged and deserving of special attention. More and more tertiary institutions, however, are now seemingly focussing on the mainstreaming and inclusion of students with disabilities. Some Higher Education Institutions (HEI) in South Africa have established so-called Disability Units (DU) to offer specialised services to their students with disabilities in order to facilitate access and integration of these students at their institutions.

The Disability in Higher Education Project was mandated by the Foundation of Tertiary Institutions of the Northern Metropolis (FOTIM) having obtained a grant from the Ford Foundation in the United States of America. The project is an exploratory study with the aim of describing and analysing the role and functioning of these specialised DUs at the different tertiary institutions in South Africa. The study aimed to provide qualitative data and limited statistics. The Project is not a disability prevalence study and in no way attempts to provide an accurate figure of the number of students with disabilities enrolled at South African tertiary institutions.

Although most institutions were excited and motivated to participate in and benefit from the Project, participation was not as extensive as one would have wished and operational demands ultimately impacted on their ability to participate. Little verifying documentation was forthcoming in support of information provided. Of the 23 HEIs, 15 of them participated on some level and provided information to the research team. This constitutes a 65% participation rate. Generally speaking, there was receptiveness amongst the DUs as they understood the value of the research and the need to substantiate their existence with objective evidence. Student participation was also invited and was voluntary taking cognisance of internationally accepted ethical research guidelines. This report constitutes the outcome of the research conducted by an independent provider, Disability Management Services, and expands on an initial Disability Survey conducted by FOTIM itself in 2009. The research was conducted during the 2010 academic year.

This document reports on the role that DUs currently play and focuses on potential areas of future improvement. Whilst this is the focus of the study it does not aim to detract from the importance of the role and responsibilities of students themselves in ensuring their success when studying at an HEI. The student, DU, faculty and institution ultimately all have a role to play to ensure positive outcomes and a successful learning experience.

The study confirmed that the factors that impact on disability inclusion go beyond things under the direct control of HEIs. The schooling system and its ability to produce learners with disabilities that can enter the tertiary sector, for example, need to be interrogated. Parenting and support systems available to students have an impact.

From the research it is clear that current functions vary greatly among the DUs operations at the different HEIs and different levels of sophistication exist in service rendering.

Some of the most important findings and recommendations include the following:

- No single definition of “disability” exists within the tertiary sector and the different HEIs all have their own way of classifying students with disabilities. The definitions used suggest that a medical model of disability remains predominant, but there is a move towards the recognition of other external factors required to ensure full inclusion, such as reasonable accommodation. The perspective remains one of an individual as the locus of the problem and not the environment. The sector will need to develop a common definition of disability that will support future data gathering and monitoring processes. The definition must express the fluid nature of disability as the concept, yet have elements against which an individual can be assessed. These elements must be functional, impairment *and* barrier based.
- At many HEIs disability is still managed in a fragmented way with the DUs being reactive in their approach. Strong policy frameworks are not in place or, alternatively, not known to support the integration of students with disabilities. Disability issues largely are managed as separate from other diversity and transformation imperatives. The business case for disability inclusion is still little understood at HEIs. Going forward HEIs should create a consumer-driven, individualised support system that has financial benefit for it rather than just perceiving disability as a costly expense. DUs further need to become drivers in the promotion of the disability agenda and herein lies a specialisation to their future multifaceted role.
- A strong recommendation to promote standards and adherence is the formulation of a National Disability Policy and Strategy Framework for HEIs by relevant stakeholders which individual institutions may customise and adopt. This may have the potential to serve as a benchmark to measure progress against, should strategic goals aligned with short, medium and long term objectives be set. Senior management at each institution should take

responsibility to oversee its customization and implementation. Possibly the Department of Higher Education is best suited to lead the formulation process.

- An erroneous perception seemingly exists among some HEIs that current legislation does not create enforceable rights for students with disabilities. Based on the international experience a specific disability anti-discrimination act, incorporating a section on education, can raise the profile of disability issues and can bring, increased disability integration in the sector. This legislative approach is worth pursuing further together with other Governmental role players.
- The proportion of disabled students is roughly estimated to be less than 1% of the total student population at the participating institutions. The number of disabled students at the different institutions varies from 21 – 400 as reported by interviewees. This is not and is not intended to be an accurate estimation of enrolled students with disabilities currently at HEIs in South Africa. It merely reflects the number of students making use of the services of the DUs at the participating institutions. It does, however, give some indication of the levels of representivity of students with disabilities within the tertiary environment. It is suggested that a proper disability prevalence study needs to be conducted.
- Not all HEIs address all the different types of impairments. The more established and larger DUs tend to provide services for most impairment needs, while the newer and smaller DUs tend to provide services primarily for visually and mobility disabled students. This is usually a strategic decision based on the availability of staff and funding for the DU. The fact that many universities serve mainly visual and mobility impaired students may also partly be attributed to the fact that these groups of students are visibly more conspicuous and readily present themselves for service delivery in terms of needs which can be met in a logical way unlike less “traditional” types of impairments. Very few offer services to students who are deaf, hearing and cognitively impaired. Going forward the needs of all types of disabilities should be addressed.
- The type and number of staff in the DUs range from a part-time administrative person or a single DU coordinator to a highly developed DU structure with a number of permanent staff, specialist functions, as well as a range of volunteer students or student assistants. Their skills and competency profiles also vary. The staff complements are generally perceived as not being adequate except for the larger and more established DUs, but competencies are

generally viewed as being adequate. Funding for the activities of the DUs is in most cases limited.

- Similar services are provided across the different DUs and the variation is more in the number of different services provided with some DUs only providing a limited number and the more established DUs providing most of these services. The longer established DU's, the longer the list of services rendered. Typical service offerings include facilitation of additional exam time, production of study materials in accessible format (for example Braille), computer labs equipped with special soft ware (for example Jaws) and zoom text, facilitation of student funding and housing on campus, counseling services, volunteer buddies and tutoring, assistance with registration procedures, mobility training, awareness raising and general academic support. Sign language interpreters and induction loop systems are provided at a limited number of DUs. Very few DUs provide services for cognitive and psychosocial disabilities.
- Interestingly, it was not necessarily that the more established and long standing DUs had all the best practices in place. Some of the small units surprised the research team with their innovation and emerging best practice features.
- Reasonable accommodation needs of students vary greatly, but the provision of learning materials in accessible format and the need to remove physical infra-structure access in the built environment were often cited.
- Interestingly although students reported many unmet needs, they still rated the DUs services as satisfactory and adequate. Much appreciation seems to exist amongst students in most cases for the work done by the DUs and overall positive responses were received. This is not withstanding that minimal accountability exist through performance appraisals of DU staff or other senior institutional staff against effective delivery on the disability agenda.
- Very few SA institutions have started to understand and/or put measures in place to ensure integrated learning and education methodologies and processes. DUs must move beyond the built environment, technology and assistive devices to interrogate the learning and teaching methodologies at their institutions. More awareness must be created with faculty staff about disability issues and how to respond appropriately to the needs of students, and the imperative to incorporate concepts of universal design into faculty instruction and curricula that ultimately benefit ALL students in their learning process as per international

developments. A recommendation is for HEIs to incorporate concepts of universal design into faculty instruction and curricula. This is an educational approach for instructing all students through developing flexible classroom materials, using various technology tools, varying the delivery of information and/or adapting assessment methodologies.

- Academic staff should be trained on achieving universal design in faculty instruction and curricula, one, as part of a formal teaching qualification and, two, additional on the job training on skills to teach learners with disabilities should form part of their continuous learning requirements.
- Any future service delivery model developed by role players for DUs needs to be built on the premise of human rights, universal access design and consumerism approaches. The results of the study can be used to start developing guidelines and standards for how tertiary institutions' DUs should function and what services should be provided for students with disabilities. Senior management at the different HEIs must support initiatives in this regard and must put appropriate institutional arrangements, such as funding, in place to support the working of the DUs at their institutions. We appear to be at a place where the sector can formulate a list of services that could and should be offered by DUs in South Africa. In addition the attitudinal, skills and knowledge competencies of staff employed by such DUs to meet the demands of the DU function is now in a position to be defined.

Although not directly part of the scope of this study, it is noteworthy that disability representation at executive decision making levels and, for example, on Senate level is limited or non-existent. Broader representation on these bodies should be the objective as this will assist in an understanding of the diversity value and business case for disability inclusion. HEIs should stipulate that persons with disabilities are included in their Senates.

- It is recommended that advocacy should be formalized as a clear and important deliverable of the DU's. This advocacy should not merely project the social responsibility and morality perspectives but should equally demonstrate the value adding impact of students with disabilities on the institution and on mainstream students thus portraying them as equal players and contributors rather than as persons needing continuous upliftment. This traditional approach is patronising and demeaning.
- Given the huge disadvantages that many learners with disabilities come with, namely sub-standard education and lack of resources, it is suggested that more development work

needs to be undertaken at HEIs. Development programmes should include the following two components, namely academic skills and life skills. These initiatives could be formalised as well designed programmes to be run by certified facilitators from either the institution's teaching or DU staff.

- This report does not detract from the student with a disability's responsibility to play his/her part in actively ensuring his/her success whilst studying. Training programmes in areas such as, self-management, performance orientation and interpersonal skills can assist to drive the correct attitude and behavior amongst students.

It is important to note that HEIs cannot by themselves overcome the obstacles faced by them in achieving disability inclusion and putting the recommended measures in place. Many have serious resource constraints that impact on their ability to respond to service delivery demands. The Department of Higher Education has a critical role to play from a policy writing perspective, to a monitoring and evaluation perspective to a support perspective. Funding and resources must be made available to assist the HEIs in driving the disability agenda.

Different funding options exist, ranging from student bursaries to per capita allocations to HEIs for students with disabilities enrolled at the institution to incentives for the number of students completing degrees, for example. Additional funding can be allocated to institutions for disability related research conducted in areas such as content design and teaching methodologies. Where such research is published additional funding can also, for example, be secured from Government. This type of research benefits the students in the form of improved service delivery and the institution as their publication reputation and ultimate service rendering are improved. Insights can be gained into possible measures by studying the international experiences in this regard.

This document sets out a number of proposed future initiatives. A phased in approach will need to be followed bearing in mind that different DUs are operating at different levels of sophistication. The broader South African economic context, high unemployment rates amongst the economically active population and resource constraints are all factors that need to be considered. Priorities and attainable time frames will have to be set. Within this context the sector must, however, not defer from taking the first steps to become disability confident and competent so that, in time, full inclusivity can be achieved.

In addition, a systemic approach should be followed rather than a piece meal approach. This means that a universal and holistic picture needs to emerge as the different components and measures are

put in place. One cannot haphazardly choose which of the recommendations need to be put in place, but a strategically planned intervention needs to enfold in the sector as a whole.

What is clear is that although laudable progress has already been made to ensure disability inclusion, much still needs to be done within the tertiary sector. DUs at the HEIs can and should play an important role in ensuring fair and equitable policies and practices for students with disabilities. Although the final aim should be total faculty integration, reality is that the South African society and the tertiary sector are still in transition and a need exists for a special unit dedicated to disability matters at our various HEIs. DUs have a unique identity but must work in an integrated way with other student service and academic staff.

Two of the members of the research team are persons with disabilities. It is positive to note that they encountered a strong display of empowerment and commitment as a trend amongst many of the young people participating in the study as opposed to a dependency approach. Students with disabilities, for example, are entering new non-traditional fields of studies across disciplines which previously were inaccessible and out of reach. This opens the door to new opportunities and progression. Hopefully this empowerment and integration will gain further impetus and society will embrace students with different types of disabilities as valued participants within the tertiary environment and, as equal players that benefit society as a whole.

The international literature review conducted supports an even more participative research approach whereby students with disabilities are included from the outset in a project of this nature. They could potentially participate, for example, in the development of the actual data collection instruments. This should be considered as part of the methodology when future research is conducted in the field.



## 2 Introduction

The higher education system in South Africa is one that has been moulded by various historic, social and political factors. Taking the degree of racial inequality that existed in the past, it is not surprising that there has been a large focus over the last few years on increasing the participation of black students in the higher education system. Some attention has also been directed at the position of women. Parallel to equity issues, government embarked on a process of restructuring the institutional landscape by merging and consolidating different universities and technikons into the 23 tertiary institutions that currently exist in South Africa. Within all of these developments and changes that have taken place over the last couple of years, limited attention has been placed on addressing issues of access, retention and participation of students with disabilities. This is notwithstanding the fact that they have been identified in various governmental policy documents as being historically disadvantaged and deserving of special attention.

More and more tertiary institutions, however, are now seemingly focussing on the mainstreaming and inclusion of students with disabilities. When faced with matters related to disability access and inclusion for staff and students, tertiary institutions are asking themselves the following questions:

- Are we teaching sufficient numbers of students with disabilities?
- Are we retaining these students and preparing them for real job opportunities?
- Are we mindful and understanding of the needs and challenges when providing facilities and services to students?
- Is our faculty staff adequately represented by persons with disabilities?
- Are our facilities and buildings compliant with relevant access legislation and the Building Regulations?
- What are the risks arising from legislation such as the Employment Equity Act and other anti-discrimination acts?
- How far must we go in reasonably accommodating staff and students with disabilities?
- Do we project a world class accessible image that will attract persons with disabilities as students, visitors, or potential staff?
- What is the business case for attracting more students with disabilities to our institution?

It is within this context that some tertiary institutions in South Africa have established so-called Disability Units (DU) to offer specialised services to their students with disabilities in order to facilitate access and integration of these students. Not all 23 institutions currently have such Units. The manner in which they function and the effectiveness of their services, where they do exist, differ considerably from institution to institution. The question that arises is whether these Units indeed play a role in ensuring access and participation of students with disabilities and how they are viewed by different role players within the institution as well as students.

## 2.1 Purpose of the project

The Disability in Higher Education Project was mandated by the Foundation of Tertiary Institutions of the Northern Metropolis (FOTIM) having obtained a grant from the Ford Foundation in the USA. The project is an exploratory study with the aim of describing and analysing the role and function of specialised disability units at the different tertiary institutions in South Africa. More specifically the research aims to:

- Explore the role, responsibilities and current effectiveness of Disability Units (DU) in Institutions of Higher Education (HEI) in South Africa, where they do exist;
- Determine the challenges faced by these Units in the translation of inclusive policies and legislative demands into practice;
- Establish baseline data for monitoring change over a period of time (i.e. time series data);
- Start to develop broad guidelines on the characteristics required for the effective functioning of these Units.

The areas of investigation include:

- Staff at the DUs and their Key Performance Areas (KPA's);
- The functions of the DUs, services offered to students with disabilities and perceived shortfalls;
- Placement of the units within broader institutional structures;
- Institutional policies (teaching, learning, assessment, etc.);
- Monitoring systems; Funding;

- Reasonable accommodation measures utilized, including assistive technology;
- Student experiences and perceptions.

This report constitutes the outcome of the research conducted by an independent provider, Disability Management Services, and expands on an initial Disability Survey conducted by FOTIM itself in 2009. The results of the study will be used to start developing guidelines and standards for how tertiary institution DUs should function and what services should be provided for students with disabilities. The research was conducted during the 2010 academic year. A limited literature review of related international developments supported the research. The Council on Higher Education has expressed their support for the project and its interest in the findings.

## 2.2 Principles

The Project is an exploratory study and is not meant to provide an exhaustive picture of the functioning of these Disability Units (DUs). It is an area that remains under research and more work and effort is required. The project is not a disability prevalence study and in no way attempts to provide an accurate figure of the number of students with disabilities enrolled at South African tertiary institutions.

The research was dependent upon the voluntary participation of institutions and students alike. Of the possible 23 HEIs, 15 eventually participated in the study and provided information to the research team. The findings in this document are dependent upon what was voluntarily provided by the participants. Although supporting documentation was required from institutions in order to verify the information received during interviews and by way of completed questionnaires, these were not forthcoming from all the participating institutions. Of the 23 HEIs, some institutions chose not to participate and the findings do not necessarily provide a complete picture of the current landscape within the South African tertiary environment.

Student participation was invited and was voluntary taking cognisance of internationally accepted ethical research guidelines. Their participation was dependent upon their availability and the pressures of the academic year. Pressures of the academic year programme seemingly influenced participation and in some cases research fatigue could have played a role as students have seemingly been participating in a number of research initiatives already. This study is not in any way meant, or portrayed to be, a representative sample of all students studying at HEIs.

The study aims to provide generic pointers to what are essential features of a DU and what seems to be currently working. This can assist current DUs to improve their services and effectiveness and provide new ones with a framework on which to build their future activities.

## 2.3 Legislative and policy background

### 2.3.1 South Africa

Notwithstanding the fact that considerable effort has been invested in the preparation of numerous Codes, Guidelines and White Papers dealing with disability, the fact remains that very little has been done in South Africa to ensure holistic progress relating to disability inclusion.

Some of the legislative documents issued by Government include:

- The Constitution of South Africa, 1996 (and more particularly the Bill of Rights) which prohibits all forms of unfair discrimination, entrenches the right to equality and provides for measures to address past imbalances;
- The Employment Equity Act, 1998 (EEA) which aims to address inequities in the workplace;
- The Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act, 2000 (PEPUDA) which has broader equity application and creates so-called Equity Courts;
- The National Building Regulations 1986 (currently in the process of being revised);
- The Code of Good Practice and the Technical Assistance Guidelines on the Employment of Persons with Disabilities. (These two guides are not legislation but simply serve to aid and clarify the Employment Equity Act);
- The Integrated National Disability Strategy, 1997 (INDS) which is intended as both a guide and tool to support increased employment of, and to some degree, service to, people with disabilities within Government structures.

Within the context of education the South African higher education policy framework also has a strong equity agenda. The following is worth mentioning:

- Education White Paper 3: Transformation of the Higher Education System recognizes both the need to prevent unfair discrimination and to implement strategies and practices which are designed to overcome inequalities generated in the past. This is important as it sets the framework for how the needs of students with disabilities must be responded to by the system as a whole and by individual institutions;

- The National Plan for Higher Education, which identifies so-called non-traditional students (which includes students with disabilities) as a target group for inclusion into the higher education system and which aims to operationalise the imperatives in the mentioned White Paper;
- Education White Paper 6: Special Needs Education covering inclusive education, but which has only limited reference to the higher education system. The White Paper makes provision for regional collaboration between institutions in providing services to address special needs but no further detail has yet been provided as to how this can be operationalised.

An erroneous perception seemingly exists among some HEIs that current legislation does not create enforceable rights for students with disabilities. Fact is that many legally enforceable instruments are already in place in South Africa which students can use when their rights are compromised as mentioned above. HEIs can thus not be complacent in their approach to disability issues.

Based on the international experience (further set out below) a specific anti-discrimination act can, however, raise the profile of disability issues and bring it more to the fore as a compliance imperative. A specific section in the statute supported by a Code of Good Practice dealing with education is advisable as per international developments.

### **2.3.2 International framework**

Most recently the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities was published and ratified by a number of countries (including South Africa). The Convention marks a "paradigm shift" in attitudes and approaches to persons with disabilities. The Convention is intended as a human rights instrument with an explicit, social development dimension. It adopts a broad categorization of persons with disabilities and reaffirms that all persons with all types of disabilities must enjoy all human rights and fundamental freedoms. It clarifies and qualifies how all categories of rights apply to persons with disabilities and identifies areas where adaptations have to be made for persons with disabilities to effectively exercise their rights and areas where their rights have been violated, and where protection of rights must be reinforced.

A distinction is drawn internationally between a medical and a social model of approaching disability. The medical model focuses on the diagnosis of a medical condition or impairment and the curing or 'normalisation' of disability. The social model in contrast expresses the view that disability is a social construct where barriers relating to physical access, attitudes and mindsets, rather than the actual medical condition of the person, disable the person. The Convention supports a social

model whereby barriers are recognised and must be addressed in a positive manner. It places certain obligations on countries that are signatories to the Convention.

Many countries have also in recent years accepted holistic disability anti-discrimination legislation. These include countries such as the USA (Americans with Disabilities Act, 1990), the UK (Disability Discrimination Act, 1995 and the more recent Equality Act, 2010) and Australia (Disability Discrimination Act, 1992). These pieces of legislation have played a pivotal role in supporting access to and integration of students with disabilities at tertiary institutions in those countries.

## 3 Literature review

### 3.1 South Africa

For students with disabilities, inequalities in higher education begin with inequalities within the whole schooling system of South Africa. Historically there was a dominant mainstream system for “normal” learners and a secondary system of specialised education for learners with so-called special needs. In the latter system very often, however, the curricula was inappropriate to prepare learners for the world of work and only a very limited number offered tuition up to matriculation (now Grade 12) level effectively excluding many learners from higher education opportunities. Many learners were also totally excluded from the education system. In the INDS it was estimated that as many as 70% learners with disabilities of school going age were outside of the general education and training system at that time<sup>1</sup>. The lack of appropriate schooling has profoundly affected access to higher education for persons with disabilities. Census data (2003) suggests that the number of children with disabilities entering the schooling system has since improved.<sup>2</sup>

Although the schooling system now has the potential to support greater participation by persons with disabilities in higher education, barriers still remain.<sup>3</sup> Traditional attitudes and stereotyping of the abilities of learners still lead to exclusion and reinforcement of the notion that learners with disabilities do not have a future in higher education. Barriers are exacerbated by inequalities inherent in the higher education system. This includes the ways in which HEIs are structured and function, dominant attitudes that inform and shape the practices of such HEI as well as the role that higher education plays within society as a whole. For example, students with disabilities are still being excluded or channelled based on mere perceptions of their capabilities where the need for fieldwork or practical development in off-campus facilities or use of graphic material or specific types of equipment are used as excuses for not allowing them to participate in non-traditional courses and degree programmes.<sup>4</sup>

This perceived ineligibility link to the continued use of a medical model of dealing with disability where the emphasis is placed solely on the nature and extent of the student’s impairment rather

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<sup>1</sup> Integrated National Disability Strategy, 1997, Office of the Deputy President

<sup>2</sup> Stats SA, 2003

<sup>3</sup> “Disabled students and higher education in South Africa” C Howell in *Disability and Social Change: A South African Agenda; The State of Higher Education in South Africa* Annual Report 2000/2001 Council for Higher Education (CHE)

<sup>4</sup> *Disability and Social Change* as above; Unpublished submission to the Education Portfolio Committee by Odendaal-Magwaza & Farman 1997

than on institutional barriers.<sup>5</sup> Although it would probably in most cases be extremely difficult to prove outright discrimination against students or potential students with disabilities, anecdotal evidence suggests that students are often “persuaded” to follow a certain course viewed as suitable for them and/or institutional exclusion is based on the perceived “unreasonableness” of accommodation requests that goes unchallenged.<sup>6</sup>

It has been suggested that the continued use of a medical discourse of disability has also influenced the way in which institutions respond to students with disabilities, particularly in terms of addressing their needs within the teaching and learning process.<sup>7</sup> Specifically it is alleged that it has deflected attention away from the extent to which the methods and materials of teaching used, the manner in which classes and learning have been managed and organised and the nature of assessment practices may in fact act as a barrier to equitable participation of students with disabilities. Barriers are indeed inherent in the curricula itself.<sup>8</sup>

Whilst facilities and assistive devices play an important role in supporting students with disabilities and have received much attention from HEIs, limited attention has been paid to the extent to which teaching and learning processes marginalise or exclude learners/students. A lack of curricula flexibility and a lack of inclusive teaching and learning methodologies remain important barriers within higher education that must be further interrogated.<sup>9</sup>

The way in which learning support and services is provided currently at South African HEIs to students with disabilities has also been criticised<sup>10</sup>. Available evidence suggests that the initiatives and structures in place at the various institutions vary considerably in what work they do and the services they offer. In many cases the HEIs and DUs experience resource constraints that limit the nature and extent of services that they can offer. Most importantly, support services to students with disabilities, where they do exist, tend to operate separately from or have limited collaboration with broader teaching and learning support initiatives at the institutions. Where links do exist the

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<sup>5</sup> *Quality Education for All* Department of Education (DoE) 1998; Chipping Away at the mountain: Disabled students' experiences of higher education *International Studies of Sociology and Education* 8, p 203 – 222 (1998) S Riddell.

<sup>6</sup> *Disability and Social Change* as above

<sup>7</sup> Riddell as above

<sup>8</sup> DoE, 1998

<sup>9</sup> “Going Global: The implications for students with disabilities” *Higher Education Research & Development* 22, p 217 – 228 (2003) P McLean *et al*; “Educational exclusion and inclusion in higher education in South Africa” (2003) Sayed in M Tight (ed.) *Access and Exclusion* (Oxford)

<sup>10</sup> CHE 2001; *Disability and Social Change* as above



collaboration is mostly with student counselling services rather than those dealing directly with teaching and learning. The structural separation of learning support for disabled students from other learning support is criticised and an integrated approach is seemingly preferred.

It is further alleged that support provision in many cases at HEIs is based on the assumption that all of a student's problems can be remedied by a particular piece of equipment (the classic "technological fix" mentality) without an attempt to understand the social context and other factors exacerbating the barriers experienced by the student.

### 3.2 International developments

It is immediately apparent when researching institutions of higher learning that there is an increase in activity toward accommodating students with disabilities at campuses internationally. Enrolment trends in the USA, for example, show a continued increase over time with some recent enrolment estimates for 2 – 4 year programmes ranging from 9,3% to as high as 17%.<sup>11</sup> Despite this increase young adults with disabilities still remain less likely to pursue postsecondary education when compared with individuals without disabilities. Of concern in the USA is that post secondary completion for individuals with disabilities dropped during the same period<sup>12</sup>. A lack of persistence and retention of students with disabilities are becoming a matter of concern. In 2003 5,4% of all undergraduate UK students in higher education self assessed themselves as having a disability.<sup>13</sup>

The scope of this project did not allow for an exhaustive review of what is happening elsewhere but does provide an overview of international trends and best practice models that are emerging specific to the functioning of DUs at such overseas institutions. As tempting as it is to critically compare international advances in this area to South Africa's own attempts of more inclusive higher education, cognisance must also be paid to our unique Post Apartheid socio-economic reality.<sup>14</sup> The progress made in South Africa must be measured against its own unique political, social and legislative background. Strategic time frames set for future initiatives will also take cognisance thereof.

An important observation is that much progress has seemingly been made, at least on paper, where strong anti discrimination laws exist. Legislative compliance and an understanding of the business

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<sup>11</sup> *National Centre on Education Statistics 2000*, National Council on Disability

<sup>12</sup> National Organisation on Disability 2001

<sup>13</sup> What are disabled students' experiences of learning at university? Fuller et al Social Diversity and Difference (2005) Keele University.

<sup>14</sup> *Disability confidence, the business case and higher education* (2007) J Opperman.

case for dealing with disability equity issues have assisted with the progress made. In the USA, for example, the Americans with Disability Act has driven behaviour since 1990. In 1995 the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) was promulgated in the UK. This act has been replaced by the Equality Act in October 2010. The latter act includes provisions dealing with UK universities and colleges to make their courses inclusive and their premises accessible to students with disabilities. A Code of Good Practice for the Assurance of Academic Quality and Standards in Higher Education has been published to assist institutions to deal with their obligations in terms of the Act.<sup>15</sup>

These anti-discrimination laws prove to be a far reaching impact agent for significant progress in disability integration in every sector of society. Like every other industry, higher education facilities in these countries had no choice but to comply with these unambiguous pieces of legislation.<sup>16</sup> Within this legislative context some universities are starting to emerge as being particularly disability confident and competent. One such example is the University of Bradford in Yorkshire, UK.<sup>17</sup> Situated within a particularly diverse community with a strong sub-continent influence, Bradford University boasts a higher than average racial diversity among its students and staff alike. They also boast a “Disability Equality Scheme” which upholds their core value of ‘Confronting inequality, celebrating diversity’. This document sets out how the University will make sure that it promotes equality for disabled staff and students, and addresses discrimination. At the heart of the scheme the University aims to make reasonable adjustments to facilitate learning, employment and to encourage participation in University life for all who come to work or study with them. This includes people who might not necessarily identify themselves as disabled, but who nevertheless face discrimination in their everyday life because of an impairment. Important facets of the scheme include a highly consultative approach involving committees chaired by senior University role-players, a state of the art access audit of all their facilities, collaboration with other Universities through the West Yorkshire Higher Education Equality and Diversity Working Group and the quantitative analysis of their staff and students profiles over an extended period of time. Important also is that a clear balance score card mechanism exists for ensuring delivery by all role players, commitment and outcome. The Disability Office, amongst other,

- assists with registration procedures,
- carries out assessments of needs,

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<sup>15</sup> Code of Good Practice issued by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) 2010. Chapter 3 specifically deals with disability issues.

<sup>16</sup> Opperman as above

<sup>17</sup> At [www.brad.ac.uk](http://www.brad.ac.uk).

- assists with applications for the so-called Disabled Students' Allowance, and
- has a range of assistive equipment and furniture available for students to use.

The Virginia Commonwealth University's (VCU) Disability Support Services Office in the USA, as another example, also determines appropriate academic adjustments, such as program and exam modifications, classrooms accommodations and auxiliary aids for their students with disabilities. Students with disabilities are responsible for self-identification prior to requesting services and may do so at any time by presenting relevant documentation to their campus coordinator. A comprehensive guide dealing with disability issues appear on their website for various target groups, namely students, their parents and for faculties and staff.<sup>18</sup> The Office of Disability Support Services offers the following services:

- Recommendations for program accommodations in accordance with documentation.
- Referral to appropriate student support offices on campus.
- Information and assistance in the area of academic planning.
- Liaison activities between faculty and students with disabilities.
- Referral to off-campus resources.
- Alternative testing.
- Consultation with public school special education administrators, rehabilitation or high school counsellors, parents and prospective students concerning the University's services for students with disabilities

At VCU a model of supported education emphasizes a consumer-driven, individualised support system that utilises community and university resources. In this regard they adapted a 3 step model framework:<sup>19</sup>

<b>Direct coaching</b>	<b>Consultation</b>	<b>Monitoring</b>
Develop self-advocacy skills	Utilise campus and community resources	Student notifies program on an "as needed" basis
Expose to technology and how to incorporate it into learning	Incorporate learning strategies and accommodations into learning	Fully uses accommodations and strategies
Identify informational interviews/job shadowing experiences	Use technology and assistive devices	Progressing with studies
Provide information on	Use self-advocacy skills	

<sup>18</sup> See [www.students.vcu.edu](http://www.students.vcu.edu).

<sup>19</sup> "Addressing the persistence and retention of students with disabilities in higher education" *Exceptionality* 16, p 207 – 219, 2008 EE Getzel

legislation and develop a plan  
to disclose status to employer  
Assist students to transfer  
accommodations and strategies  
to long term work setting

International trends noted in the review of a range of literature include the following:

- **Self-disclosure and identification**

- Students with disabilities must typically self-identify their status to institutional authorities. Students must further self-identify their accommodation needs. The international experience, however, shows that often students are unprepared to disclose their status or lack the understanding of how to access services on campus which impacts on their utilization of services and ultimately their academic progression.
- Students for varying reasons choose not to self-disclose. Possible reasons could be that some students want to start afresh and do not want to carry the label of being disabled into their new tertiary environment. Others wait to disclose until they are experiencing academic problems;<sup>20</sup>
- In some instances students are made to feel that they do not belong in advanced degree programmes because they require special assistance. As a result many students elect once again not to disclose their disability status;<sup>21</sup>

- **Emerging models of service delivery**

- A range of models and services are emerging to assist students:
  - Some support services are privately owned and can be rendered either through for-profit or non-profit organizations offering extensive support to students with disabilities;<sup>22</sup>
  - Other approaches include offering support and services as part of a Disability Support Office on campus - the more traditional approach;

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<sup>20</sup> 2008, Getzel

<sup>21</sup> 2004 Brugstahler & Doe; 2005 Getzel & McManus; National Centre for Study of Post-Secondary Educational Support 2000

<sup>22</sup> 2006 Lipka

- In other cases partnerships are being developed between Disability Support Offices and other external role players.<sup>23</sup> The line between “fee-for-services” programmes offered on campuses and legislative obligations of institutions to integrate students with disabilities may become blurred and problematic due to this development.<sup>24</sup>
- **Increased visibility of the Disability Support Offices**
  - It seems that many of the international institutions ensure that their disability service offerings are clearly visible to current and potential students. Many of the institutional websites perused, for example, contain detailed provisions on the services of these units and guidelines to students, parents and staff alike.
  - The aim is to showcase their range of services offerings to, for example, prospective students with disabilities. Whilst this can be interpreted merely as a factual account of what’s in place, the manner of communication took on a marketing flavour illustrating the institutions as possible centres of excellence offering an inclusive learning environment for students with disabilities.<sup>25</sup> Often emphasis was given to unique service deliverables either specific to a disability or study programmes. This type of trend services as a useful benchmark for South African HEIs’ service offerings as well as positioning development for the future.
- **Key factors emerging as critical for the access and retention of students<sup>26</sup>**
  - Services and support that are key to the success of students being offered by institutions are seemingly the following:
    - Disability Support Office services that assist with the development of self-determination skills and self-management skills of students<sup>27</sup> are featuring as it has become clear that an understanding of how to access and use accommodations is a critical self-determination skills for post-secondary students

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<sup>23</sup> 2006 Harding et al

<sup>24</sup> 2005 Duffy & Gugerty

<sup>25</sup> Examples include Ghent University, University of Greenwich, Mararyk University and the Melbourne School.

<sup>26</sup> 2008 Getzel

<sup>27</sup> 2004 Getzel, Mc Manus & Briel

with disabilities. They also need to understand the importance of utilizing accommodations after they have disclosed their status. Initiatives such as support groups, training modules and use of peer mentors are merging in this respect.<sup>28</sup> Self-management skills requested by students include areas such as time management, goal setting skills and study skills. A lack of these skills can interfere with students' academic autonomy.<sup>29</sup>

- Services that assist with the exploration and provision of technology and assistive devices to students are critical. It is recognized that exposing students to technology and assistive devices can assist greatly in their success and improve their career outcomes.<sup>30</sup>
  - Assistance with the obtainment of internships or other career related experiences are also emerging as being of great value to students. Institutions should thus develop a comprehensive approach to assist students in their career choices and preparing them for the work life,<sup>31</sup>
- In conjunction with the above mentioned student support services, professional development activities for instructional faculty are also being recognized as being a critical element which should form part of a Support Office's functioning:
- More particularly, the two components emerging are, firstly, the need to create more awareness with faculty staff about disability issues and how to respond appropriately to the needs of students, and, secondly, the need to incorporate concepts of universal design into faculty instruction and curricula that ultimately benefit ALL students in their learning process. Helping to create instructionally accessible environments is critical and a growing theme of professional development activities on

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<sup>28</sup> 2001 Burgstahler & Cronheim

<sup>29</sup> 2001 Costello and English

<sup>30</sup> 2005 Burgstahler

<sup>31</sup> 2005 Briel & Getzel

campuses across the USA.<sup>32</sup> Universal design is an educational approach for instructing all students through developing flexible classroom materials, using various technology tools, and varying the delivery of information or instruction.<sup>33</sup> In a study of 17 sites funded by the US Department of Higher Education it was found that the idea of infusing universal design techniques as part of information dissemination for diverse learners, including students with disabilities, proved to be an effective strategy for faculty professional development.<sup>34</sup>

- These key factors should greatly influence the role and functions of Disability Support offices elsewhere as well as in South Africa.
  - The above development also has a resource implication for staffing a disability support office and the skills and competencies required by such staff members. By implication they would need to play a much bigger advocacy role and give guidance on principles and practical application of universal design methodologies to empower faculty staff.
- **Increased move to inclusive policies and practices**
    - Many institutions are seeking to move towards more inclusive policies and practices and away from remedial interventions. **By 'inclusion' is meant the enabling of full and equitable participation in and progression through higher education for all prospective and existing students.** Under such approach aspects such as equality, widening participation as well as student retention and success are addressed.<sup>35</sup> Some institutions like the Emerald Open University are even starting to look at the empowerment and reduction of isolation of housebound disabled students.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> 2005 Getzel & Finn

<sup>33</sup> 2006, Finn & Thomas

<sup>34</sup> 2003, Getzel, Briel & McManus

<sup>35</sup> An online record and testimonial of universities that are getting it right and their practices in the effective placement of, for example, social work students with disabilities can be found on [www.communitycare.co.uk/carespace](http://www.communitycare.co.uk/carespace).

<sup>36</sup> Find at [www.emeraldinsight.com](http://www.emeraldinsight.com).

- Whilst conducting the review it was overwhelming the amount of information available on accessible web pages of the different institutions dealing with students with disabilities, services that are offered and guidance given to students and staff alike.

The University of Westminster in the UK<sup>37</sup> is an example of where an institution provides in-depth guidance and a range of inclusive services for students with different types of disabilities. This includes:

- Dyslexia support;
- Enrolment information and assistance ;
- Mentoring for mental health programmes;
- The issuing of special assessment regulations for different types of impairments;
- Guidelines for students with hearing impairments;
- Access to a so-called Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) and a Special Equipment Allowance (SEA);
- Information on temporary disabilities and support rendered.

The University launched its Inclusive Curricula for Disabled Students (ICDS) project from 2006-09. The key objective of the ICDS project was to promote inclusive approaches to curricula development and delivery for disabled students that are securely embedded in mainstream processes and practices. The project focused on disabled students, but its work is relevant to the wider diversity agenda. The University recognised that removing barriers to learning for disabled students is likely to be of benefit to the University's diverse range of students, and is liable to enhance overall retention, progression and achievement. As an outcome of this project the Disability Support Office produced a bespoke range of resources for academic and professional service staff to support the development of inclusive curricula and the implementation of inclusive learning, teaching and assessment practices. Resources include: A set of 13 thematic Learning and Teaching Guides, case studies from staff and disabled students as well as guidelines on key aspects of inclusion.

The project website includes comprehensive signposting to internal and external guidance and resources on inclusion and disabled students. The University also promotes approaches to inclusive curricula for disabled learners and schools are invited to contact them for staff development sessions, guidance for course developers and troubleshooting on inclusive curricula issues.

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<sup>37</sup> See [www.westminster.ac.uk](http://www.westminster.ac.uk) for details.



Interestingly the University further issues a so-called Disabled Student Allowance to support their students. Several other articles perused also dealt with the provision of a disability allowance at institutions for non-academic but personal needs that impact on students' academic performance. Criteria have been established at a number of other institutions relating to allocation to and eligibility of students for such allowances.<sup>38</sup>

Another interesting development internationally is the broadened collaboration and networking support opportunities for tertiary institutions. Examples include the Advancing Higher Education Access for Disabled Students in Europe<sup>39</sup> that aims to explore the experiences of students with higher education in the European higher education system and to obtain evidence of EU, national and local policy, guidance and best practice.

Much research has taken place internationally relating to barriers and/or difficulties experienced by students with disabilities. Studies and articles examined document a broad range of positive and negative experiences encountered by students with disabilities across the study cycle.<sup>40</sup> The barriers experienced and the problem solving approaches share much in common to the findings of the FOTIM set out below. There seems to be a universal nature of disabled students' experiences at tertiary education institutions and the barriers that exist.

Some findings following four surveys conducted at a number of UK institutions to identify and evaluate disabled student's experience of teaching, learning and assessment include the following<sup>41</sup>:

- The experiences of students with disabilities varied. Some encounter significant barriers, others are not aware of any, some find the support they receive highly praiseworthy and others find it does not meet their needs at all;
- Between 9 and 15% of students said that they chose their institution or field of study in the light of their disability;
- Although the surveys found that in many cases students reported facing fewer barriers than one would have expected, for those who did, their impact was serious. These findings suggest that using a catch-all category 'disabled students' is problematic and that devising

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<sup>38</sup> See for example the Medical Research Council's information on Disabled Student Allowances on [www.mrc.ac.uk/fundingopportunities](http://www.mrc.ac.uk/fundingopportunities).

<sup>39</sup> See [www.disabledstudents.eu](http://www.disabledstudents.eu) as an example.

<sup>40</sup> See for example [www.resources.glos.ac.uk](http://www.resources.glos.ac.uk).

<sup>41</sup> What are disabled students' experiences of learning at university? Fuller et al Social Diversity and Difference (2005) Keele University. Also Healey et al Listening to Students: The experiences of disabled students in Adams and Brown (eds) Inclusive Learning in Higher Education (2006) RoutledgeFalmer.

generic policies to support their teaching, learning and assessment may not always meet the specific needs of individuals. Individual assessment of needs and discussions with the individual are important.

- Perhaps most surprisingly, less than half of the respondents, and in many cases less than a quarter, identified disability-related barriers in terms of most of the modes of teaching that they experienced. Only 19% of students participating in the one survey recognised barriers related to residential or non-residential fieldwork. In the case of lectures, however, close to 50% of respondents in two of the surveys identified barriers, and in relation to independent fieldwork (e.g. undertaking a dissertation) 43% of disabled students acknowledged barriers. The nature of the difficulties the students identified varied but included issues involving attendance, note taking, participation, confidence, concentration, and the longer time it takes them to complete tasks.
- Barriers were rather more prevalent when it comes to assessment practices, ranging between one- to two thirds of the students experiencing some form of difficulty with assessment methods.
- The studies further show that instead of treating disabled students as a separate category all on their own, they rather fall along a continuum of learner differences and often share similar challenges and difficulties that all students face in higher education.<sup>42</sup> Sometimes the barriers are more severe for them, but sometimes not. Arguably, in the long run, both disabled and non-disabled students could benefit from adjustments, such as well-prepared handouts, instructions given in writing as well as verbally, notes put on-line, and variety and flexibility in forms of assessment.

The literature review suggests another area for consideration in future research, namely a comparative analysis of the barriers experienced both by students with and without disabilities at tertiary institutions in South Africa. It is interesting to note that common problems do exist. Discussions suggest that those barriers that appear less as compared to non-disabled students, could be attributable to the fact that disabled students only highlight the more severe barriers faced by them. As a starting base all students should be seen as having some form of impairment and it is on this premise that service delivery should be designed.

Diversity is then addressed more fully and in line with universal design principles. The studies confirm an important principle namely that the students themselves must be allowed opportunity to

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<sup>42</sup> Hall, T., Healey, M. & Harrison, M. (2002) Fieldwork and disabled students: discourses of exclusion and inclusion, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers NS*, 2, 213–231.

voice their needs and requirements: “Listening to the experiences of disabled students themselves has the advantage of letting individuals express their ‘lived experience’ of being a student in Higher Education...”

Lastly, the issue of Governmental funding has received a lot of attention internationally and various models have started to emerge. Governments allocate budget not only for students with disabilities, but also for universities who are attracting more students with disabilities and for their successful completion of degrees. This works as an incentive for universities not just to enroll, but to retain students until successful completion of their chosen degrees. This funding filters down the tertiary institution itself and Faculties once more receive funding for attracting more students and for increasing the number of students with disabilities who successfully complete their degrees. Individual teaching staff is incentivised for their teaching expertise acquired and appropriate behaviours exhibited in relation to students with disabilities.

The Higher Education Funding Council of England, for example, in 2003 – 2005 launched a special funding programme called “Improving provision for disabled students”<sup>43</sup>.

As part of this initiative 23 research projects were developed in order to disseminate resources relating to the learning and teaching of disabled students. Examples of topics for which funding was provided included accessible online learning, inclusive curriculum design, accessible assessment, developing strategies for inclusivity, and managing off-campus learning for students with disabilities. These projects had a sector-wide impact.

The above merely highlights some institutional and student perspectives of and experiences on dealing with disability to ensure inclusive education for all persons. The thoughts above have important implications for service delivery at South African institutions some of which are highlighted further below in the thematic discussion (Chapter 6). South African HEIs can learn a lot from international institutions and collaborative initiatives should be pursued.

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<sup>43</sup> See <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/widen/slidd/fund>.

## 4 Methodology

The general methodology utilised in the project was a mixed methods one, using standardised questionnaires together with a series of semi-structured interviews and focus groups. The aim of the project was to obtain information on services rendered by tertiary institutions to meet the needs of students with disabilities, the success of these measures and specifically the role and functioning of DUs within higher education institutions. The data was verified as far as possible through triangulation of information from the different interviewees and documentation provided on policies, implementation plans and student data. However, the methodology did not aim to obtain, for example, a reliable figure of the prevalence of disabled students in each institution. The scope of the study period did not allow for an audit of the verifying documentation as provided.

While the information ultimately provided may be limited (e.g. students not knowing what services should be provided or institutions not always submitting verifying documentation), sufficient data were obtained to determine important trends in the findings. The possibility existed of comparing the information obtained in this study with information from international studies of a similar nature. The data gathered provided some indication of service provision in South African institutions, shortfalls and future research needs.

A summary of steps followed is provided below.

### **Pilot site**

- Various research instruments were prepared by the research team and commented upon by FOTIM.
- A first site visit was used as a pilot for the research instruments to be used in subsequent interventions. As the pilot site occurred in a multi-campus environment, it produced its own challenges and provided important insights. The initial instruments were reviewed and revised accordingly. No significant changes were required.

### **Data collection instruments**

- The following data collection instruments were utilized attached as Annexures A – D hereto.
  - Institutional questionnaire
  - Disability unit questionnaires with List of Supporting Documentation required
  - Individual student with disabilities questionnaire and interview sheet

- Focus Group guidelines
- Areas covered in the interviews and focus groups included:
  - Demographic information – sex, age, course, how many years at University, what year of course, type of disability, impairment needs
  - Application process, registration process, lecture support – academic (electronic notes, extra time in exams, etc) and practical (access to lecture theatres, etc)
  - Positive and negative experiences
  - Recommendations including the disabled students’ thoughts on what would be ideal for them to manage at higher education institutions.
  - Identification by DUs and institutional role players of services, short falls and future service plans.

#### **Contact with HEIs and students**

- A project letter was issued to all 23 HEIs, informing Disability Units, Registrars and/or Vice-Chancellors about the project in order to obtain institutional consent for participation. A Letter of Support from the Council on Higher Education (CHE) accompanied the letter.
- The team thereafter liaised with an appointed contact person for the duration of the project once a consent form was received from the HEI indicating their willingness to participate in the study.
- An invitation letter was drafted for students which were distributed via the DUs at the various institutions. The target group was students utilizing the services of the DU. The study did not attempt to reach all students at the various institutions in order, for example, to establish broader issues such as why they were or were not utilizing the services of the DU.
- As only a limited number of students responded to the invitation to participate, all of them were included in the project and they were either provided with a questionnaire to complete or participated in a campus workshop. The study did not intend that a statistically representative number of students participate, but rather that a random

sample, as far as possible, be drawn to give insights into current perceptions and experiences at HEIs.

- Consent forms were completed by the different participants at various stages as appropriate.

#### **HEIs with a site visit**

- 7 sites were selected for on-campus visits utilizing criteria such as size, location, whether or not a DU existed on campus, and distance vs. face to face teaching.
- Face to face interviews were conducted with the Heads of the DUs and/or DU staff during such site visits. In addition, the interviewees completed the research instruments with written comments.
- In addition, one other institutional role player was interviewed, typically a member from senior management to whom the DU reports.
- Verifying documentation in support of information provided was requested and supplied in some cases.
- The students with disabilities who indicated their interest to participate in the project were invited to participate in a campus workshop. Due to the limited student response no selection criteria needed to be applied in order to provide a mixed group of persons. The research team utilized the Student Focus Group Guidelines when conducting the workshops.
- The workshops gave rise to healthy discussions. Often students gave their initial responses on many topics and then, following discussion in the focus group, altered in their thinking and submissions as new learning's were discovered.
- At some sites Students with Disabilities Questionnaires were also handed out for completion afterwards to gather additional information from the participants.

#### **Other HEIs**

- In the case of HEIs not selected for a formal site visit, contact was made with the respective DUs or designated persons dealing with disability issues. They were provided with the various research instruments for completion by the different target groups.

- Telephonic interviews or, alternatively, face to face interviews were conducted with the DU Heads and/or some of the DU staff.
- Verifying documentation in support of information provided was again requested. Not all institutions submitted these requested documents.
- Telephonic interviews were conducted with a limited number of students with disabilities. Contact with the students proved problematic and challenging due to academic pressures and few times when they were available. These interviews were conducted using the same Guidelines utilized during the site visit workshops.
- All participating students were requested to complete the Students with Disabilities Questionnaire. Notwithstanding various attempts from the research team the ultimate response rate for receipt of completed questionnaires were not high.

#### **Data recording and capturing**

- Face to face or telephonic interviews and focus groups were audio recorded and interviewers made their own notes. These recordings were not transcribed but detailed notes were made from them and combined with the notes taken during the interviews/workshops.
- All the data gathered as per the above methodology were captured onto Excel spreadsheets allowing for capturing of both the qualitative and quantitative data. This made a comparative analysis possible in order to identify common responses and trends.
- A summary of the outcomes were prepared together with information obtained during the literature review.
- A draft report was prepared by the research team following deliberations amongst themselves.

#### **Verification**

- Two open sessions were scheduled (one in Johannesburg and one in Cape Town) to which all HEIs were invited.

- The draft report and specifically the findings and themes set out in the document were discussed and verified with participants.

### **Final project outcome**

- A final report was prepared incorporating data and the responses received during all the above steps.

### **Overview of demographic information**

- Of the 23 HEIs nationally, 15 institutions ultimately participated in the project. This constitutes a 65% participation rate.
- 7 site visits were conducted spread out geographically and according to the features of the different institutions
- During these site visits 10 interviews were conducted with DU staff and other institutional role players. 10 Student focus groups were held and 1 focus group was with the DU co-coordinators at a multi-campus site.
- At the other HEIs 5 telephonic interviews were conducted with role players and students and 2 face to face interviews with DU staff.
- A total of 10 completed questionnaires were received from institutional role players, 14 from the DUs themselves and a total of 40 from students with disabilities at the various institutions.



## 5 Analysis and findings

### 5.1 Demographics

Based on the limited data available some findings were made relating to the profile of students participating in the project as well as overall student with disability participation at the HEIs as set out below:

#### 5.1.1 Student participant profile

##### **Race**

Students were mostly Black. This fits the national demographic of the general population but is not necessarily indicative of the overall race representivity of students with disabilities. A full survey of a large sample of the student population would be required to obtain an accurate estimate of the proportion of students with disabilities.

##### **Gender**

Of the 40 students who completed the questionnaires 20 were Male and 18 were Female. (2 students did not disclose on the questionnaire). There was thus an even spread across gender. Equal distribution across gender is positive.

##### **Age**

In the case of students participating in the student focus groups the following apply, the ages ranged from 19 to 55 years of age with the majority being between 20 and 23 years old.

In relation to completed student questionnaires the following apply, the ages ranged from 19 to 57 years of age with the majority being 21 years old. Three students did not give their age on the questionnaire.

#### 5.1.2 Demographic profile of students at HEIs

##### **Number of students with disabilities**

The data available on the total numbers were estimates given during the interviews and were not verified. Thus the following comments are tentative.

- The proportion of disabled students is roughly estimated to be less than 1% of the total student population in participating institutions. The number of disabled students at the different institutions varies from 21 – 400 as reported by interviewees.

- This is not, and is not intended to be an accurate estimation of enrolled students with disabilities currently at HEIs in South Africa. It merely reflects the number of students making use of the services of the DUs at the participating institutions.
- It is important to note that it was difficult for all institutions to provide us with accurate statistics on the prevalence of students with disabilities within their environments.
- The various DUs keep statistics only on the students who come to them for assistance and make use of their services. The number of students with disabilities studying at the institutions not making use of their services is unknown.
- Data capturing during the registration phase does also not provide an accurate picture as not all students disclose their status and/or very limited verification takes place on information provided during the registration phase.
- Little if any linkage exists between information kept by the DU and general administration data.
- Disparities exist between data captured by DUs and figures captured on formal institutional databases.

The above points are indicative of trends locally and elsewhere that accurate statistics on disabled students are lacking. Students, for various reasons choose not to self-identify. Not all students make use of the services offered by DUs. Holistic data capturing processes are not in place at HEIs relating to disability data. This is an area of data collection that could be improved to get a more accurate picture of the total number of disabled students and the proportion of these that require DU assistance.

### **Distribution across faculties and courses**

Complete information provided by 3 HEIs' only shows a good spread across faculties and courses. The graph below shows the spread but, as it is based on limited information, it is merely an initial description. It does however, give an interesting indication of where the majority of students are studying, namely in the Arts faculties/courses, followed by Commerce. This may well reflect the spread of students generally in the universities. While this is a good thing, there does seem to be rather low representation in the sciences, education, law and health sciences faculties. Courses students register is reported by participants as being dependent to a large degree on what is

provided at school as Grade 12 subjects. Students with disabilities often do not have maths. Some institutions provide bridging courses to allow for a wider selection of courses.

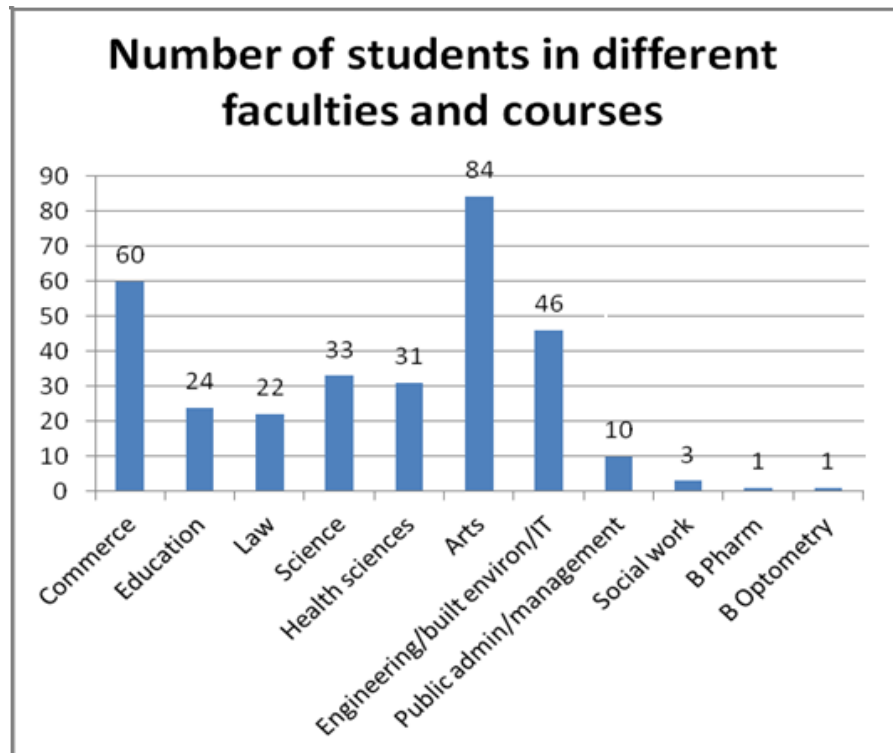


Figure 1: Spread of courses attended by Students with disabilities across HEIs who provided information

### Types of disabilities

The main impairments listed by DU coordinators include:

- Visual including partially sighted and blind;
- Partial hearing impairment but only a few universities dealing with deaf students who would be using sign language;
- Mobility impairments and wheelchair users;
- Dyslexia and Learning difficulties;
- Chronic illness
- Psychiatric illness/ psychosocial and emotional impairments;
- Multiple impairments.

Not all HEIs address all these impairments. The more established and larger DUs tend to provide services for most of these impairment needs, while the newer and smaller DUs tend to provide services primarily for visually and mobility disabled students.

This is usually a strategic decision based on the availability of the infrastructure, staff and funding for the DU. In one case it was further influenced by the fact that many of the students come from

special schools for the visually and mobility impaired in the surrounding area which primarily feeds this university.

Few universities provide assistance with sign language interpreters. However, of note, the main distance teaching university reported having 113 deaf students enrolled. Some may argue that the medium of distance education may well be better suited to deaf students as they rely more on the reading materials than on spoken lectures. However, the learning experience for first language, sign language speakers would need to be understood in terms of content design and printed language demands.

The fact that many universities serve mainly visual and mobility impaired students may also partly be attributed to the fact that these groups of students readily present themselves for service delivery in terms of needs which can be met in a logical way - removing physical barriers, providing Braille, for example. Provision of Sign Language interpreters would similarly be the logical response to the needs of deaf students, but DUs seem to fall short in the provision of these services probably due to cost implications, the limited availability of qualified interpreters, and the diversity of Sign Languages in South Africa being some of the challenges.

Addressing the needs of students with other disabilities takes us into areas of greater uncertainty, less clarity, reduced disclosure, etc. Further research and international networking may contribute to the better defining of these needs and services. Many of the DUs reported more and more students with learning disabilities requesting assistance and that services for these students need more development.

## **5.2 DU staff**

This section sets out some of the overall features of the DUs in terms of their geographical and organisational location, and the staff retention, and demographic status of the DU coordinators interviewed.

### **5.2.1 Reporting structure, DU resources and location**

#### **(a) Reporting structure**

Generally the DUs are subsumed under student counseling services or student affairs departments. None reported being entirely autonomous. The comments made by DU coordinators suggested that this influenced their effectiveness as they were not given sufficient independence to develop the relevant programmes. It was felt that this organizational and reporting location may not be ideal. A

better placement may be within the department that manages diversity thus mainstreaming disability as a diversity issue rather than a medical or problematic area.

- Five universities have a coordinator with staff who report to the coordinator. The DU coordinator, in turn, reports to the head of the student counselling unit (or similar).
- Two universities report directly to the Dean for student affairs, while one reports to the head of transformation services.
- One university does not have a DU and five did not supply the requested information in this regard.
- One interviewee stated that the reporting lines for the DU historically have been a challenge. After benchmarking with other institutions, this person said that reporting line is most appropriate to registrar academics, as the DU gives support to students to enhance academic performance.

Overall, there seems to be a clear reporting structure at most universities.

**(b) DU premises and location**

The location of the DU varied across the different HEI. Three DUs said their location is not ideal because of rapid growth, not being centrally located and not being fully accessible; two said they are adequately located and accessible; and five said they were well located and with accessible premises. Library accessibility remains an issue for some. One DU reported that funding was provided to make buildings and residences accessible.

A number of the HEIs have multiple campuses and the comment was made that there were not equal facilities across the different campuses.

**(c) Disability profile of the DU coordinators**

Of the DU coordinators interviewed, ten are not disabled and four are disabled (three are blind and one has scoliosis). Four DUs did not give any disability status information.

**(d) Most of the DU coordinators are non-disabled.**

**Staff retention**

The retention rate seems to be good as many of the participants reported having worked for quite a few years with their respective units.

However, in one university, the problem of temporary contracts often renewed very late was given as a major barrier to retaining staff.

**Table 2: Years of employment in the DU for HEI's Surveyed**

<b>Institutions</b>	<b>Years working</b>
3	1 year and under
3	3 years and under
4	10 years and under
1	12 years and under
5	Did not disclose
No DU - only a responsible individual	12 years and under

**(e) Qualifications of DU staff**

The qualifications of DU coordinators are predominantly in the field of social work and special education or psychology. The range of qualifications includes:

- Social work;
- Special education and educational psychology;
- Physiotherapy;
- Business administration ;
- Public policy;
- BSc (not clarified by the respondent);
- Communication (not clarified by the respondent).

**(f) Accountability of DU and its staff**

The interviewees were asked about the accountability of the DU and its staff. The responses varied from those with little or no accountability structures to those who report to a whole range of committees. Some DU staff have no performance appraisals, while others, at another university, do have performance contracts and regular evaluations. Other universities report to a committee of people with disabilities which oversees the operational decisions of the DU. One DU reports to the

Accessibility committee, disability advisory committee, transformation and equity committee, as well as student representative committee.

**(g) Number of staff in DU and competencies**

The number of staff in the DU range from a part-time administrative person or a single DU coordinator to a highly developed DU with a number of permanent staff as well as a range of volunteer students or student assistants. The highest number of staff reported was eight with two further DUs reporting seven staff members.

The lack of secure staffing posts was, however, noted in a number of DUs and was seen to generate much insecurity and created problems with staff retention.

A few of the DUs employ sign language interpreters on a freelance and/or ad hoc basis when required. One DU provides a driver for the students thus facilitating their transfers between their residences and their academic lectures. This driver even provides transport to outside appointments such as doctor's visits.

The range of staff includes the coordinator, psychologists, administrative staff, editors, Braille support staff, and staff with technical expertise in specific technology and applications, drivers, and student assistants.

The number of staff, thus, varies significantly across the different universities and some have no staff with people involved in other activities providing some support, through to well-staffed DUs.

When asked if the number of staff were adequate, seven DU coordinators said their staff complement was inadequate or could improve, while two reported having adequate to excellent staff complements. Some of the gaps in staffing identified were specialised staff such as maths tutors, the need for permanent posts to ensure staff retention, and a budget for hiring additional external expertise.

In terms of staff competencies, six DU coordinators reported having adequate to excellent staff competencies, while only one said they did not have the required staff competencies. The role of experience and additional training in building competency was noted by two DUs. The staff motivation is generally high, with seven saying it was good to excellent, and four that it varies across the staff or is generally low. One DU reported a low staff turnover, 4 years, using this to confirm a good level of motivation.

The staff complements are generally not adequate except for the larger and more established DUs but competencies are reported as being adequate. If there is no DU there will usually be a person within the gender, welfare and disability officer but, as commented by one university, 'this person does nothing for disability'.

## 5.2.2 Definitions of and policies on disability

### (a) Definitions of disability

The model of disability adopted by the university will have a significant impact on the services provided, *what* and the manner in which they are provided, *how*. A more medical definition results in individualised services being provided with little improvement of the environmental barriers that face disabled students, such as inaccessible buildings and negative attitudes of others.

A more social model of disability would address these environmental barriers in a more concerted manner while still retaining the more individual impairment needs of students.

Table 3: Definitions of disability provided by different HEI

The definitions provided:
medical model based on a doctor's diagnosis or visible impairments; include psychiatric and learning disability and psychosocial;
medical model based on a doctor's diagnosis or visible impairments; include psychiatric and learning disability and psychosocial;
medical model based on a doctor's diagnosis or visible impairments; include psychiatric and learning disability and psychosocial;
we basically use the standard definition whereby there must be a functional impairment longer than 12 months, recurring or permanent, I think it is the WHO definition;
Sensory, Physical, learning, medical, neurological as per Disability Policy
A person who satisfies the criteria of physical and/or impairment which is long term or recurring and which substantially limits educational progress
means people who have a long-term or recurring physical or mental impairment which substantially limits their prospects of entry into, or advancement in, employment (EEA, 1998)
"people with disability" means people who have long-term or recurring physical or mental impairment which substantially limits their prospects of entry into or advancement in employment. In terms of the Policy the EEA definition is used and other definitions are included. The DU uses the social model definition based on the student's ability to function and compete equally and services to be accessed. Verification of disability is a process. Disclosure only required when reasonable accommodation is requested. DU does not carry out verification of disability. 1 faculty refers student to campus health and wellness. 2. Assessment is conducted by relevant health professional e.g. OT, Psychologist etc. 3. Report is prepared and referred back to Campus H&W. CHW makes recommendation for reasonable



accommodation and refers to faculty. 5. faculty signs off on RA request and forwards to DU.
Students identify themselves. Provide medical certificate, rely on professional opinion.
According to the policy of the institution, “a disability is any ailment or impairment that is long term”
Impairment refers to any loss or abnormality of psychological or anatomical structure or function. Disability refers to a physical, mental or learning impairment that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities of such individual.

Six universities did not provide information, while three use a medical diagnosis from a medical doctor or an impairment based assessment. Four use the employment equity Act (EEA) definition of 1998 (a long-term or recurring physical or mental impairment which substantially limits their prospects of entry into, or advancement in, employment) with one university giving much more detail on process of assessment beyond medical diagnosis to determine functional limitations and needs for reasonable accommodation.

These definitions suggest the medical or individual model remains predominant. But there is a move towards the recognition of other external factors required to ensure full inclusion, such as reasonable accommodation. The perspective remains one of an individual as the locus of the problem and not the environment. Burden is on individual students to disclose and undergo assessment to obtain reasonable accommodation.

A more social model focus would ensure that a basic set of accessibility features would be established within the university. These would include, for example, fully accessible buildings (academic and residence) and lecturing styles that address most impairment needs. This would lessen the focus on making the individual ‘fit’ into HEI life and make it easier to accommodate many impairment needs. There will of course always be certain highly individualised impairment needs that will continue to require DU assistance.

The most prevalent impairments addressed by the DU are visual and mobility impairments. Some universities only accept students with mobility or visual impairments as a deliberate strategy to facilitate specialist competencies in the DU. The larger and older DU tend to address most impairment needs. Few universities provide assistance with sign language interpreters.

## **(b) Policies on disability**

There is a policy in most universities but generally as part of the Employment Equity (EE) policy and focused more on disabled staff than disabled students. The larger universities with more established DUs are looking at including aspects of both staffing and service delivery in the university EE policy. This would allow for more focus to be placed on assistance for disabled students.

The comments on how well the policy is known suggest that there is poor awareness and more effort is required to increase the awareness. Comments included: 'it (the policy) is available to staff and students 'on website', 'sometimes requested by staff and students', 'info included in staff induction and in student packs'.

### **5.2.3 DU vision and mission**

Similar points were raised by all DUs as to their vision and mission. The main aim of the DUs is to create opportunities for disabled students in both academic and broader student life. This is done through meeting impairment needs of the individual disabled students.

The long term vision is to increase awareness, be part of 5 year planning strategies (for example); increase number of services provided; provide Braille printing for external customers; increase capacity within the DU; developing institution-wide strategies. This would include undertaking access audits and accessibility plans with relevant departments who need to take these responsibilities on board; increased collaboration with other departments and develop innovative projects as a result of this collaboration. One example given was that of working with the Geography department to develop an access map of the campus.

The DUs expressed their long term goal as being part of a broader structure which will have a disability support, as well as teaching and research arm. The need for permanent contracts and posts was seen as critical in order to develop and realise a long term vision.

The question was asked as to the relevance of the DU and its perceived importance. A number of the comments address what can be termed the Cinderella role of the DU within the university thus perpetuating the marginalization of disability. There is often a lack of recognition, and the important role played by support from people outside of the DU, (such as head of a department), to make the DU work most effective.

Despite this general negativity, a couple of DUs reported much more positive impact. They suggest a growing recognition but with still far to go. The role of advocacy is clearly important in creating awareness.

Many of these comments were made by DU coordinators and not from students or other staff members. Despite the possible bias of these comments, they do represent the extent to which DU coordinators feel supported.

While one DU coordinator felt as a 'non-entity and insignificant, and of little worth to the university', she retained her passion for assisting disabled students. Other DUs reported similar passion and dedication. Other DUs reported varied support with some departments valuing the services and opinions provided by the DU, and stating that:

“It really boils down to individuals getting it or not getting it. Some ask for help and others don't but it depends on the individual - it does somehow influence the whole department especially if it is the Head of the Department.”

A couple of DUs noted that the DU was seen as being very important and getting a fair amount of attention, funding and support. This was seen as being due to the understanding of disability as contributing to student diversity. This is a positive perspective which enhances the inclusion of disability.

A number of comments suggest that there is a growing awareness of the role and importance of the DU. A couple of DU coordinators described this positive support as follows:

“We are respected in all relevant decision making structures, including the university building and development committee where all issues surrounding work on the infrastructure is considered. Our recent move into organisational structure located in the office of the Vice-Chancellor is evidence of the value the university places on the work we do.” and

“We are fortunate. Our unit is highly respected in Transformation clusters and Executive. We are envied by many for our obvious teamwork and evidence of dedication by staff to their work.”

The relevance of the DU is growing in recognition and, most positively, is about the inclusion of disability as part of transformation and diversity management. This beginning shift of focus from providing a highly specialised service for a few students to managing disability as a diversity issue is a positive and constructive change. It also suggests a shift from a medical or individual perspective of disability to a social model perspective.

## 5.2.4 Budget and functioning of DUs

### (a) DU budget

A number of problems were reported in getting dedicated and adequate budgets. There seems to be reliance, in a number of DUs, on getting ad hoc funds or from specific departments to meet their own student accommodation needs. A number of DUs mentioned the need to develop their external funding sources with one DU being entirely reliant on donor funding and has no specific budget. This latter DU is a small DU but this reliance on donor funding reinforces a welfarist view of disability (where disability is managed through charity) and is thus not optimal as a funding model.

The five DUs that said their budget is inadequate expressed concerns of lack of recognition and being swallowed up in other unit's budgets (e.g. careers and counselling). Two DUs said there was no separate budgets for the DU. Four DUs said their budgets were adequate or sufficient but all indicated they need to supplement with external funding or through providing services for external consumers to augment their budgets. One of the activities commonly mentioned that they can use to generate external funding is providing a Braille printing service.

The comment was made that the growing recognition of their role led to an increase in and stability of their budget. They also said that their budgets may be adequate for now but would need to be increased with growing service provision by the DU.

### (b) Student funding sources

Ten DUs reported that students with disabilities get bursaries and that this is adequate, while two reported the funding to be inadequate. Two main problems cited were the lack of funding for bridging courses (for students who do not make the entry requirements but who show potential) and the lack of guarantees of continuity in funding.

The application process for bursaries was reported to be complicated although some of the universities provide support for applicants. HEDSA is seen as important in facilitating better funding sources and there are attempts being made to link up with outside companies to provide specific bursaries. The main source of bursaries is the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) but also through the Departments of Labour and Education.

### (c) DU equipment and facilities

Four DUs reported adequate to excellent equipment and facilities with one of the four reporting that their equipment is excellent and up to date. Two reported inadequate equipment with one of these indicating that they do not have any equipment and have to borrow it from student affairs. Students

with bursaries can obtain their equipment through that route. Three DUs reported fairly adequate equipment and facilities with gaps in services such as sign language interpreting or needing more of what is available.

**(d) Support from other departments**

Two said the support they received from various departments varied ranging from no support through some 'fairly good' support, to good support but limited to a few departments, such as the health centre and student affairs rather than academic departments.

**(e) Support from teaching staff**

When support from teaching staff happens it is usually good support, but it often has to be requested. Some DUs are working on a module for training teaching staff on disability to increase awareness and, it is hoped, more proactive request for assistance and support. This awareness was reported by five DUs as being critical in ensuring that teaching staff are made aware of what is possible and required.

**(f) Utilization of services by students with disabilities**

Five DUs reported good to excellent use but not all disabled students are registered or use the services. Students with disabilities use the services when they require them which is a positive and constructive use pattern. One DU said it was not fully used as there are not enough satellite offices for students to use across a large campus.

**(g) Cooperation from non-disabled students**

Seven DUs reported the cooperation between disabled and non-disabled students to be adequate or good, with a further two saying it was low. Some examples of good cooperation include disabled students co-opting non-disabled students for specific activities and disabled students becoming their own advocates in this process. Active collaboration is encouraged by the DU, and they work with volunteers and, in one instance, with the SRC.

**(h) Role of students with disabilities in the functioning of DUs**

There seems to be minimal involvement of students with disabilities in the overall functioning of DUs – they seem to assist in determining service provision and be service consumers. However, a number of DUs mentioned having a representative committee of students. The DU liaises with this, and similar committees through regular meetings. Older disabled students also assist as advisors to younger students entering the system. Student volunteers in DUs are largely non-disabled students.

A Disability Awareness Movement exists with a number of disabled students taking part. The main thrust is to create awareness and bring issues to the attention of the DU and to serve as representatives on other university structures.

**(i) Role played by students in assisting their own functioning and independence**

Mixed comments were received on the role disabled students play in their own functioning and independence. Two of the smaller and least established DUs seem to have the most negative comments. What was not clear from the comments is whether this was due to the nature of the DU approach or the nature of the students attending those universities. The overall university culture may also be playing a role in this. Getting a sense of responsibility across to students seems to be key and the difference between students who come via a special schooling system vs. a mainstream one could also be a factor explaining this trend.

At one institution many of the students come from special schools as a number exist in their area. Special life skills and orientation programmes are offered to students to ensure their adaptation to campus life.

### **5.2.5 Services provided by DUs and its effectiveness**

**(a) Services rendered to students with disabilities**

Similar services are provided across the different DUs as set out below as extracted from individual DU questionnaires. The variation is more in the number of different services provided with some DUs only providing some and the more established DUs providing most of these services. The more established and long standing the DU, the longer the list of services rendered.

The points below could form the start of a basic core set of services. The longer list of services could form the basis for a best practice list.

DUs indicated the following:

- “Disability management services, which include information access, academic support, education and awareness,
- Facilitation of student funding and housing;
- Braille production, computer lab with 10 computers that have the jaws software on, zoom text, we have 6 merlins, also help with administration - we contact lecturers to make sure that they have what they need in the classroom, they write accessible tests, learning

material is in Braille or audio format, also reading programmes for those we want in audio format, we also have digital recorders available. Hearing impaired students we have sign language interpretation in each class or for any academic purpose if they have to participate in groups or field trips or have to talk to lecturers by appointment. Also have lip-reading interpreters for those who do lip reading, one permanent sign language interpreter who is the co-coordinator and we also use free lance sign language interpreters as well. We are looking into FM and loop systems for the classrooms for students who use hearing aids - this is part of the strategic plan. We have reading programmes to enhance students' reading skills, also dyslexia specialists working with educational psychologists. We teach study techniques. We are also in the process of getting computer software to assist students with dyslexia and also Dragon Speak for students with mobility impairments and students with specific learning difficulties. There is the use of the lab. Our students with mobility impairments this is an ongoing process working on accessibility of the campus. We have a 5 year plan to increase the physical access it started last year. Making sure buildings are accessible ramps everywhere. The unit liaises with all departments in terms physical planning with regards to accessibility and also awareness on campus. We talk to lecturers and different groups, we also have put students on the student representative council of the university. We involve non-disabled students as volunteers, we are also setting up buddy and mentorship programmes to teach non-disabled students on how to deal with students with disabilities.

- Accessible residence accommodation;
- Inter campus Transport;
- Recommending/facilitating computer use for tests/exams, extra writing time, oral exams, spelling concessions;
- Reasonable accommodation - providing specialised supervision, training and support, computer hardware and software;
- Services include (among others): Providing psycho-social guidance and counseling services to students with learning barriers, Assessing for aids to support students with disabilities specific needs, Advising on academic adjustments and reasonable accommodations with regards to the students' academic programme, Attempting to find practical and implementable solutions with regard to the students' academic support, Liaising on accessibility and support issues with faculties, health services, safety and security services

and residences (accommodation for students with special needs), Helping people with disabilities to familiarise themselves with the campus depending on their special needs, Bringing the specialised situation of every student with disabilities to the attention of the respective Deans, departmental chairpersons, subject lecturers and/or house committee with the consent of the student, providing support to the faculty staff and lecturers on issues relating to accommodating students/staff with disabilities.

- Accessible transport, volunteer buddies, scribes, readers, assistive devices, assistance with administration, reported needs, reasonable accommodation, link to support organizations such as Department of Labour and Department of Higher Education;
- Induction;
- Access to study material in accessible format; Access to technology for study and communication purposes; access to accessible housing accommodation; one-on-one tuition where specific disability is likely to disadvantage the student in acquiring the necessary competencies; Note takers for students with upper limb and hearing impairments; Small group workshops for students with learning/psychological disabilities; An accessible day house; An accessible bus; Designated parking for people with disabilities, A map showing wheelchair accessible routes to all venues; Modified exam and test writing facilities; Modified furniture, quiet space, etc., Assistance with administration tasks such as filling in application forms, applying for bursaries, registering, etc. Services to students are very much tailor made to serve each individual needs;
- Assistance with everything from registration, accessing lectures, accessing financial aid, accessing accommodation on campus;
- We provide a range of services. Production of study material in alternate reading formats. The provision of academic support intervention. Sign language interpretation, Orientation and mobility assistance, support in terms of access technology, advice in terms of access technology, Bursary application motivation;
- Software - Jaws and zoom text, software available directly related to specific study course of the student, e.g. Toccata for students studying music, provision of assistive devices where possible, these include Braille printer, scanner with open book software and Braille note takers where possible, provide bursaries in cooperation with the Department of Labour. Networking with lecturers and head of faculties, assisting students with alternative



arrangements, e.g. extra time in writing tests and exams, improving accessibility where possible, arrangements for special accommodation.”

**(b) Services provided by DUs to students without disabilities**

Some efforts are made to provide information to and generate interest among non-disabled students to be more aware on disability and the needs of disabled students. These efforts comprise of awareness raising campaigns and lectures. The DU provides information to students doing research in the area of disability and recruit volunteers from the general student body. There seems to be some perceptions from non-disabled students that disabled students get favoured.

Some DUs provide sign language classes for hearing students. A suggestion was made that a course for credits could be developed to engender a better understanding of diversity and its management to all students. A number of DUs reported that they have a well-stocked resource centre which can be used by all students, disabled and non-disabled.

**(c) Services provided by DUs to Administrative staff**

Efforts are made to ensure the inclusion of students with disabilities through ongoing awareness raising and collaborative work with administrative departments. This is the same as that provided for academic staff. Some of the issues dealt with include recruiting, retaining and advancing the career prospects of people with disabilities generally, residence placements, funding recommendations, and extra time recommendations.

**(d) Services DUs provide for other departments and structures**

Below are some points raised about services provided by some of the DUs to other departments and structures and what services and support other departments provide (or should provide) to the DU. The points raised highlight the push for including disability on the diversity agenda:

- “Central application office - share information on what to expect and apply and supply students with this information and advice on disability; Risk management security residence - what experiences students might have; LAN has regular patrols at night; Traffic issues - signage should be put on campus and markings on edges of steps; Lifts needs to be serviced regularly; Urgent attention to accessibility - audit has been done but have not seen results of audit. Housing: prepare accommodation for students - need a dedicated residence; Student funding: assist for applying for bursaries; support students and the funding centre; Sports union: these facilitate students getting involved in sport; special disabled students sports

association; Giving advice, We assist in students getting resources and support to compete in sports. There is the SRC and the Disabled Students' Association;

- If there is a person with a disability appointed in a specific department or faculty then we assist in getting the assistive devices they need and also sensitising the rest of the staff. In general, awareness ,advocacy and information are requested from them;
- Special parking disc in collaboration with campus protection services;
- We strive to actively collaborate with other departments/structures at the university in an advisory capacity - one that actively promotes and advocates for support of its students based on their specific needs;
- Collaboration and awareness;
- Education on how to deal with disabled students;
- We work closely with most departments at university if not all. We have a reciprocal arrangement in terms of support. E.g. we work closely with the departments that do buildings and things. To provide them with info on access issues;
- Cooperation re applicable need to DU.

**(e) Services provided by DUs to new applicants with disabilities**

The DU provides support to new students from before registration. Efforts are made to contact schools for medical examination; provide access to funding support; arrange and advise housing; and liaise with departments on academic needs of new applicants. One described their orientation and mobility training two weeks prior to registration and their adjustment support group. For those students who do not meet the entrance requirements access steps are provided through a bridging course or motivating for a discretionary acceptance followed by additional support.

Some application forms have an extra page for disabled students to disclose and document their individual impairment needs. Some DUs liaise with parents and tell them what to expect and invite them for a visit.

Most DUs, however, wait for new students to contact them but some efforts are made to review the university student administrative software to track down potential users of the DUs' services.

**(f) Services provided by DU for bursars and bursary grantors**

The NSFAS provides financial support for indigent students and students with disabilities are encouraged to apply. Assistance and support is provided in this process. Some DUs also work with potential sources of funding and bursary providers. The DUs works closely with the financial aid unit in this regard. Some DUs do not involve themselves with this aspect and refer the students directly to the financial aid office.

Very little liaison seemingly occur with external funding sources such as potential future employers.

**(g) Services provided by DU to potential employers and the community generally**

The DUs described efforts to educate both potential employers and the community in general on disability issues. They provide them with skills training, knowledge and information on how to assist and support students with disabilities. The DUs have links with disabled people's organisations and other external bodies. The DU staff visit special schools to provide information to potential students and also to use expert services available at these schools such as sign language interpreters.

**(h) Success of meeting needs and gaps identified**

Many DUs reported that they are meeting the needs of disabled students, but they are not sure how successfully. One DU reported successful provision of sign language as an example. Much effort is spent keeping tabs on students to get them to hand material in on time for conversion to an accessible format. Many students complain that materials are provided late to them, but the DUs staff said that often the students do not hand in the required materials on time causing the delay. Text conversion seems to be one of the more successful services at most DUs.

The DUs work on physical, social and emotional support of students, and address accessibility of the university campus with a good amount of success.

The DUs are generally successful in providing services for which they are well equipped and less for the emerging needs.

It was felt that the main needs not met include services for hearing impaired and deaf students, and learning disabled students. There is a lack of sign language interpreters suitably qualified to interpret academic materials. The geographic layout of campuses remains a challenge for students with visual and mobility impairments. Management often use the frequency of utilisation as an indicator of where they need to make adaptations rather than creating a universally accessible built

environment. This is another example of a medical or individual focus rather than a social model one.

There is a trend of increasing numbers of students with learning disabilities and services for their needs are not yet sufficiently developed.

The provision of assistive devices is not optimal as there is often a long turn-around time between the application and provision of the device.

There is a need to bridge the gap between secondary and tertiary education to allow more disabled students to meet the entrance requirements for higher education.

Generally, gaps in service provision are due to lack of funding and staff with the required expertise, or where new trends of needs emerge, such as that of learning disabled students.

DUs listed a number of services that they would like to provide but are not able to, currently. These include:

- Orientation + mobility;
- physio-, speech and occupational therapy;
- structured assessment of disability and plans to understand individual needs;
- a more dedicated permanent structure to provide services and permanent relevant staffing;
- Specialist services and relevant software for learning impaired students, as there is currently a lack of capacity and understanding of the complexities involved;
- A more structured staff information and staff development plan.
- Sign language Interpreters;
- Transport services for students with disabilities, particularly between sites.

One DU coordinator said that there were no services that were missing and commented that 'our students are pampered'. This again raises the issue of whether students are spoon fed or taught to become independent students or whether the DU has glorified its role.

**(i) Key service challenges of DU staff**

The main challenges reported facing the DU staff are lack of adequate budgets, accessible office space, permanent staff posts, and lack of commitment from management and academic staff to prioritise disability issues and needs of disabled students. The problem of special school education was also highlighted.

The detailed comments are presented below for the individual HEIs:

- “Location of offices, physical information & exam accessibility;
- Staffing issue is a main one;
- Commitment to the implementation of the Disability Policy by senior management and space constraints of the Disability Office;
- Staffing, equipment, programmes, facilitating;
- Lack of staff, more space and better physical facilities and definitely the integration with different faculties taking some responsibility and accountability for disabled students because they refer everything to the DU;
- We don’t have access to the students. We don’t know them. We only know them when they come to us for something;
- Getting the facilities dept to be more proactive and responsive to our requests regarding the physical spaces and challenges experienced here. Having staff more clued up regarding support to students with disabilities;
- Sign Language interpreters;
- To ensure equitable technology services on all campus sites, to provide transport services for students with disabilities between sites;
- Staffing support and financial constraints;
- Collaboration with other role players, processes relying on other departments, red tape, time delays. Don’t always respond when urgent need. Take too long to respond to requests as not faculty priorities. Bureaucracy and red tape in getting things done e.g. the process required to address access issues. Needs of disabled students not taken seriously enough by lecturers etc. and DU required then to intervene. Unnecessary delays because needs not viewed as important enough e.g. getting literature from lecturers. This is not an attitude

problem as staff displays positive attitude. Problem is among other priorities, disability is not seen as an equal priority.

- As with all others funding and resources are limited. Another greater challenge is the state of disarray in which the special school sector finds itself. Students with congenital disabilities especially, are poorly served by many of these schools and leave those schools poorly prepared for tertiary education. They seldom come anywhere near the entrance requirements set out by the institution.
- Non permanence of disability coordinator -this is somehow demoralizing because I lose out on study benefits. I'd like to register for masters, but have no benefits whatsoever, and my salary scale isn't market related.
- Turn-around time with regards to audio production mainly. That is because we want to go into digital audio production. We don't have adequate space in terms of the studios for that. That is something in the pipeline. We have put it down as our need and it will be addressed in the New Year."

**(j) Complaints received about the DU**

Staff wants to know about having a disabled student in their course and students want more rapid assistance. The issue of students (and possibly staff) not taking enough responsibility to get requirements and needs known more timeously was highlighted by a few DUs. The DU seems to be the interface between staff and students and this sometimes causes problems. A recommendation made was that there needs to be more direct communication between lecturers and students rather than always communicating via the DU.

**(k) Extent to which teaching and administrative staff are adequately equipped and trained to deal with students with disabilities**

Of the DUs who answered this question, the majority said 'yes, sometimes'. This fits with the identification of a number of challenges in meeting needs of disabled students. The comments include the following:

- "Lecturers have not received specialised training on disability;
- We try to equip them as far as we can. Not everyone is, because individuals have preconceived ideas that get in the way;

- Not always empathetic to special needs;
- Not all have been taught or have had to do text conversion, for example. Naturally they need to be given the relevant information;
- Overall, teaching and admin staff go out of their way to support students with disabilities, but may require support/advice when dealing with students specific needs-this is where the Office assists with recommendations and possible interventions that can be implemented by Faculty;
- More awareness and strategic planning required;
- Have done some targeted training e.g. Engineering faculty invited to staff meeting, centre for teaching and hearing every 2 months contact all new lecturers. They are sensitised somewhat from the awareness training on campus offered by the DU. Experience shows it is more effective to present faculty specific awareness interventions than general sessions inviting staff across faculties. Latter less commitment to attend. Disability awareness is included in an ongoing basis in Teaching Staff's training. Regarding admin staff awareness training is addressed on a needs basis, however good levels of sensitisation exists;
- Some awareness raising has occurred;
- No, they have attitudes towards the students, well, some of it I understand because of the rotten attitude of the students themselves, others even had attitude towards me just because I'm the Disability Coordinator, can you imagine;
- Depend on the college or school. Not all staff is equally trained and sensitive. Fortunately staff is very receptive to working collaboratively with us. E.g. we have to work with staff from the various colleges which was our initiative we wrote to the Deans at all colleges indicating that we will be willing to provide training to them and they were responsive. They agreed to meet with us and we did a presentation to them and now they have agreed on a programme of collaboration. For us college means faculty and in faculties are schools e.g. school of computing;
- They have courses in dealing with disability (new personnel members)."

**(I) Do any attitudinal barriers exist within the Institution in your opinion?**

The response to this question was predominantly 'yes, sometimes' (9 DUs) compared to two who said 'yes, always' and three who said 'no'. These responses suggest that attitudinal barriers remain 'sometimes' for most of the universities. Examples of these are given in following comments:

- "Across all level have attitudinal barriers; not sufficient interventions; limitations stops you from achieving ultimate goals;
- Some staff are insensitive to the need of students with disabilities;
- With specific individuals it is a struggle. But for the institution it is a 2 [sometimes];
- Lecturing staff are not very sensitive;
- One gets a whiff of this every now and then, but gets the whiff less and less so I think that means that there is a greater openness to diverse student populations on campus;
- At times the institution does not fully understand / appreciate the work that is performed by the Office. The institution's various stakeholders are, however, very supportive towards students with disabilities e.g. protection services unit assisting with transport when required;
- Lack of sufficient awareness and training coupled with lack of adequate specialist support and resources;
- Very rarely, attitudinal. People sometimes over compensate consistency issues. Over compensation is more the issue. There is no special criterion for entry for students with disabilities into the university although not seen as an obstacle - it could be positive or negative. The number of disabled students has lessened, it could be because there is now increased number of universities that cater for disabled students. Special schools do not prepare students with disabilities for entry to university. There also could be sub-standard schooling that could prejudice them in entering university. The DU is seen as responsible for all problems related to the students with disabilities, but the issue may not be disability related. The idea should be that eventually we have a universal design situation which is what we do not have presently. Paradoxically the DU becomes a barrier to the promotion of universal access design. Access looks good at face value but when you go into them you find that there are major barriers. Not DU issue but campus issue. It becomes a budget issue because it costs millions of Rand;



- Special projects had to intervene;
- University is part of society, and to that it will reflect the prejudice and ignorance deeply embedded in society; with a staff of 4000+ and a student body of 24000+ (both fluid and changing all the time) it is conceivable that advocacy initiatives can change all hearts and minds. But again this is true of all aspects of transformation - race, religion, sexual orientation and nationality;
- Not that I know of, we do not experience that.”

**(m) Availability of special technology or assistive devices and competence of DU staff in using these**

The DUs gave long lists of software and technology that is available with some variation based on the size and length of time the DU has been in existence. Some of the issues are the use of early versions of software rather than the latest and limited access to these.

The lists as per individual institutions are:

- “The unit has JAWS, Zoom text, and Braille services. However more special technology is required at undergraduate and post graduate;
- Currently technology is available at entry level - basic technology useful for start but not for later studies. Limited in quantity across disability. Access to wireless internet not available as yet for all students, e.g. JAWS only available in one spot. Accessibility very limited;
- Yes IT department to arrange training programmes for students with disabilities to use technology;
- Not adequate as very outdated;
- We have now included the JAWS software onto all computers in the lab previously we only had it in the unit;
- The only accommodation is extra time. No assistive devices. IT students have new special facility;
- Students can borrow laptops with JAWS, WYNN or Zoom text. They also have access to accessible computers in the computer labs. They can access audi-see units if they are deaf.

WYNN is for dyslexic students. Zoom text for low vision. JAWS for blind students. We outsource what we cannot do. Like get the closest school for blind students for Braille Maths or do tactile embossing;

- Yes - JAWS program, Braille Printer and scanner;
- Yes, the office has a diverse variety of hard and software that addresses a wide range of barriers. The office has a fully adapted and resourced computer laboratory utilised by students with disabilities. The office has Braille services available but prefers to train students to utilise software to perform the required functions. Examples of such include (among others): learning barriers: dragon speak / learning access suite software / Digital voice recorders, hearing barriers: loop system, Physical barriers: manual / Electric wheelchairs on loan / adapted keyboards, Visual barriers: Merlin LCD Screen / JAWS / Openbook software;
- Yes, purchased on a network license software basis and technologies that serve a broad range of disabilities. More focus on hearing impaired requirements;
- Yes – we have all the necessary software and gadgets for disabled students, e.g. digital recorders, software, scanners etc;
- At the moment we have access technology and assistive devices that we purchase in terms of the needs of students. The ongoing needs will determine what we need to have. Fortunately we budget on an annual basis so provision can be made for this. Because of operational space we can't get all the access technology and assistive devices we need. That will be accommodated when we have our new premises;
- Yes - all software programmes, special computer screens, scanners, enlargers.”

Five DUs said their staff was competent to manage the technology and software, while six DUs said they were not competent. Two DUs reported that their staff has only basic knowledge. Specialist knowledge is required for some equipment and programmes and this means that not everyone in the DU will be trained to use it.

#### **(n) Adequacy of reasonable accommodation**

The DU Coordinators were asked whether the reasonable accommodation measures put in place at their universities were adequate 'always' or 'sometimes' or 'never'. The responses were spread out

with four saying they were adequate 'always', seven that they were adequate 'sometimes', and three that they were 'never' adequate.

Some of the supporting comments given to the above include the following:

- "Every effort is made to provide reasonable accommodation rising out of diversified needs of students;
- Learning disability is the least catered for. Sensory and physical is the most catered for;
- Varies from disability to disability;
- Mostly at the discretion of the individual;
- Generally adequate accommodations exist. The physical mobility or health problem students who struggle with stairs have reason to feel that reasonable accommodation does not exist for them;
- Depends on the individual need. An assessment is completed which identifies the need. Partnering with various departments generates the accommodations;
- Based on individual need. Psychological disability is more difficult as not so common disability. Cover for other types adequately. We provide adequate reasonable accommodations for most disabilities. The psychological disabilities are more difficult to address;
- Some independent e.g. where assisted to write exams at the unit and extended time or tape recording in classes;
- On the whole our accommodations are excellent. We ensure for instance that students with epilepsy write tests and exams in a quiet, private and safe place, including a bed on which they can lie should they have a seizure, and under close supervision;
- Reasonable accommodation in terms of academic varies from one lecturer to the other and from one faculty to the other. For instance, the Law faculty is the most difficult and still doesn't want to fully support our students, whereas the other faculties are just wonderful and go all out to accommodate our students;

- At the beginning /previous year we do an assessment with prospective students, placing them in residences that are ok for their disability. If necessary we do change rooms or provide assistive devices. This is a personal assessment and a unique team effort.”

**(o) Adequacy of current service provision in addressing needs of students with disabilities**

The DU coordinators were asked in their opinion how adequately the current services address the needs of students with disabilities The responses were spread with 10 saying they were adequate to very adequate, and four that they were inadequate or very inadequate. One DU commented on the length of time that a DU has been in existence as being an important factor in determining the effectiveness of the unit.

Some of the comments made by the DU coordinators on why they gave their responses include the following:

- “People’s attitudes, accessibility e.g. loop systems and FM systems in classrooms issues, but these are being addressed at the moment;
- The university has been very slow in setting up a DU;
- Most students’ needs are adequately met. The gaps would be physical access problems largely.
- The following gaps are identified: limited manpower/human resources, provision of equitable services on all sites, provision of transport facilities to students with disabilities;
- The aim is to enhance the facilities currently available to the represented disability categories namely partially sighted, hearing loss, mobility impaired, chronic, learning difficulty (dyslexia only), and sensory (epilepsy). Endeavours are being made to capacitate for the gaps where they exist e.g. assistance with other learning impairments. Policy: allowed to work from home or in-hospital when not well and adapted flexibility within curricula and assessments;
- Visually impaired students complain that they cannot get information to all information on campus e.g. social networks and news papers. So they contact the relevant departments to make it accessible or provide it electronically. E.g. student newsletter print material. Voting process for SRC Braille format e.g. social integration, working groups, personal preference, integration in campus life, SRC reps good, Use SRC students to assist with mobility training for new students. They use non-disabled students in disabled activities and vice versa. e.g.

everyone gets involved in selling of casual day stickers etc. Senior students are assigned to new students to orientate them which is support and is very useful;

- Have enabling technology for them students and intervene and make accommodations;
- Whatever the gaps may be, we're working tirelessly to ensure that they are close;
- Our current services address the need of students with disabilities adequately. We have a few gaps and programmes in the pipeline and that will raise it to very adequate."

**(p) Perceived differences between students from special schools vs. mainstream schools**

Some were of opinion that students from special schools have more of an entitlement approach as compared to students who come from mainstream schools. Students from special schools are already using accommodations and so accommodation needs at university are clear. Some students from special schools have a challenge to adapt to the university environment. Students from mainstream schools are not always aware of accommodations and so struggle to meet performance standards. Eventually it is based on individual adaptation and integration. No specific trend could be identified in answers given.

### **5.3 Other institutional staff**

The findings are based on interviews held and completed questionnaires received from institutional role players. The findings correspond closely with information gathered from the DU themselves and thus the findings are presented as summary comments only. Findings above are not repeated. In total ten questionnaires were received completed by institutional role players commenting upon the DUs' activities. Some were interviewed telephonically or in face to face interview situations. Positions of the interviewees ranged from members of senior management, directors, a dean, information officer to the Head of the Health Centre.

None of the interviewees were disabled, but most are involved in student affairs in one way or another and have close working relationship with the DU and students with disabilities.

**(a) Policy for disabled staff and students**

There was mixed knowledge of whether the university has a disability policy but most seem to say yes and give detailed explanations of this. The points made were similar to those made by DU staff.

The comments were, generally, that there is a policy but they felt that it was not well drafted enough.

**(b) Accountability of staff in relation to disability equity**

When asked about the accountability of their institutions in relation to disability equity, many responses indicated that they were not sure that diversity management is successfully implemented and people held accountable but there are signs of progress and increasing awareness. There seems to be a general struggle to find the right place where to deal with diversity management and specifically disability equity issues within the institutions.

**(c) Objectives of DUs**

The objectives of the DUs seemed to be well understood and seemingly supported as reported in the following comments:

- “Raising awareness; policy development; auditing physical accessibility;
- To provide equitable access to the academic programmes for persons with disabilities. This translates into support measures to ensure that our students with disabilities receive academic material at the same time if not earlier than other students and also for the university community to be aware of and be responsible in their interactions with persons with disabilities and be sensitive to the appropriate interactions;
- Must have a DU and a person in charge. Clear need for specific support for students with disabilities. Policy states that disability is a key aspect of diversity and integration;
- I was not there when they instituted the DU but from my side it was about 6 or 7 years ago they started the unit because they realised the need for it. They realised that the disabled needed extra services;
- To ensure that disabled students enjoy the same rights and privileges of able bodied students;
- Provide the support required but not everyone has the level of expertise. Role for a specific unit exists- advocacy skills and special needs. Consultative approach and they must use the opportunity created for them. They recognised that they needed to have a dedicated office to provide support and expertise to address the needs rather than making it everyone’s

responsibility because not everyone has the expertise to deal with all types of disabilities. There will always be a need for the disability unit because of the specialised expertise required;

- To ensure access with success for all and widen our diversity scope;
- To comply with the spirit and content of the Code of Good Practice on the employment of people with disabilities of the EE Act and the National Plan for Higher Education (2001);
- The key objective was to create the environment for students with disabilities so that they can have full access to the higher institution of learning;
- To ensure that students with disabilities' rights are preserved and to ensure necessary support in their studies;
- We are aware of the fact that in an institution or community there are around about 10% of persons with disabilities and they are not getting serviced properly so we had to establish this unit. When students arrive for registration we immediately make them aware that we are offering this service. We also go out to special schools and inform them what we offer."

#### 5.4 Students with disabilities

The following findings were extracted from focus groups discussions with students and completed student questionnaires received from students at the participating institutions. Participation at all times was voluntary and limited to what students were prepared to share with the research team.

##### **(a) Profile**

There was a good race and gender representivity amongst the participating students as set out above. The fact that more Black students participated reflect the South African race demographics. More or less equal numbers of males and females participated. The aim of the project was not to address any gender differences that may exist in the experiences of male and female students. Limited data also does not allow for any inferences to be drawn relating to gender. It would be interesting to research further what role gender plays in the tertiary education experiences of disabled students and this could form a topic of future research.

Generally speaking some students accept their "lot", adhere to expected norms and accept institutional limitations at face value, whilst other students are more human rights driven. The latter group realises that HEIs are not doing them a favour by providing accessible education and follow a

stronger human rights approach in dealing with the issues arising. Some examples came to fore of students with disabilities being elected on representative Student Committees.

Students probably unknowingly adopt in most cases a medical approach to dealing with disability issues. Students were of the opinion that mostly visually impaired and mobility impaired students make use of services and in some cases they are clearly defined as target groups by the DUs themselves.

**(b) Disclosure of status and need for services**

In most instances students indicated that they initially approached the DUs when experiencing problems in the course of the academic year, rather than disclosing their disability status upfront during registration procedures when enrolling at the institution. Various reasons were given, for example, that they initially did not want to be labelled as disabled due to a fear of discrimination, or were unaware of the existence of the DU, or at the beginning was of opinion that they will be able to cope independently, only later realizing the challenges posed by tertiary education. They accept that self-declaration of status is required and that such does not mean that one necessarily must be a recipient of the services of the DU.

**(c) Influence of mainstream schooling**

Students had different opinions on whether mainstream schooling vs. attendance of special schools had an influence on their academic success and progress. Examples were cited of both historic groups of students either excelling or failing to cope. Many high performing individuals indeed in their perception came from special school environments. Overprotection of students at special schools, limited life exposure and the quality of the special school education system were, however, debated. At one of the institutions the majority of students came from a special school environment, as many of these schools fell within the feeding area of the institution. In this case life skills and orientation programmes offered by the HEI assisted greatly in their adaption to campus life.

Many students from mainstream school environments had the disadvantage of not knowing or being familiar with assistive device technology that is available and only get exposed to such when they approach the DUs.

Ultimately on the responses received, one cannot identify any conclusive trend in the perception of students on this aspect of the study. Individual personality and the availability of social support systems ultimately play a big role.

**(d) Influence of age of onset**



Again much debate occurred on whether the age of onset of the disability played any major role. In case of persons becoming disabled later in life some felt it was more difficult to cope as the person may still be grappling to come to terms with their disability and the resultant accommodation needs. If disabled from birth the person may be better adjusted and able to cope with his/her disability, since they have been disabled for a longer period of time, and so face the challenges of the tertiary environment better. Students felt that one's ability to adapt to changed environments was critical.

Again on the information received no conclusive trend in the answers could be identified. –

**(e) Visibility of DU and its services**

Most students were of opinion that the DUs on campus are not visible enough – get to know about services by chance especially if coming from mainstream schools. Many students did not have enough knowledge about the services offered by the DUs.

Visible vs. invisible disabilities could play a role. For example, staff can easily identify visible disabilities and assist during registration processes and others left to cope by themselves. Where disability not visible and student not aware of the DU, he/she will not be able to access their services. Some students only became aware of the DU in their later years of study.

DUs thus need to make a greater effort to be visible and publicise their services to the wider student community.

**(f) Common needs and services utilised by blind and visually impaired students and their comments**

Blind and visually impaired students indicated the following needs and/or commented on the services rendered currently by DUs:

- Material in alternative reading format (Braille and enlarged print) – common problems are experienced in this regard is time delays in receiving documentation and lecturers not providing material on time (vs. DU claims that often students hand in their material too late and then expect miracles)
- More accessible material from source as limited resources available (publishers etc must come on board)
- Total blind students: orientation on campus and independent movement requirements

- Partially sighted: Inadequate signage on campus and colour contrasted demarcation on steps etc, not sufficient
- Visual presentations on screen – PowerPoint presentations commonly used are not accessible, lecturers don't e-mail or post it as promised
- Access to JAWS, LAN, Zoom Text - dedicated computer room for students with disabilities most welcome, however, in some instances these computer rooms are not on the same level or standard of equipment and technical support as for other general computer rooms on campus. The latter are typically not accessible to students with disabilities
- Preference for computers – maybe personal laptops can rather be provided with wireless internet access?
- Some Universities lend them assistive devices or purchase with bursary funds
- Tests and exam – need extra time, facilities to go and write, accessible format of assessment
- Funding – in many cases limited level of support offered by DUs to access funding and bursaries
- One Institution does accept blind students (no Braille machine) seemingly there is an arrangement with other institutions to refer blind students to them.

**(g) Common needs and services utilised by students with mobility impairments and their comments**

Mobility impaired students expressed the following comments and needs:

- Computer needs and equipment: Adapted key boards and LAN
- Ramps in many cases do not provide easy access : typically longer routes to get to, and/or steeper gradient
- Volunteers/buddies to push the wheelchairs could be useful
- Fatigue – management have no idea how performance was impacted upon by infrastructure problems, for example, where a lift is broken and can't get to lecturing halls
- Need for timeous maintenance and urgent attention required is often misunderstood

- Getting from one place to the other in time for lectures often problematic as not all of campus is accessible. Also can't go back to residence between the classes and limited accessible facilities to wait in between
- DU in most cases has taken on a social context and has become a meeting place for students. Expressed need for DUs to create a separate space for that ("social" room). Such facilities will address an expressed need but could hamper integration and socialisation with other students
- Residences –on most campuses management makes 1 location accessible. From a cost perspective they understand that BUT limits their social integration, for example, can't visit friends at other facilities; Cost implications vs. Integration hampered
- Good practice feature at one institution – dedicated bus that commutes all day long and rostered according to students' need.

**(h) Limited accommodations provided for hearing impaired students**

Even though at many institutions Deaf or hearing impaired students were not participating in discussions held, students with other types of disabilities identified the situation of hearing impaired students to be inadequate and more disadvantageous than for other disabilities:

- Most HEIs do not cater for hearing impaired and students who are Deaf. In some instances they have a referral system or just deliberately exclude these students as they do not have the equipment to serve this group of students. For many students the exclusion of deaf students from HEIs was obvious.
- Students mainly come from mainstream schools or unique special schools if they offer standard Gr 12 and many rather enrolled at distance learning institutions.
- One emerging institution catering for Deaf and hearing impaired students was perceived to have a lot of success and integration – for example, pool of interpreters available. Some provide sign language interpreter – either in DU or in Department (for ex IT). Limited number of institutions provide induction loops –amplify sound for hearing aids.
- Deaf and hearing impaired students indicated that written communication can sometimes be a problem.

- Some try and cope within the system and don't come forward which impact on their academic performance. DU can't service these students if not aware of their disability.

### **Cognitive and psychosocial disabilities**

Students indicated that:

- They are not aware that the institutions are dealing with cognitive and psychosocial disabilities in a pro-active way and whether accommodation measures are available.
- Limited examples at the institutions were expressed– ex dyslexia use assistive devices like Dragon.
- It was felt issues were emerging incidentally and DUs not dealing with it in a calculated manner. Rather have a case management approach.

### **Comments on whether DUs service specific types of disabilities better**

Perceptions among students were that they were mostly treated the same. This link to the fact that only certain types of disabled were represented at that institution and comments were limited to those types of disabilities. Seemingly students don't even think about other types of disabilities, because those are not visible on their campuses. They did, however, mention the poor position that deaf and hearing impaired students find themselves in.

### **Application and registration procedures**

Many students commented about barriers faced in the application and registration process. Students face challenges in that, a gap exists between schools and universities and not enough awareness raising occurs on high school level to prepare them for tertiary education environment. Online application processes in many instances were found not to be user friendly.

In many instances students commented that they were not aware of the services offered by the DUs when they enrolled at the institution. This indicated a need for HEIs to publish information in their prospectus and websites must make people aware of the services offered, including during registration procedures.

No interface exists between broader administrative processes relating to enrolment and DU processes whereas the first profiling of students could and should already occur on registration.

Many students experienced registration processes as emotionally stressful and physically exhausting especially for mobility impaired students. The amount of mobility required during registration was problematic in that students, for example, must often move between offices to various persons for signatures, payment and the like. A central point of procedure must be established alternatively a person should be appointed to assist them to go around to the various points. In case of visible disabilities staff would approach students to assist but other non-visible disabilities get “lost” and must make their own way. Either friends or families had to assist them. Some students indicated that the choice of, or programmes and/or subjects enrolled for also proved to be problematic. They tend to make choices on the day of registration in the absence of proper vocational guidance. This shows some common experiences with students without disabilities.

### **Day to day campus life**

In relation to friends, experiences differ but the overall trend is that they have disabled and non-disabled friends. Some persons integrated and mixed with non-disabled friends and examples were cited of students being elected by the broader community on Student Council bodies. Others felt excluded and ostracized.

The participation levels in sport and social activities varied. Most students focus on lectures due to difficulties experienced or time spent at the DUs, for example, to collect their converted material. In many instances they felt they were not sufficiently aware of social events, especially visually impaired and blind students, as events were posted on notice boards only. Some cited examples are of being excluded from sports and sports events— especially if they live off-campus.

It was indicated that where a more active student body existed, more accessible student communication was forthcoming. Physical access barriers once again impacted on their inclusion and participation in social and sport events.

Students indicated that the respective DUs have become a social meeting place for students with disabilities and social networks often develop in this manner. Students spend a considerable amount of time at DUs to address their needs, for example, to pick up their material.

### **Student funding**

- Mixed process approach at the DUs – in some cases DUs assist at others left to student to approach finance department

- Most had governmental bursaries – in most cases not sufficient additional sources disability grant, parents (NAFAS)
- University managed the monies for tuition, etc
- Major problem is time delays in processing applications
- Other cases parents fund studies
- Link with corporate world and potential employers – very few has employer bursaries notwithstanding EE and BBBEE objectives – need better link and explore
- Personal needs not covered – care givers, for ex, for Quadriplegics (In the UK Care givers are paid for from an additional fund, Disability Student allowance (DSA) derived from two main sources NHS and SFE) Reasonable accommodation requirements

The most common examples cited by students were:

- physical access, ramps, parking
- JAWS
- Emergency procedures
- Extra time and venues for tests and exams.

The comments indicated that a very broad range of accommodation needs existed ranging from the built environment to assistive devices to issues such as extra exam time. The students indicated in many instances that the building of ramps where conducive to the current environment, does not necessarily meet students' needs and is often only a short term measure. Students were aware that areas concerning accommodation of hearing, psychosocial and cognitive disabilities are not being addressed. From the comments it was clear that a lot of research was required in relation to the latter needs.

### **Overall impression of DU services offered**

The overall impression is that the services offered by the DUs are well received by students and mostly positive comments were received about DUs (with some exceptions) Students reflect empathy towards the position that DU staff sometimes find themselves in acting as a buffer with faculty staff. The majority is appreciative what is done at their respective units. A lot of trust is involved and relationships are often formed with individual staff members within the DUs. Job

profiling and skills sets of DU staff must reflect this as they render services within a relationship context.

### **Possible measures of improvement identified by students**

Services offered vary from institution to institution. Those less established ones obviously need to broaden the scope of services more than the more long standing DUs. Students identified the following areas of possible improvement (listed in no specific order):

- Time delays on DoHET funding processes were unacceptable and created huge problems for students. For example, not allowed to register until funding is approved. More assistance is required in this regard;
- DUs should be more strategically placed within the institution recognizing the role it could play;
- The physical location of DUs was often inaccessible or reachable with difficulty and this needed to be addressed;
- Not all persons function the same as perceptions imply i.e. not a homogenous group and should not be treated as such. Individual needs must be realized;
- It was felt that it is not the person that must change all the time and that a reactive approach is often followed. In some instances the institution must also change and DUs must become more pro-actively involved in identifying and addressing issues.
- Staff resource needs must be addressed and appointments must be made on a permanent rather than a temporary basis;
- Better and more urgent attention must be paid to facility maintenance issues, for example, the fixing of lifts as a huge negative impact on students;
- Staff training and sensitisation must occur;
- It was felt that some DUs were part of committees and structures whilst others are still battling for their place within the respective institutions;
- Satellite campuses often don't cater for students. This is influenced by the mergers of institutions as part of reorganizing the tertiary landscape. Multi-campus site are influenced by inherited different units, staffing structures and policies which need to be addressed;

- The need for Sign Language interpreters was expressed;
- Tutors and mentors;
- Not all lecturers are responsive to their needs and much education still needs to be done;
- Students expressed a need for Inclusive Sport activities and opportunities;
- General awareness raising programmes could be offered or more often;
- An assessment of the different Faculties on what is in place was suggested;
- Students felt that services should reach across disability as per the international approach and that HEIs should not focus on some disabilities only;
- Specialist knowledge on different disabilities gained will prepare the HEI and DUs in particular to deal with issues arising in a more pro-active manner.

### **Perceptions and experiences relating to attitudes on campus**

Interestingly most indicated that they do not experience problems with other students without disabilities. Most DUs have awareness programmes or special disability events which have assisted greatly with creating acceptance with fellow staff.

However, some students did cite examples of derogatory treatment and exclusion. In limited case abuse and/or bullying were reported, for example, financial abuse of visually impaired where they were robbed of their monies or misuse of their study material. This may be an area for future study in order to determine how prevalent such behaviour is. The research instruments were not framed to detect or measure this and further work will be required in this regard. Concern was expressed in some cases mainly with the attitudes of senior management of the institutions. Some felt that management felt that they were “forced to cater for us” and thus did not embrace the inclusion of students with disabilities. The perception is that some members of management may fear transformation. The students also rejected an attitude that “we will decide what is right for you”.

The above findings for the three target groups are further discussed below in a combined format with reference to certain themes identified. Discussion points are raised based on the research team’s own experiences, local governmental policy frameworks and the outcomes of the literature review above. Some recommendations are made on areas of development. What follows below are not a prescriptive set of guidelines but some pointers to what are essential features of a DU and what seems to be working as per this research study. Some examples of best practice features are mentioned.



## 6 Thematic discussion and recommendations

### 6.1 Inclusivity within higher education

#### 6.1.1 Disability policies and strategies

##### 6.1.1.1 Summarised findings

- Most institutions do have some form of a policy dealing with disability. Policies are typically included in a single policy to cover both students and staff with disabilities. These documents mirror national policies relating to disability.
- In some instances these documents form part of the broader transformation agenda of the institution.
- In a limited number of cases a separate policy dealing with students only have been formulated.
- In many instances policies have been developed but have taken months if not years to be approved through management structures as formal institutional policies.
- Generally speaking these policies are not well known by staff and students and hence not effectively implemented.
- Quite a strong medical model is still used in implementation. This means that DUs are mainly looking at individual needs and not how to create an overall basic level of accessibility and support.

##### 6.1.1.2 Discussion

- Policies and strategies provide the framework within which institutions operate and thus it is important that it portrays a true reflection of commitment on all levels and those principles are adhered to in practice.
- The benefit of having a disability policy in place cannot be sufficiently emphasized, since it reflects and reinforces the ideology and ethos of the institution. Equally important is that it shapes the development of strategies and procedural guidelines for implementation of service design and delivery.

- It could be a sign of lack of senior management’s commitment that these policies in some cases have taken years to be approved or are still in draft format.
- Since service delivery to students with disabilities is a relatively new field in South African higher education institutions and while the study may demonstrate emerging good practice features (and not yet models) institutions appear in general to lack disability competencies and disability confidence necessary to produce sound policies. We may infer that weak policies results in weak practice as evidenced from the student data in the research.
- An erroneous perception seemingly exists among some HEIs that current legislation in South Africa does not create enforceable rights for students with disabilities. They thus steer away from institutional policies as they believe that these will create additional obligations for themselves with which they then need to comply. They also seemingly attempt to steer away from the financial implications attached to a disability inclusive approach. Fact is that many legally enforceable instruments are already in place in South Africa which students can use when their rights are being compromised as mentioned above. HEIs can thus not be complacent in their approach to disability issues as legal and disputes risks arise in relation to their non-compliance with statutory prescripts. As students become more aware of their rights the risks in this regard will increase.

#### **6.1.1.3 Recommendations**

- A possible recommendation to promote standards and adherence may be the formulation of a national disability policy and strategy framework for higher education institutions by relevant stakeholders which individual institutions may customise and adopt. This may also have the potential to serve as a benchmark to measure progress against should strategic goals aligned with short, medium and long term objectives be set. This is similar to the DPLG model for Local Government.
- Individual institutions should aim to put a comprehensive policy framework in place supported by procedural guidelines where lacking, and get approval where lagging somewhere in the bureaucratic system. The Heads of DUs should give input and, as subject experts, be allowed to present the policy to Council and Senate for their approval and/or buy-in.
- Policy development should adopt a participatory and inclusive approach.

- It is important that awareness is raised with staff and students on the content as well as broader interest groups such as parents. The DU should play an important advocacy role here.
- HEIs should ensure monitoring of the practical implementation and must performance manage compliance at an institutional and HR level. It could form part of a balance scorecard methodology, for example.

### **6.1.2 Managing diversity at HEIs**

#### **6.1.2.1 Summarised findings**

- In most cases the functions of the DU is largely meeting accessibility requirements of the built environment, converting information into alternative reading formats for distribution, facilitating student funding and arranging extra time for examinations.
- It is currently not part of the transformation agenda at all institutions (but is at others). Disability issues largely are managed as separate from other diversity and transformation imperatives.

#### **6.1.2.2 Discussion**

- Similar experiences exist in the whole of the tertiary environment in SA where a lot of focus has been placed on race and gender transformation with disability lagging behind. A human rights approach regarding this target group is not yet entrenched at HEIs.

#### **6.1.2.3 Recommendations**

- A strong recommendation is that a service delivery model needs to be built on the premise of human rights, universal access design and consumerism approaches. The literature review revealed that the trend in the developed world is to address disability as part of the broader diversity agenda. All students would be viewed as having some functional, learning and ability differences regardless of being disabled or not. Consequently from the design and usage of the built environment to the design and facilitation of course material student differences would be factored in. Consumerism requires that we recognise that the student is the consumer/client and that we align our service with the student/consumer's needs should we intend to remain a viable and sustainable entity. It is ironical that the key deliverable of higher education institutions is to produce intellectual growth. We require a

paradigm shift in the mindsets of these institutions and for their own intellectual growth to occur in disability integration.

- Disability inclusion should be taken into account at all levels and all departments and faculties should be on board. The disability agenda is to be entrenched in the way in which the institutions function as a whole.
- Examples exist at several UK institutions where manuals on every aspect of campus life have been drafted and made available to different target groups namely students, parents and institutional staff on different types of disabilities. This creates awareness, supports legal compliance and is indicative of inclusive management policies and practices.

### **6.1.3 The business case for inclusion of disability**

#### **6.1.3.1 Summarised findings**

- Seemingly very little focus and understanding of the business case for disability inclusion exist and very few participants even mentioned the possibilities arising in this regard. The financial viability and growth prospects are underestimated and it is mainly viewed as a cost item.
- Feelings of institutional obligations exist in some cases and implementation of measures, are also perceived as such by students rather than due to a value-add and a human rights approach and universal design for diversity management.
- Some of the long established DUs have started engaging with the corporate world in an effort to secure bursaries for students with disabilities with varying levels of success. Attempts are being made to penetrate the corporate world.

#### **6.1.3.2 Discussion**

- Internationally institutions more and more understand the business case and this drives institutional behavior towards addressing this “market” segment (disabled students). Traditionally the human rights approach would have been in conflict with consumerism. The former focusing on redressing human rights violations based on moral and social values held by society at a point in time, the latter focusing on economic profitability and financial viability. In the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century these seemingly opposing approaches became strange bed fellows. Society expects business to function with a moral conscience and profitability is combined with human rights adherence.

- We see the same pattern emerging with higher education institutions internationally. There is a strong movement to address historically disadvantaged student market/student sectors needs and bring them into the mainstream fold. The FOTIM research may still convey that SA institutions are stuck on the human rights approach only as the reason for addressing the disability market. The human rights approach merged with the business case rationale is still to be clearly understood, quantified, valued and projected.
- There are clear advantages however, for South African HEIs in that we can take from the best that is becoming apparent on the international scene and capitalise on the unique legislative approaches in South Africa. The literature review clearly demonstrates higher education institutions showcasing their disability service offerings in a manner that attracts disabled students. Accessible research techniques for postgraduate disabled students, provision of accessible sports, psychosocial and learning disabilities expertise are all examples of international institutions developing a competitive edge over other institutions and competing in the open student market.
- The disabled student population represents a growth area for SA institutions which is further reinforced by SA legislation like the Employment Equity Act, Skills development Act, Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment Act and the like. Forecast on national skills gaps, disability equity targets for business and incentivising business to meet their BBBEE score card goals are major opportunities for SA higher education institutions and design service delivery that attracts, cultivates and provides talent to South African business. South African institutions can play a major role in mobilising the disability sector to participate and contribute in the South African Economy and society in general. Furthermore, tapping into the dedicated funding provided by the Department of Higher Education and increasingly from the private business sector reduces the financial obligation in catering for the disabled students market.
- Within the broader South African economic context, high rates of unemployment and resource constraints a combined approach and cooperation between corporates, HEIs and students with disabilities are required to successfully mainstream students and ultimately employees with disabilities.

#### **6.1.3.3 Recommendations**

- A key recommendation is for SA higher education institutions to develop a sound business case based on quantitative research that demonstrates the business value of addressing the

disability student market. The DUs would need to become drivers in the promotion of this initiative and herein lies another specialisation to their multifaceted role.

- HEIs should create a consumer-driven, individualised support system that has some financial benefits for the institutions rather than just perceiving disability mainstreaming as a costly expense. The possibility exists for HEIs to secure guaranteed funds from Government and corporate bursaries and to create new areas for centre of excellence. HEIs thus, should cultivate social and economic inclusivity.
- Broader awareness and advisory campaigns targeting the corporate world can assist DUs in offering services to corporates and thus potential employers. This in turn can lead to increased funding in the form of bursaries and assist with future employment placement of students on completion of their degrees. Employers are also at varying degrees of sophistication in dealing with disability matters in the workplace and need to be convinced of the business case for disability inclusion.

## **6.2 Student demographics and defining the target group**

### **6.2.1 Student profile**

#### **6.2.1.1 Summarised findings**

- A lack of accurate data on the number of students studying at HEIs and little interaction between the data kept by DUs and registration data were an obvious shortfall that the project highlighted.
- This in turn means that there is currently no accurate data available on the prevalence of disability within the higher education student population in South Africa. The representivity levels of students with disabilities in relation to the national demographics practically cannot be established at this point in time.
- On the data that was available, less than 1% of the total student population at the participating institutions made use of the DUs services.
- DUs serve mostly people with physical and sight disabilities. Very few have ventured into serving other types of disabilities. Few examples exist where DUs are addressing the needs of deaf students, and in limited cases HEIs are starting to develop the capacity to deal with

psychosocial and cognitive disabilities. This development is mainly at the institutions where the DU is long standing and entrenched in the institutional culture.

- At some HEIs a conscious decision has been taken to cater only for certain types of disability in order that they can cope with service provision and resource requirements. Some referral arrangements seemingly also have been made between some institutions
- Another important finding is that students choose not to disclose their status or wait until they experience problems impacting on their academic progress and then only come forward.
- From the available data there was a good spread of students across faculties meaning that students are accessing and enrolling for various types of courses and degrees.

#### **6.2.1.2 Discussion**

- Less than 1% of students at the institutions make use of the DU services. If this figure is assumed to be indicative of representivity levels of disability within the tertiary sector, this is much less than the estimated 6 – 10% of the South African population that is disabled. Various factors which do not form the subject of this discussion can explain the big discrepancy in student enrolment vs. national demographics. This is a worrying indication of student participation and much need to be done to increase and retain students with disabilities at HEIs.
- The above point can also be viewed as an opportunity for growth for DU's to increase their client base by attracting more students with disabilities. This is providing that the disabled student population reflects the same average percentage distribution 6 - 10% as the general disability population within the total SA population
- The fact that services are limited to certain types of disability is problematic. HEIs open themselves up for possible dispute and legal challenge and this is not good practice. We already see evidence of this in the literature review. In the USA, Princeton University for example is faced with a law suit regarding the alleged violation of a disabled student's right to additional exam time. We can infer that as SA students with disabilities become more aware of their human rights and more empowered to assert themselves, similar litigations could become common place in our country. Examples of this are already evident in the SA employment world.

- Regional collaboration to serve all types of disabilities needs could be a way to assist to address as per White Paper but how it is implemented must be looked at carefully. It does not take away the individual obligation of institutions to become accessible centers of learning. Selective integration as above is perpetuating a “special schools” system and creating centres of excellence for a specific type of disability could be a short term measure. More research is, however, required on the prejudice suffered because of this and the need for an integrated approach at all institutions.
- The fact that many universities serve mainly visual and mobility impaired students may also partly be attributed to the fact that these groups of students readily present themselves for service delivery in terms of needs which can be met in a logical way - removing physical barriers, providing Braille, for example. Addressing the needs of students with other disabilities takes us into areas of greater uncertainty, less clarity, reduced disclosure, etc. Further research and international networking may contribute to the better defining of these needs and services. Many of the DUs reported more and more students with learning disabilities requesting assistance and that services for these students need more development
- The low rate of self-disclosure is in line with international trends where students don't always come forward either because they themselves unaware of their status or of accommodation possibilities. Others want to avoid being labeled within the tertiary environment as having “special” needs.
- Based on the spread of students across faculties and degrees the possibility exists that this generation can penetrate the employment world by entering non-traditional jobs. This may have a positive impact on workplace representivity levels in South Africa. HEIs can play a critical role in ensuring that students are prepared and empowered to access such non-traditional jobs. This development also has major implications for curricula design – for example, to ensure that these students are included in practicals and exercises where otherwise in the past they would have been excluded. The demand for inclusivity and career driven choices is becoming more evident now, and will grow in the future.

#### **6.2.1.3 Recommendations**

- It is recommended that the tertiary sector should conduct a proper prevalence study within the higher education sector probably driven by the Council on Higher Education. Bodies such



as HEDSA could play an important role (as FOTIM winding-down its activities). This will provide base line data on the representivity in relation to the student population as a whole, and serve could to inform future developments. Issues concerning the definition of disability as set out below needs to be addressed.

- On institutional level awareness raising is an important component to ensure that more students disclose their status. DUs should play a more visible role here and must link with general registration processes and disclosures on enrolment. Proper institutional data should be kept.
- HEIs should look holistically and pro-actively how they can provide services to ALL types of disabilities. Further research and international networking may contribute to the better defining of the needs and services and how these can be addressed.

## 6.2.2 Defining disability

### 6.2.2.1 Summarised findings

- HEIs currently utilise different ways of defining disability and there is no one integrated way in which the different DUs define their target group. Some still use the outdated medical model of dealing with disability. Others utilise the definition as contained in the EEA. In one instance the EEA definition was adapted to reflect an educational rather than a workplace context. Verification processes are in most cases through medical examination by a medical doctor with the focus on the impairment of the student. Most services currently offered by DUs are also geared towards managing activity limitations.
- There is an impairment specific focus rather than applying universal design principles and recognising the role, environmental and attitudinal barriers play. 'Lip service' is paid to the social model but this is not entrenched in the practical implementation of measures. Although some medical verification is and will be required, the focus is too much on the individual impairment and the individual having to adapt to the environment.

### 6.2.2.2 Discussion

- Major objections exist against exclusive use of the medical model. This approach is long outdated and unacceptable to the disability rights movement and also out of line with long standing international legislative and best practice models as well as SA governmental policy documents as set out in the Literature Review above. SA, for example, is also a signatory of

the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities which support a social model and places obligations on member countries to comply with this fundamental principle

- The EEA definition can also not be used “as is” as it was designed for the workplace and has its own inherent limitations. It still needs to be determined, to what extent the social model is practiced and enforced in the workplace.

### 6.2.2.3 Recommendations

- HEIs need to move away from impairment assessment towards a true social model of a universal design approach to dealing with disability. They should attempt to understand the interaction of the environment with impairment needs and the individual. In some cases the institution rather than the individual will need to adapt.
- The sector needs to debate and come up with a suitable definition to be utilised. Many more persons have specific activity ‘difficulty’ rather than being ‘disabled’. One possible approach for exploration is the Washington short set of questions: For example: Do you have difficulty .....Seeing, hearing, walking and climbing steps, remembering and concentrating, communicating, self care and upper body mobility, learning..... and Do you have difficulties because of ....anxiety, depression, pain or fatigue.
- Students may cope with and without assistance or devices and personalised needs must be addressed in consultation with them.
- Another perspective which needs to be factored into the recommendations is that we may not be able to move away completely from the medical model even with an activity based definition simply because we are looking at physiological and psychological conditions representing functions of the body. These conditions would need to be verified and their degree of impact on manifested behaviour. The medical specialisations are primarily equipped with the competency to do this. It may be that the influence of the medical model requires to be managed within a broader picture of other assessment approaches. Perhaps what we should be looking at is an eclectic approach, i.e. multifaceted and which looks at the functional difference on how students access, perform and deliver on the learning experience. These functional differences may fall within the range of easily corrected interventions or special correction interventions thus depicting the continuum of diversity in functioning across students, again reinforcing a diversity agenda for service delivery at HEIs.

## 6.3 Disability Units at SA tertiary institutions

### 6.3.1 Location and structural placement

#### 6.3.1.1 Summarised findings

- The following findings apply in this context:
  - DUs are often situated in an inaccessible physical place although some excellent examples exist of dedicated buildings/offices. It ranges from small temporary offices to some well established facilities with good space allocation;
  - Different structures exist between institutions and even for different campuses at the same university. This situation has been exacerbated by the most recent mergers among the higher education institutions;
  - Staffing range from a single disability officer through to large staff complements with diverse skills. Staff is often appointed on a temporary basis with poor security of tenure. In some instances the DUs are also heavily reliant on voluntary support.
  - Often consumed (swallowed up) by other unit – e.g. student careers and counselling unit. DU coordinator reports to for example careers and counselling director and then to deputy VC (or similar).

#### 6.3.1.2 Discussion

- Physical inaccessibility is problematic and needs to be addressed. The nature and range of services would determine the physical layout and design of the built environment. A campus blue print similar to a franchise model may go a long way to promote consistency and quality of standards, similar to major corporate Banks in its retail branch design. This branding approach is not uncommon in a tertiary environment as facilities of one campus bare strong resemblance to campuses at other institutions. DU services could be equally duplicated across multi-campus sites. This could ultimately have the benefit of contributing to efficiency in usage and effectiveness of delivery of the Disability Unit concept.

#### 6.3.1.3 Recommendations

- From the findings it is argued that there is a need for a special unit dedicated to disability matters. The South African society and tertiary sector is not ready for total faculty

integration, although that would be the final aim, and is indeed still in transition probably for another couple of years. A dedicated and physically accessible unit should be established at all tertiary institutions and such DU should not necessarily form part of another major unit. Different models exist locally and internationally where the disability support functions as independent units or within broader structures commonly the student counseling and support units.

- HEIs should support a permanent structure of posts and security of tenure.

## **6.3.2 Roles and responsibilities of the Disability Units**

### **6.3.2.1 Summarised findings**

- Functions vary greatly between the different DUs and different levels of sophistication exist in service rendering. Typically the longer the unit has been in existence the broader the scope of services offered. Common tasks /responsibilities (though not all are offered at all the institutions) include:
  - policy development;
  - awareness raising ;
  - auditing physical accessibility and assisting when access issues arise ;
  - provision and maintenance of assistive devices and equipment ;
  - dedicated LAN and Computer Room for use by students with disabilities ;
  - changing material into accessible format ;
  - academic support;
  - personal support;
  - negotiations when conflicts arise (e.g. inaccessible lecture rooms);
  - sorting out extra time for exams and tests;
  - assist with applications for governmental bursaries and grants;
  - provision of specialist services example sign language interpreter, therapists, subject tutors etc;

- accessible social hub for students to interact and socialize.
- Long standing units including distance based institutions of learning have made major progress in the last couple of years and offer a wide range of services to students.
- The DU typically tends to respond to 'passing traffic' rather than have a coordinated linkup with the registration office of the institution. Students with disabilities typically also approach the DU and not vice versa with the result that services are mostly reactive in nature. Some students report to the DU office when enrolling but the larger number only approach the DUs later in the academic year when they are experiencing problems impacting on their academic progress and performance. Many are unaware of the existence of the DU at their time of enrolment with the institutions, and this ignorance in some cases extends into later years of accessing services.
- In many instances DUs are still playing a pioneering role although there are some excellent examples of well established and long standing units. In many cases units saw the light through the dedication and commitment of a single individual who managed to get buy-in from senior management to support the forming of the unit.
- DUs further act as diversity champions and change agents but in many cases still face resistance from management and some faculty staff members. The lack of commitment and/or prioritisation of the disability agenda is displayed either overtly in some cases (for example, through a lack of dedicated funds) but often in a more discreet way (for example, delays in acceptance of disability policies as formal institutional documents).
- DU staff, as demonstrated by the research outcomes, possesses a wide range of qualifications and not necessarily competencies specific to service delivery for students with disabilities. These skills are largely acquired on the job and through subsequent education and training in some cases.

#### **6.3.2.2 Discussion**

- This research together with the literature review show that there are common tasks executed by the DU staff across institutions and that this is multi faceted in nature. This allows for the opportunity to engage in a human resource exercise of developing fairly precise job profiles from leadership to entry level functions for the DU. We appear to be now at a point where we can identify and define the attitudinal, knowledge and skill

competencies required to meet the demands of the DU functions. This may be an important juncture and development as it allows for the design and initiation of other human resource processes and systems to be integrated including selection, development and performance management specific to these roles. In this way the profession is formalised which has the potential to serve as another quality measure in the delivery of services of the DU. The research and literature review also allow for the formulation of a list of services that could, and indeed should, be offered by DUs in South Africa.

### **6.3.2.3 Recommendations**

- From the above list of common tasks one can already start formulating a common service delivery model for South African institutions. As DUs progress they can start expanding on the scope and nature of the services currently offered by them. DUs must move beyond a reactive to a pro-active approach of dealing with disability matters on campus. They should ensure that sufficient awareness is created about their services very early in the study cycle to ensure that the maximum number of students benefit from their interventions. A holistic institutional approach is advised where areas such as DU initiatives, registration processes and faculty activities are combined and linked with each other to offer an integrated experience for students with disabilities.
- DUs and students should move away from a “technology fix all” mentality to interrogation of learning and teaching methodologies as further discussed below.
- To support the above expansions and progressions DUs will have to act as change agents and achieve buy-in on a high level, amongst other, for the business case for disability inclusion and universal design principles.
- Institutions like HEDSA can play an important collaborative role in the above regard whereby models and guidelines can be developed as blue prints for the sector.

### **6.3.3 Effectiveness of the DU services**

#### **6.3.3.1 Summarised findings**

- Interestingly students report many unmet needs, but still rate DUs services as satisfactory and adequate. Much appreciation seems to exist amongst students in most cases for the work done by the DUs and overall positive responses were received. This is not withstanding

that minimal accountability exist through performance appraisals of DU staff or other institutional staff against delivery on the disability agenda.

- Funding of the activities of the DUs vary considerably. Only in a limited number of instances does the DU have its own budget and financial planning processes and mostly these processes are consumed in bigger departmental budgets. In some cases DUs only receive ad hoc assistance from the institution and is highly dependent upon external fundraising activities. Again the lack of secured funding could be indicative of the importance put on the disability agenda at the various institutions.
- At most institutions DU representatives as well as students with disabilities sit on various liaison committees, which is helpful to address operational services delivery issues. A broader consultative approach and disability representation on strategic decision making and/or transformation committees are, however, limited. Where they do exist these interactions are useful for interface between disabled students, staff and non-disabled students;
- Some debate is seemingly going on in HEIs as to the responsibility of the various parties to pay for perceived “personal” rather than academic need items of students with disabilities. Questions exist about the scope of obligation placed on institutions to incur costs incurred outside of the traditionally perceived study process.

#### **6.3.3.2 Discussion**

- Mostly positive experiences, with some exceptions, were reported by students but from the available data and lack of performance management measurables, ratings and strategic deliverables at DUs it is difficult to objectively assess the performance of DUs and its staff members against their mandate. Many students themselves in some respects are unsophisticated and accept certain things as unchangeable or acceptable, which is not necessarily the case. When measuring success the focus is also still on the correction of the medical impairment rather than on the removal of institutional barriers. In order to fulfill their mandate DUs need allocated funding and budget processes. Broader representation and consultation with students with disabilities are required within the DU context and broader institutional involvement to ensure effective service delivery that addresses student needs.

- Several international institutions seemingly provide for a disability allowance for non-academic but personal needs that impact on students' academic performance. It is important to note that formal recognition is given to these areas of needs and dedicated funds are provided. Certain criteria exist for allocation and legibility. The FOTIM research showed that the current governmental funding is not adequate since students paid personally to address the needs that the disability allowance cover in other countries. The debate with respect to what is personal and academic and what should be paid for and provided by the DU and the funding scheme is weakened by these international developments. The trend for payment of a dedicated disability allowance is a practice that is in place in the developed world and can be seen as a good practice feature to be adopted in the future.
- It is advised that DUs should establish international networking and collaboration opportunities to broaden their experiences and draw on practical examples of service delivery.

#### **6.3.3.3 Recommendations**

- HEIs should implement some balance score card methodology to measure delivery of the DU staff and other staff on the disability mandate as per accepted local and international human resource practice. Performance should be measured against agreed objectives and deliverables.
- Proper funding, budgeting processes and commitment from senior management in the allocation of funding need to be secured.

### **6.4 Universal access and design**

#### **6.4.1.1 Summarised findings**

Three main areas impacting on service delivery were identified:

- **Physical infra-structure and facilities**
  - Many problems remain on campuses relating to the physical accessibility of buildings and facilities. Much discrepancy exists in multi-campus environments. In some cases much money has seemingly been spent in an attempt to improve campus access. No one institution did indicate that physical infra-structure barriers do not play a negative role in the experiences of students on campus. Students



themselves cited various examples of environmental barriers impacting on their performance.

- Some debate exists concerning the balancing of expressed infra-structure needs against the preservation of old buildings. Most HEIs indicated that the needs of students with disabilities are actively considered when designing and building new infra-structure.
- A feature specific to residences, was the tendency to only make 1 or 2 facilities accessible and that all students with impairments are placed there.
- **Technology and assistive devices**
  - In some cases especially at long standing DUs, state of the art technology and equipment are available to students. At other DUs there is a lack of devices and equipment which impacts on their service delivery either in scope or quality. In many cases equipment and devices cater for visual and mobility impairments only. Deaf students are catered for by a small number of DUs and very few have started to address psychosocial and cognitive disabilities of students.
- **Lecturing and learning processes and methodologies**
  - The focus of service offerings at South African tertiary institutions is mainly on addressing impairments by means of technology and assistive devices. The influence of the medical model is once again felt whereby the student must adapt to the environment. Very little attention is paid to universal design principles in lecturing and learning processes and methodologies.

#### **6.4.1.2 Discussion**

- The physical infra-structure, or rather the lack of access to such facilities, remains a major barrier especially on older campuses. In this regard the value of architecture and preserving history must be balanced with service delivery needs of students with disabilities. It is imperative that institutions must make their environments accessible as far as reasonably possible. Case law developments indicate an enforceable right to equal access. Where adaptation is not possible comparative satellite services need to be rendered in order to ensure full enjoyment of the study cycle by all students. Experience show that modifications

of the built environment ultimately benefit a much bigger group of people other than just people with disabilities.

- Interestingly in some instances, a reasonable accommodation, although addressing one need, can in itself become a barrier. For example, special residences are being created that meet the access needs of students but because of segregation it restricts the mobility and social interaction of students. This cannot therefore be a long term solution.
- A good practice feature for mobility impaired students related to transport barriers emerged at one of the institutions where a dedicated bus and driver have been allocated. This mode of transport is available all day long according to a worked-out roster.
- Universal Design is a framework for the design of places, things, information, communication and policy to be usable by the widest range of people operating in the widest range of situations without special or separate design. Most simply, Universal Design is the human-centered design of everything with everyone in mind. It is possible for a place to be physically accessible while the activities taking place there or the attitudes of those employed/studying there remain grossly exclusionary. Both attitudinal and environmental barriers must be addressed. As mentioned above a need exists to move away from impairment assessment towards a social model of dealing with disability. Institutions must attempt to better understand the interaction of the environment with impairment needs and the individual. Gaining access especially to a career of choice is as fundamental as being able to participate equitably in the process of teaching and learning and having a fair chance to succeed.
- Very few SA institutions have started to understand and/or put measures in place to ensure integrated learning and education methodologies and processes. DUs should move beyond the built environment, technology and assistive devices to interrogate the learning and teaching methodologies at their institutions. More awareness should be created with faculty staff about disability issues and how to respond appropriately to the needs of students, and the imperative to incorporate concepts of universal design into faculty instruction and curricula that ultimately benefit ALL students in their learning process as per the international developments highlighted in the literature review.

#### 6.4.1.3 Recommendations

- Proper physical access audits of campuses are advisable which will assist in putting appropriate short, medium and long term objectives in place to address the many environmental barriers that do exist. Dedicated funding will have to be allocated by HEIs in this regard.
- DUs and institutions should move away from a “technologies fix all” mentality to interrogation of learning and teaching methodologies as per internationally progressive models. DUs cannot continue addressing the issues arising with “special” support programmes and assistive devices. Rather it is the various ways of thinking about teaching and learning from methods and materials to assessment instruments and physical environment which demand examination. Progressive DUs must go beyond mere support to pro-active intervention and being institutional change agents in this regard.
- HEIs should incorporate concepts of universal design into faculty instruction and curricula that ultimately benefit ALL students in their learning process. It is an educational approach for instructing all students through developing flexible classroom materials, using various technology tools, varying the delivery of information and/or adapting assessment methodologies.
- Cognitive and psychosocial type of disabilities should be addressed, for example, through the provision of psychologist and counseling services and/or appropriate teaching methodologies. Math’s support for visually impaired students at one of the HEIs is a good example to open up new career opportunities for students with disabilities.
- Once again organizations like HEDSA can play a major role in doing research and bringing applicable material from overseas on the issues raised above to inform development locally. Collaboration between the various institutions is critical and can greatly assist in the sector developing a best practice model of disability inclusion.

## 7 Way forward

Following consultations with various DU representatives of the different HEIs the following way forward is recommended:

- As this report contains important information on the functioning of DUs at different HEIs, it is imperative that the report be distributed to as many role players as possible and that people be made aware of its content;
- FOTIM, as section 21 organization, will be disbanded in the first quarter of 2011. The impetus of this Project needs to be maintained and the findings and recommendations taken forward regardless of its closure. It is proposed that FOTIM should recommend to the Ford Foundation, who provided the funding for the research, to support HEDSA in taking the findings forward and implementing the sectoral wide recommendations;
- Within HEDSA urgency has arisen for the HEIs on a national basis to commit to its operations and to finalise their membership applications. A national specialist body is required to act on disability issues within the tertiary sector. HEDSA could provide advocacy services, could support DUs in their daily operations with appropriate advice and can act as spokesperson at the Department of Higher Education. In order to fulfill these objectives it should be supported by all the HEIs. HEDSA as an emerging authority should be legitimised by the Department of Higher Education and the HEIs in order for it to become an authoritative body in the sector.
- HEDSA can further drive the process in cooperation with other role players to develop the proposed national policy framework (incorporating strategic objectives), the development of a model for DU operations as well as job profiles and competency requirements for staff;
- The role of disability coordinators and other support functions need to be profiled and appropriate competency requirements identified. These roles need to be professionalized and appropriate training programmes put in place. Accreditation of professional staff should take place via some national body. Potentially this could be another role for HEDSA to fulfill;
- The sector needs to obtain the commitment and buy-in from the DoHET as well as CHE. Although both have expressed their interest and commitment, they have a very important role in ensuring and enforcing disability integration in the sector;

- The DoHET, for example, must explore appropriate funding mechanism to assist HEIs in accommodating and integrating students with disabilities. Due to resource constraints many HEIs need financial assistance and/or incentives for it to implement the proposals set out in this report. For example, a “per capita” contribution for each student with a disability could be considered by the DoHET. Much could be learnt from the international experience in this regard where governments provide funding to students but also to institutions. Monetary incentives are awarded to HEIs who have attracted more students with disabilities, who have successfully enabled students in completing their degrees and/or who conducts research in the area of disability. Ultimately the financial reward for disability integration should filter through to individual lecturing and/or DU staff who fulfill their mandate in this regard. The payment of a so-called student allowance to individuals to cover incidental needs and its linkage to grants available under the current social grant system is an area which requires further investigation. A funding model needs to be developed and the DoHET will need to play a critical part in this;
- The sector needs to further engage with the DoHET on matters arising and build on discussions that have already taken place. A common understanding of the issues faced by the sector and the guidance and assistance required from the DoHET must be established.
- An erroneous perception seemingly exists among some HEIs that current legislation does not create enforceable rights for students with disabilities. Fact is that many legally enforceable instruments are already in place in South Africa which students can use when their rights are being compromised. Based on the international experience a specific anti-discrimination act can, however, raise the profile of disability issues and bring it more to the fore as a compliance imperative. A specific section dealing with education is advisable as per international developments. It is suggested that role players should advocate and lobby for this possibility as it will bring clarity and guidance on how to deal with issues arising;
- A definition of “disability” must be consulted on, developed and agreed to, in the sector. This will ensure consistent and fair treatment of students and provide a consistent basis against which to assess disability integration at the various institutions. A social model of defining disability should be favoured, even though some elements of a medical approach will remain in order to assess a student’s functional impairment. Some students will access learning in the conventional manner whilst other students will need reasonable accommodation measures to be put in place.

- The sector needs to embark upon appropriate data collection processes. As a first step, a national disability profiling project needs to be conducted following agreement on the definition of “disability”.
- It is suggested that data be collected thereafter on regular intervals, first, on the number of students with disabilities enrolled at HEIs in South Africa as well as their retention and progression and, second, on the number of students with disabilities making use of the services of DUs at these institutions. Each of these recording systems serves their own purpose but ultimately give a holistic picture of what is happening within the sector relating to disability. These two sets of data will indicate the overall representivity of students with disabilities, will indicate access, retention and progression of these students, will indicate reasonable accommodation needs, and will justify and substantiate the need for a specialized unit offering services to students with disabilities in future. Users of the DU’s and Disabled Enrolment information should be kept and made available. In both cases some verification of disability status needs to occur.
- The DUs should agree on the quality and standardised service offerings and delivery to be provided to students with disabilities and a service delivery model should be developed by role players. Individual organizations can customise this model when reviewing its current DU operations or when establishing a new unit;
- Future service offerings should address all types of disabilities. Psychosocial and emotional disabilities, for example, were an area identified for future research and guidance;
- DUs should further investigate and promote the business case for disability inclusion at their institutions and should provide proof in terms of the beneficial monetary and diversity impact value for the institution. The value of the interaction between students with and without disabilities and the enhancement it could bring must also not be under estimated;
- HEIs should embark upon broader and more visible awareness campaigns. Currently much of the awareness raising is events based whereas broader ongoing measures need to be implemented. DUs should re-energise their awareness and advocacy function. This also includes interventions for students with disabilities to instill in them a work ethic and a results and performance approach;
- Compulsory skills based training must be offered at HEIs for lecturers to ensure the implementation of universal design principles in teaching processes and methodologies.

Due to the nature and cost implications of the above, a phased-in approach is advisable. The sector needs to agree on appropriate time frames, goals and enforcement mechanisms. Once again HEDSA together with the DoE seem to be the most appropriate convenor and driver of the process.

Ultimately the commitment from the various HEIs will determine whether or not disability inclusion remains a nice theoretical term or whether it becomes a reality in the lives of millions of students with disabilities wanting and expecting to study in South Africa at tertiary institutions.

## 8 Closing remarks

The above chapters set out the findings of the Disability in Higher Education project conducted on behalf of FOTIM by Disability Management Services. From an international and local perspective it is clear that the disability agenda needs to be entrenched in the way in which the HEIs function as a whole. Disability inclusion should namely be taken into account at all levels and in all departments and faculties within HEIs.

The South African society and tertiary sector, however, does not appear to be ready yet for total faculty integration, although that would be the final aim, and is indeed still in transition. DUs at tertiary institutions in South Africa thus have an important role to play in ensuring the inclusion and mainstreaming of students with disabilities within the sector and achieving the desired integrated approach.

Current functions vary greatly between the DUs operating at the different HEIs and different levels of sophistication exist in service rendering. Most still have a “technology fixes all” mentality and DUs and institutions should move beyond towards an interrogation of learning and teaching methodologies at their institutions as per internationally progressive models.

A common future service delivery model needs to be developed by role players in the tertiary sector to support DUs functioning and effectiveness. This model needs to be built on the premise of human rights, universal access design and consumerism approaches. The development of a National policy framework with strategic objectives is an imperative. This study intends to support the sector in finding its way towards making disability inclusion a priority objective and through its findings and recommendations provide evidence and practical considerations for implementation. .



## Glossary of terms

CHE Council for Higher Education

DU Disability Unit

HEI Higher Education Institution

DoHET Department of Higher Education and Training

DoL Department of Labour

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## Annexure A – D – Data Collection Instruments

### Questionnaire for Students with Disabilities

#### Introduction

Explain the aim of the project and the purpose for which the information gathered will be used. Ensure that they have provided consent either verbally on tape or a written signed consent. Make sure that the respondent understands that they do not need to answer a question if they do not want to and that they can end the interview at any time if they feel uncomfortable.

#### Institutional information

A. Interviewer to note:

1. Name of Institution:
2. Date of interview:
3. Name of interviewer:
4. Length of interview (approximate if not timed):
5. Mode of interviewing: 1 = telephone 2 = receive whilst on site visit
6. Type of interview: 1 = student

#### Demographical information

B. I'm going to ask you some background questions to start off with.

1. Your name:
2. Your age?
3. Your gender?
4. What population group are you from
5. What was your language of education at school?
6. Year of study?
7. Course studying?
8. How many years have you spent at university so far?
9. What is your disability? \_\_\_\_\_
10. What was the age of onset of the disability? (i.e. at birth or later in life) \_\_\_\_\_ years

11. What type of school did you attend prior to registering at the Institution? (i.e. mainstream or 'special')
12. What are your main educational needs at [NAME OF INSTITUTION] related to your disability? \_\_\_\_\_

### Questionnaire

- C. Let's discuss your experiences so far at this institution as a student. When answering think about all aspects of being a student – applying to study, registration, everyday lectures and tutorials, exams, attitudes of staff and non-disabled students, access to facilities etc. If you are thinking about a particular aspect tell me what you are thinking about.

Questions and standard responses	Notes on open ended responses
<b>General needs and services</b>	
1. What are your needs as a student with a disability? List and explain	
2. Do you have all the resources necessary to meet your study needs? Explain 1 = yes always; 2 = yes, sometimes; 3 = no.	
3. What services should be offered by the Institution and/or the Disability Unit to students with disabilities? List and explain for your disability specifically and more broadly for other types of disabilities	
4. Which services are currently delivered and which are not? List and explain	
5. How adequately do these services address your needs? Explain 1 = very adequately; 2 = adequately; 3 = inadequately; 4 = very inadequately.	

6. How do you finance your studies? Does the institution provide any financial assistance? Explain	
<b>Disability Units and/or designated resources</b>	
7. Do you have easy access to the Student Disability Unit (if any)? Or other similar designated person at the Institution? Explain 1 = very easy access;	

2 = reasonable access; 3 = poor access; 4 = very poor access.	
8. Is there a sufficient number of staff in the Unit to meet student needs timeously in your opinion (if any)? Explain 1 = yes always; 2 = yes, sometimes; 3= no	
9. Should persons with disabilities be employed in the Disability Unit (if any)? Explain 1 = yes; 2 = no; 3 = not sure/don't know	
10. Does the staff in the Unit/designated person demonstrate a good understanding of disability issues and student needs? Explain 1 = yes always; 2 = Yes, sometimes; 3= No	
11. What competencies should the staff/person have? List and explain	
12. Where are the current gaps in staff competencies in your opinion? List and explain	
13. Does the Disability Unit have the resources to address your needs e.g. budget, facilities, equipment etc (if any)? Explain 1 = yes, always; 2= yes, sometimes; 3 = no	
14. What role do the students play in the functioning of the Unit?	
15. What role do the students play in their own functioning and ability to be effective and to ensure their inclusion?	
<b>Physical infra-structure, technology and assistive devices</b>	
16. Is the campus environment accessible i.e. residential accommodation, indoors and out	

<p>door facilities etc? List the gaps and explain</p> <p>1 = most of the buildings;  2 = yes but only some of the buildings;  3 = no, none are accessible</p>	
<p>17. Is special technology or assistive devices available to meet the needs of students with disabilities? Explain. List the gaps if any</p>	
<b>Staff</b>	
<p>18. Are teaching and administrative staff adequately equipped and trained to deal with students with disabilities? Explain</p> <p>1 – yes always;  2 = yes sometimes;  3 = no</p> <p>Explain</p>	
<p>19. Do you experience any attitudinal barriers within the Institution? Explain</p> <p>1 – yes always;  2 = yes sometimes;  3 = no</p>	
<b>Reasonable accommodation</b>	
<p>20. How adequate are the reasonable accommodations that are provided to individual students with disabilities? Explain and cite examples</p> <p>1 = yes always;  2 = yes sometimes;  3 = never</p>	
<b>Integration and non-disabled students</b>	
<p>21. Do non-disabled students integrate freely with students with disabilities? Where are the barriers to integration?</p> <p>1 = yes always;  2 = yes sometimes;  3 = never.</p>	
<p>22. Do non-disabled students offer assistance when required? Explain</p> <p>1 = yes always;  2 = yes sometimes;  3 = never</p>	
<p>23. Do you have more non-disabled friends than disabled friends on</p>	

campus? Explain 1 = yes; 2 = no	
<b>Integration</b>	
24. Could the Institution do more to support the integration of students? Explain 1 = Yes definitely; 2 = yes maybe; 3 = no	
25. Do students with disabilities participate equally in sports, cultural and social events on campus? Explain 1 = yes most of the time; 2 = yes but only sometimes; 3 = never	
26. Are there disability specific structures, events etc on campus targeting only students with disabilities? Are these beneficial to students with disabilities? List and explain 1 = yes; 2 = no; 3 = not sure/don't know	

# Student Focus Group Guideline

## Introduction

Hello and welcome to this focus group discussion. You have all agreed to participate in this focus group discussion and each of you should have signed the consent form as well. Before we start let me set a few ground rules for the discussion.

1. There are no right or wrong answers. We are interested in getting your completely honest views, experiences and insights on the role and functioning of the disability unit within this university and/or your experiences within the institutions. We want to understand barriers experienced by you, if any, accommodation needs and possible ways of addressing perceived shortfalls, if any.
2. The choice of whether to participate or not, is yours alone. However, we would really appreciate it if you do share your thoughts with us through participating in the group discussion.
3. We guarantee confidentiality of the information whereby we will not link any information from this group to any of your names in any reporting we do. We cannot, however, guarantee full confidentiality of the information as we cannot ensure that no one in this group will repeat what any of you said in the group. Please do not divulge any of the personal information provided by participants to people outside of the group. We would like to ask that if you do discuss the group discussion later, please do not link anything you say to any names of people in the group.
4. Please try and keep to the rule of one person talking at a time and making sure that you give each other space and time to say what you want to say.
5. Remember that you can leave the group at any point in time if you no longer wish to participate.
6. The discussion will be recorded and a note taker is taking notes as a precaution as well.

## Aim

The aim of this study is to describe and analyse the extent to which the needs of students with disabilities have been addressed by institutions of higher education on a national basis in SA. Service delivery to students with disabilities needs to be determined. The role and functioning of disability units at different tertiary institutions in South Africa are also assessed. The results of the study will

be used to start developing guidelines and standards for how tertiary institutions could ensure equitable opportunities and improved inclusion of disabled students. These Focus Groups form part of a broader review process to gather information about the position of persons with disabilities at SA higher education institutions. Institutional needs are also considered.

### Topics for discussion

To be used as a guide for the discussion by the facilitator and as probes when required. The order of discussion is not important.

1. How many of you use the services provided by the disability unit at your institution? Describe why you use it/ why you do not use it.
2. What are the main services that are provided currently by the institution/disability unit? Are there other services that you think should also be provided?
3. Let's talk about your experiences at the institution and/or with the disability unit. Can you give me some examples of both good and bad experiences?
4. What role do students with disabilities play in the functioning of the disability unit? (e.g. do students with disabilities have a say in the running, do they influence how effective it is, do they themselves create barriers for how effective it is, etc.
5. What role does the individual with a disability play in their own functioning and ability to be effective and successful students as well as in their own integration and inclusion within the higher education context?
6. Does the institution provide services that cater more fully for some types of disabilities compared to others? Describe and explain.
7. When embarking on tertiary education, a learner needs to find out about the right course, apply, attend the course and pass exams. In all these different stages what problems or good experiences have you and other learners with disabilities experienced? Are these general trends at this institution or specific to certain types of disabilities only? Describe and explain.
8. As students with disabilities describe your day to day life on campus – what you are involved in and how you are included by other students, and so on. How much of these experiences are facilitated by the disability unit or hindered by the lack of services?
9. What barriers do you experience to your full participation at the institution?

10. What is your main source of funding and how adequate is it e.g. bursaries, loans, family support etc.?
11. What reasonable accommodations have been put in place for learners with disabilities?
12. Do you think the disability unit should remain as is? If not what changes would you like to see?
13. What are other proposals you can make in order to better the services rendered by the institution to you as a learner with a disability?
14. Do you think the age at which a disability starts, makes a difference to how a disabled student copes in tertiary education?
15. Do you think the type of schooling (mainstream or 'special') a disabled child received, makes a difference to how they cope in tertiary education?

#### **4 Conclusion and contact details**

Thank you for participating in the group. If you have any further comments or issue you want to discuss please discuss these with me or contact me on the following:

Name of facilitator: <>

Phone: <>

Cell: <>

E-mail: <>



# Disability Unit Self Assessment Questionnaire

## Introduction

Explain the aim of the project and the purpose for which the information gathered will be used. Ensure that you have consent either verbally on tape or written signed consent. Make sure that the respondent understands that they do not need to answer a question if they do not want to and that they can end the interview at any time if they feel uncomfortable.

## Institutional information

- A. Interviewer to note:
1. Name of Institution:
  2. Date of interview:
  3. Name of interviewer:
  4. Length of interview (approximate if not timed):
  5. Mode of interviewing: 1 = telephone; 2 = face to face
  6. Type of interview: DU Staff

## Demographical information

- B. I'm going to ask you some background questions to start off with.
1. Your name:
  2. Your age?
  3. Your gender?
  4. What population group are you from?
  5. What are your qualifications?
  6. Position within Institution?
  7. What is the reporting structure for the Disability Unit?
  8. How many years have you been working at the institution?
  9. Do you have a disability? \_\_\_\_\_. If yes, what type?  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Institutional Questionnaire

- C. Let's discuss your experiences at this institution working within the Disability Unit or being the designated person dealing with disability issues. When answering think about all aspects of working with students – students applying to study, student registration, everyday

lectures and tutorials, exams, attitudes of staff and non-disabled students, access to facilities etc. If you are thinking about a particular aspect tell me what you are thinking about.

Questions and standard responses	Notes on open ended responses
<b>Student numbers</b>	
1 What is the total Student Population at your Institution as indicated by your list of students registered in the DU? Provide evidence	Get a copy of their application form to indicate types of disabilities – how this is reported on the HEMIS (Higher Education Management Information System)
2 What are the disabled students' demographics? (i.e. population group, gender, Faculty breakdown). Please explain how the number was calculated.	Provide evidence
<b>Disability defined and categorized</b>	
3 How does the Institution define "disability"?	Provide evidence by means of Disability Policy
4 What are the disability types or categories recognized by the Institution? Number of students enrolled in each? Explain categorization. Breakdown and indicate which are most common.	Provide evidence.
5 What study programmes are students with disabilities enrolled for? Explain	
<b>Policy and/or strategy</b>	
6 Does the Institution have a policy and/or strategy on disability for (a) Employment of staff with disabilities? Describe if yes. (b) Service delivery to students with disabilities? Describe if yes 7 Are these documents well known within the Institution and/or enforced? Explain	Obtain a copy of policy – verify that what they say is being done, is mandated in the policy OR what is being done versus what should be done.
<b>Enforcement</b>	
8 What accountability is there with staff to ensure disability equity and integration at the Institution? Explain	Besides accountability, one could ask about forums that exist to ensure equity, reporting structures etc.

<b>Disability Unit (if applicable)</b>	
9 What is the number of staff employed in the DU and their	

	positions?	
10	What is the number of persons with disabilities employed in the Disability Unit and their positions? Give number and roles	
11	Describe the DU's reporting lines within the institution	Explore position of power of DU or Head of DU at the institution
12	State briefly the Disability Unit's vision and mission.	
13	Do you work with the Disability Units at other educational institutions? Explore	
14	In relation to other functions and departments at the Institution, how is the unit viewed in terms of its relevance and/or perceived importance?	
15	What is the Institution's long term vision for the unit? Does it form part of 5-year strategic plan?	
16	Comment on the adequacy of:	
	(a) your staff complement?	
	(b) your staff competency level	
	(c) Your staff motivation and performance	
	(d) your budget	
	(e) Student Financial support – Bursaries and loans	
	(f) university policies	
	(g) Disability policies and strategies	
	(h) your premises and location	
	(i) your equipment and facilities	
	(j) support from other departments	
	(k) collaboration with teaching staff	
	(l) utilization of services by students with disabilities	
	(m) cooperation from students without disabilities	
17	What role do the students with disabilities play in the functioning of the Unit?	

18	What role do the students play in their own functioning and ability to be effective and to ensure their inclusion?	
19	If not part of a designated Unit, is there a designated person(s) dealing with disability issues and what department does he/she form part of? Explain	
<b>Service Delivery</b>		
20	What services does the Institution / DU (as applicable) provide in relation to disability to:	
	(a) Students with disabilities?	
	(b) Students without disabilities?	
	(c) Teaching staff?	
	(d) Administrative staff?	
	(e) Other departments and structures?	
	(f) New applicants with disabilities?	
	(g) Potential bursars and bursar grantors:	
	(h) Potential employers?	
	(i) The community?	
	(j) Other	
21	Do students with certain types of disabilities make more use of the services than others? Explain	
22	What needs are being addressed successfully and why? Explain and cite examples	
23	What needs are not being addressed adequately and why? Explain and cite examples	
24	What services do the Institution/DU not offer that you	

	should be? Why are they not being offered? Explain and cite examples	
25	What services are the Institution/DU offering that you should NOT be offering? Explain why and cite examples	
26	What are the key service delivery challenges the Disability unit faces?	
27	What are the common complaints about the DU received from staff and disabled students? What are the mechanisms for submitting complaints and how are they received by the targeted staff?	Staff:
		Disabled students:
28	What improvements would you like to implement in your service delivery and how would you think these can best be achieved?	What improvements?
		How to achieve them?
29	Are teaching and administrative staff adequately equipped and trained to deal with students with disabilities? Explain 1 – yes always; 2 = yes sometimes; 3 = no	
30	Do any attitudinal barriers exist within the Institution in your opinion? Explain 1 = yes always; 2 = yes sometimes; 3 = no	
<b>Physical infra-structure, technology and devices</b>		
31	How adequate is the infra structure access on campus to students with diverse disabilities? Give examples	
32	Is special technology or assistive devices available to meet the needs of students with disabilities? Explain. List the gaps if any	
33	Is the DU staff trained in how to provide and maintain assistive technology?	

<b>Reasonable accommodation</b>	
<p>34 How adequate are the reasonable accommodations that are provided to individual students with disabilities? Give examples and describe whether adequacy varies across different types of disability:</p> <p>1 = yes always;  2 = yes sometimes;  3 = no</p>	<p>Varies from disability to disability</p>
<b>Conclusion</b>	
<p>35 How adequately do the current services address the needs of students with disabilities in your opinion? Explain. List the gaps if any</p> <p>1 = very adequately;  2 = adequately;  3 = inadequately;  4 = very inadequately.</p>	

**LIST OF SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION REQUIRED THAT MUST BE SUBMITTED TOGETHER WITH THE COMPLETED QUESTIONNAIRE:**

1. DISABILITY POLICY DEALING WITH STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES
2. DISABILITY POLICY DEALING WITH EMPLOYMENT OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES
3. DISABILITY UNIT STRUCTURE
4. VISION, MISSION AND/OR STRATEGIC PLAN OF DISABILITY UNIT
5. LIST WITH DEMOGRAPHICS OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES INCLUDING AGE, GENDER, RACE, FACULTY AND PROGRAMME ENROLLED FOR
6. DEFINITION AND CATEGORISATION OF DISABILITY UTILISED BY YOUR INSTITUTION
7. COPIES OF ANY ENVIRONMENTAL ACCESS REPORT AND/OR ATTITUDINAL SURVEYS CONDUCTED RELATED TO DISABILITY AT THE INSTITUTION

# Institutional Questionnaire

## Introduction

Explain the aim of the project and the purpose for which the information gathered will be used. Ensure that you have consent either verbally on tape or written signed consent. Make sure that the respondent understands that they do not need to answer a question if they do not want to and that they can end the interview at any time if they feel uncomfortable.

## Institutional information

A. Interviewer to note:

1. Name of Institution:
2. Date of interview:
3. Name of interviewer:
4. Length of interview (approximate if not timed):
5. Mode of interviewing: 1 = telephone; 2 = face to face
6. Distance learning = 1, Residential = 2

## Demographical information

B. I'm going to ask you some background questions to start off with.

1. Your name:
2. Your Age?
3. Your gender?
4. What population group are you from?
5. What was your language of education at school?
6. Position within Institution? 1 = Academic; 2 = Administration and support staff
7. Level of position?
8. Department?
9. How many years have you been working at the institution?
10. Do you have a disability? \_\_\_\_\_ . If yes, what type?  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Questionnaire



C. Let's discuss your experiences at this institution working as a staff member and specifically dealing with learners with disabilities. When answering think about all aspects of working with students – students applying to study, student registration, everyday lectures and tutorials, exams, attitudes of staff and non-disabled learners, access to facilities etc. If you are thinking about a particular aspect tell me what you are thinking about.

Questions and standard responses	Notes on open ended responses
<b>General</b>	
1. Define your role in the Institution and your interactions with learners with disabilities? Explain	
<b>Policy and/or Strategy</b>	
2. Does the Institution have a policy and/or strategy on disability for: a) Employment of staff with disabilities? Describe b) Service delivery to students with disabilities? Describe Are these documents well known within the Institution and/or enforced?	
<b>Enforcement</b>	
3. What accountability is there with staff to ensure disability equity and integration at the Institution? Explain	
<b>Disability Unit or designated person</b>	
4. Does the Institution have a Disability Unit or designated person dealing with learners with disabilities? Explain 1=yes; 2=no	
<i>If applicable:</i>	
5. What were the Institution's objectives in establishing the Disability Unit? Explain	
6. Is the Unit achieving these objectives? Explain and give examples	
7. What can the Institution do to improve the efficacy of the Unit? Explain and give examples	

8.	In which areas has the Unit performed well in your opinion? Explain and give examples	
9.	What role do the students with disabilities play in the functioning of the Unit?	
10.	What role do the students play in their own functioning and ability to be effective and to ensure their inclusion?	
11.	Have the attitudes of staff and other students changed in any way towards disabled students because of a. the Disability Unit? b. Something else happening?	The Disability Unit:
		Something else:
12.	In relation to other functions and departments at the Institution, how is the Unit viewed in terms of its relevance? Explain	
13.	What is the Universities long term vision for the Unit? Explain	
<b><i>If applicable, i.e. if there is a person designated to work with disabled students:</i></b>		
14.	What role has the designated person played in ensuring disability equity and integration? Explain	
<b>Service delivery</b>		
15.	What services should be offered by the Institution to learners with disabilities? Explain	
16.	Which services are currently delivered and which are not? Explain and cite examples	
17.	Is the campus environment accessible i.e. residential accommodation, indoor	

<p>and outdoor facilities etc? List the gaps and explain 1 = most of the buildings; 2 = yes but only some of the buildings; 3 = no, none are accessible</p>	
<p>18. Is special technology or assistive devices available to meet the needs of learners with disabilities? Explain. List the gaps if any</p>	
<p>19. Are teaching and administrative staff adequately equipped and trained to deal with learners with disabilities? Explain 1 = yes always; 2 = yes sometimes; 3 = no</p>	
<p>20. Do any attitudinal barriers exist within the Institution in your opinion? Explain 1 = yes always; 2 = yes sometimes; 3 = no</p>	
<p>21. How adequately do the current services address the needs of learners with disabilities in your opinion? Explain. List the gaps if any 1 = very adequately; 2 = adequately; 3 = inadequately; 4 = very inadequately.</p>	
<p><b>Reasonable accommodation</b></p>	
<p>22. How adequate are the reasonable accommodations that are provided to individual learners with disabilities? Explain and cite examples</p>	

# Report of the Benchmarking and Best Practice Project

## INTRODUCTION

The Disability Benchmarking Project forms part of the FOTIM Disability in Higher Education Project, funded by the Ford Foundation. Benchmarking activities were conducted to allow all South African Higher Education Institutions to self-assess against specific international standards and practices. The United Kingdom was selected as a comparative country as their services to students with disabilities are well established with processes that ensure these students are properly supported in higher education.

Various organisations which support disabilities within the higher education sector in the United Kingdom were investigated and visits to disability units at universities were also conducted. The information that was gathered during the investigation is presented in this summary report and will allow South African institutions to discover new ideas, improve services currently provided, obtain data to support decision making, set new standards and assist in the reformation of structures and policies within universities.

When planning the benchmarking visits, different types of universities were targeted so as to get a wide spread of information. The chairperson of the National Association of Disability Practitioners provided suggestions as to which organisations and institutions should be visited and we were guided by her knowledge and experience. The following six disability-related organisations and universities were targeted and included in the activities:

- National Association of Disability Practitioners (NADP)
- National Bureau for Students with Disabilities (SKILL)
- Equality Challenge Unit (ECU)
- Warwick University
- Sheffield Hallam University
- Cambridge University

## DISABILITY ORGANISATIONS

Many organisations and associations exist in the United Kingdom to support people with disabilities. Three organisations that directly affect higher education were visited.

The **National Association of Disability Practitioners (NADP)** is a professional association for those practitioners working in the tertiary education sector involved in the management or delivery of services for disabled students. They aim to promote excellence in the quality and consistency of educational support services provided for disabled students, and work to improve the professional development and status of disability service staff through peer support, education, communication and leadership. This is achieved by representing disability staff at appropriate fora; drafting codes of practice; encouraging Continuing Professional Development; peer support and peer mentoring; information on qualifications and training; conferences and educational events; dissemination of good practice. Through the NADP discussion list, practitioners share policies, practices and advice on specific cases.

**The National Bureau for Students with Disabilities (SKILL)** is a UK-based independent charity that promotes opportunities for people in learning and entry to employment. **They** provide a free information and advice service for individual disabled people and the professionals who work with them, via a freephone helpline, email and the website. SKILL also informs and influences policy makers to improve legal rights and support for disabled people. They promote best practice through keeping professionals up to date and informed about policy changes, running topical conferences and seminars, producing publications, consultancy and training services as well as research and developmental projects. The services and information provided by SKILL help prospective students in making the appropriate career and education choices and eases their transition from the school to the tertiary environment.

The **Equality Challenge Unit (ECU)** supports the higher education sector to realise the potential of all staff and students, whatever their race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, religion and belief, or age, to the benefit of those individuals, higher education institutions and society. They work in partnership with institutions and organisations, undertaking projects and research and providing practical support and guidance. They are the formal body that takes care of equality and deal with the legal issues.

These three organisations work together in assisting students with disabilities, towards the greater goal of providing equal access. Each organisation has a different emphasis, their activities benefit students, and institutions in terms funding, policy and good practice.

## **DISABILITY UNITS**

The services provided to students with disabilities at universities are supported by an effective financial system. There are clear processes and procedures in place for students to apply, be assessed and receive the necessary equipment and support required for them to succeed in their studies. A strong legislative framework informs practice and services.

### **Legislation**

The UK Equality Act 2010 brings together nine separate pieces of legislation into one single Act simplifying the law and strengthening it in important ways to help tackle discrimination and inequality. As different sections of the Act are gradually brought into force, the Act will replace all existing equality legislation.

The Act introduces new measures that will have direct implications for higher education institutions in the UK.

### **Funding**

Sources of financial assistance for disabled students include:

- Disabled Students' Allowances
- Access to Learning Fund
- Disability Living Allowance
- Employment and Support Allowance

These are paid in addition to the standard student finance package.

Students with disabilities can apply to the Disabled Student's Allowance (DSA) for funds to assist them with specialized equipment; non-medical helpers; general and travel expenses. Students are required to provide evidence of their disability with their application. They then receive an assessment by a trained assessor to ascertain the individual requirements of each student.

It is the responsibility of Social Services to meet the day-to-day needs of people with disabilities. Educational and/or training service providers have a legal duty to meet the educational needs of their students, but it is the responsibility of Social Services to provide medical carers or assistance outside of any educational needs.

## **Services**

Services differ at institutions depending on factors such as budget, perceived importance of functions of the unit etc. All universities in the United Kingdom are required by law to provide services to students with disabilities, which are delivered at all universities for all types of disabilities. In South Africa, the White Paper 6 on Special Needs Education recommends that facilities for students with disabilities are organised on a regional basis, but does not detail how this should be implemented.

In general, the UK Disability Units provide a co-ordinating function, rather than providing services directly to the students. Services to students with disabilities are all provided by the libraries; examination centres, building departments etc. This is in contrast to South African universities where the Disability Units take on the overall responsibility for all support services for disabled students, and often provide access to information in alternative formats, provide the space to write examinations and generally provide all services first-hand to students.

In the United Kingdom, the Disability Units rely on having good links with those support units rendering the services to students with disabilities. They do not provide venues for students with disabilities, as opposed to South African institutions where students with disabilities gather and receive assistance. This allows the students to take responsibility for all aspects of their studies. They are able to access their material directly in the libraries. The examination centres have venues that cater for students who require extra time or equipment. Examinations are coordinated by the faculty in conjunction with the examination centres. Each faculty has a representative staff member who liaises with the Disability Units and their students. It is the responsibility of the faculty to make necessary coursework adjustments for their students with disabilities. The Career Centres work with the Disability Units on employability programmes.

## **Scribes**

Some of the institutions visited use post-graduate students to scribe for students with disabilities. Others prefer to use retired staff members. Some institutions make use of external agencies. Scribes are trained on note and exam taking and are paid for by the DSA.

## **Assessment Centres**

The National Network of Assessment Centres is a UK-wide network of specialist services that facilitate access for disabled people to education, training, employment and personal development. Funding authorities usually request DSA applicants to undertake an independent assessment of their

needs at established Assessment Centres, to ensure that they are getting the best possible assistance from the allowance. Generally, these assessments look at a student's individual learning support needs in relation to their course and might include the use of assistive or other technology; support workers; mentors, and/or ergonomic study environments.

### **Process**

Information is readily available for students and staff, and the process for applying for the DSA and receiving an assessment is clear and well understood by all practitioners.

### **Learning Disabilities**

It was remarkable to note the high number of students with learning disabilities at all institutions. It is the disability category with the highest number of students. This is one area where services are given directly to students by a staff member in the Disability Units. Most Units employ at least one staff member who assists students with learning disabilities. Assistance includes the provision of scribes; one-on-one tuition and teaching of skills; extra time; relevant software; sticker identification on examinations and assignments; mentoring etc.

### **Diagnostic Assessments**

Staff members at the Disability Units are generally able to conduct initial screening assessments for learning impairments. If a full diagnostic assessment is required for a student, the assessment is conducted externally and paid for by the Access to Learning Fund.

### **Coding**

The process of assessing and assisting SWD is enhanced by a standard coding system that all role-players use.

## **WAY FORWARD (SOUTH AFRICA)**

### **Policy and legislative framework**

There is evidence indicating that the needs of students with disabilities are well served in the UK, despite some challenges that are faced. South Africa is lagging behind in its support of students with disabilities in the higher education sector due to the lack of a national legislative framework, no anti-discriminatory act, as well as no framework for the support of students with disabilities in higher education or other educational levels. Without clear guidelines or policies, the status quo will



remain and these students will continue to be doubly marginalised and will not reach the required employment equity targets. If such a framework were in place, institutions would have a standard definition and categories of disabilities, which would then lead to improved reporting and enhanced support to students.

### **Funding**

There is a critical lack of funds to support students with disabilities in higher education in South Africa, both for the individual student as well as for the institutions. Institutions are currently not meeting their human rights responsibilities because of the financial cost of supporting students with disabilities. NSFAS is currently the only state funding body in South Africa, and therefore very few students are able to access higher education and succeed in their studies. NSFAS guidelines are formalised and geared towards the payment of assistive devices. They do not fund human support (scribes, sign-language interpreters and note takers etc) which are indicated for certain disabilities.

### **Standardisation**

An effective national higher education legislative framework, with clear definitions of the term “disabilities”, will allow for:

- Standardisation of codes and categories of types of disabilities, which will assist in providing accurate data collection.
- Standardised assessment processes and practices, relevant to the South African context, could also be developed.
- The standardisation of guidelines for the granting of reasonable accommodation e.g. extra time.
- Standardisation of best practice.

On a practical level, the following suggestions were made by experienced disability practitioners in the United Kingdom that South African staff could make use of:

- Use a sticker system to alert academic staff that a paper or assignment they are marking is from a student that has been diagnosed with specific learning difference. They should make allowances when marking e.g. language, grammatical errors etc. Guidelines for marking should be made available to all academic staff.
- Create good working relationships with university departments and faculties.
- Address fears about the practicalities of supporting students with disabilities.

- Form a Disability Interest Group with members from all faculties and support services e.g. facilities, libraries. Meet with them every semester and discuss pertinent issues.
- Anticipate accommodating students with all types of disabilities, and prepare for them before they arrive.
- The considerable money that is spent on making buildings accessible is only spent once and is an investment in the future of many students and staff; including those who become temporarily “disabled” e.g. knee surgery.
- When faced with resistance from teaching staff, ask them to identify what is non-negotiable, before looking at reasonable adjustments.
- Disability Practitioners are often snowed under with work, and therefore can only do “fire-fighting” rather than “fire-prevention”. Aim towards prevention! Be proactive rather than reactive.

## CONCLUSION

With the adoption and implementation of the abovementioned recommendations, the future for potential graduates with disabilities is bright, and much more is possible. As Helen Keller wrote: “Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.”

Report written by Tanya Healey, Anlia Pretorius and Diane Bell