

Conference

Enhancing the Quality and Outcomes of Disabled Students' Learning in Higher Education

This one day dissemination event marked the culmination of the four year ESRC TLRP Phase III project which is directed from the University of Gloucestershire by Professor Mary Fuller. The conference was held at the University of Edinburgh on 24th October 2007. Members of the team presented key findings of the research and the keynote speaker looked to the future by examining the impact of the Disability Equality Scheme in Higher Education.

Delegates were welcomed to the conference by Professors Lyn Tett, University of Edinburgh and Miriam David, Associate Director, TLRP, who explained the significance of the research as part of the overall aims of the TLRP. Their introductions were followed by a series of presentations from team members, representing each of the four institutions participating in the research, and a keynote address delivered by Mike Adams, member of the project's Advisory Group, in his new role as Chief Executive of the Essex Coalition of Disabled People. One of the students involved with the project also shared his experience of being a disabled university student – this proved to be one of the highlights of the conference and was extremely well received by the delegates.

The main focus of the day was to examine disabled students' experiences of teaching and learning in Higher Education. Speakers aimed to understand how disabled students' academic performance and experience varied by disability, subject studied and by the type of institution; and examined ways of how this experience developed during their course. Presentations covered a number of key areas including policy drivers and tensions; teaching learning and assessment; professional standards and fitness to practice; and staff training and development.

Mike Adams' address entitled 'Looking Forward to the Future: The Impact of the Disability Equality Schemes in Higher Education' was particularly relevant to the research. He examined the impact of recent legislation and the move towards a broader equalities discourse and what it means for Higher Education Institutions. He also spoke on the education outcomes for disabled students, the importance of partnerships to find solutions and the wider impact education can have on improving the lives of disabled people. He said:

“providing good support for disabled students is not, and cannot, simply be about enforcing legislation. It is about individual universities setting a tone and making it clear what sort of institution it wants to be”

“an inclusive universitywill look at creative and innovative ways in which to make inclusion happen...”

Over 80 delegates attended the conference – participants came from a variety of UK organisations e.g. Higher Education Institutions, the Scottish Executive, the NHS and the Higher Education Academy. There was a very good representation from practitioners and Disability Advisers. Comments received included:-

“It’s the first time I’ve been to an event in this sector where my attention has been held for the full day – a pleasant change to listen to a range of speakers from across the UK – all with very good presentation skills.”

“Interesting, thought provoking and idea inducing”

“Well organised, balanced and highly relevant. In a positive way, more questions raised than answers given”

Further details and all the conference presentations are available from <http://www.glos.ac.uk/faculties/ehs/education/tlrp/index.cfm>