Widening access to higher education and disabled students – Scotland and beyond ...

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Overview

- The Bologna Process and non-traditional students
- Data gathering across Europe – individual categories
- No examination of *socioeconomic background and disability* – does it matter? If so, for whom?
- Analyses of outcomes for disabled students focus on a comparison between *Disabled – Non-disabled students* – problematic
- Data on Scottish students used to illustrate the need for more fine-grained and cross-sectional analyses
Key policy documents and strategies

- The Bologna Process focuses on harmonisation of HE across European Higher Education Area
- Social dimension developed from 2001 onwards
- Focus on increasing participation and diversity
- ‘The student body entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels should reflect the diversity of our populations’ (EACA, 2012)
- Supported by the *European Disability Strategy 2010-2020* and the *Education and Training within Europe 2020 Strategy*
Understandings of ‘non-traditional’ students varies across Europe

- Eurydice report (2014) suggests that most countries have few or no targets and limited data gathering.

- Data may be gathered in relation to:
  - Qualification prior to entry (27 jurisdictions)
  - Socioeconomic status (19 jurisdictions)
  - Disability (17 jurisdictions) Eurostudent survey includes 27 countries
  - Labour market status prior to entry (13 jurisdictions)
  - Labour market status during studies (12 jurisdictions)
  - Ethnic/cultural/linguistic minority status (8 jurisdictions)
  - Migrant status (13 jurisdictions)
Eurostudent V – national differences in disabled student numbers: Cultural differences in understanding of disability and/or differences in data collection?

![Bar chart showing national differences in disabled student numbers](chart.png)
Sweden and Scotland: similarities and differences in promoting access for disabled students

- Both countries committed to widening access and have comprehensive equalities legislation and the number of disabled students have increased over the years.
- Sweden – hub at Stockholm University distributes funding to institutions and collates data. Does not use benchmarks and targets. Nationwide system of coordinators.
- UK – tighter national regulation. Data gathered nationally by HESA, comparisons made with similar institutions, each institution organises own disability support.
- Scottish institutions obliged to submit annual outcome agreements relating to Scottish domiciled students considered ‘under-represented’ – financial penalties for failure to meet targets can be used for institutions that fail to meet targets.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of impairment</th>
<th>(self declared)</th>
<th>1994-95</th>
<th>2004-05</th>
<th>2013-14</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unseen disability</td>
<td></td>
<td>57.5</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dyslexia <em>(Specific learning difficulty)</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>54.2</td>
<td>53.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other disability <em>(or medical condition)</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deaf/hard of hearing</td>
<td></td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wheelchair/mobility difficulties <em>(A physical impairment or mobility issues)</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blind/partially sighted</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>0.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Multiple disabilities <em>(Two or more conditions)</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health difficulties</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal care support</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(Social communication and)</em> Autistic spectrum disorder</td>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of all F-T first degree students</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
 Disabled and non-disabled students by SIMD quintiles, HESA, 2015

Non-disabled  Disabled

SIMD 1 14.1 13.3
SIMD 2 15.8 16.2
SIMD 3-5 69.7 70.3
Under-representation of disabled students from less advantaged neighbourhoods – particularly in most selective universities
The disabled student population is heterogeneous but examination of socioeconomic background of disabled students is skewed by dominance of Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD) (dyslexia)
Disabled students by type of impairment and SIMD quintiles,
HESA, 2015 – caution low numbers in some categories
SpLD, socioeconomic background and type of institution, HESA, 2015

- SpLD SIMD20: 6.7 Ancient, 7.8 Old, 13.1 New
- SpLD SIMD20-40: 9.3 Ancient, 13.4 Old, 16 New
- SpLD SIMD40-100: 83.6 Ancient, 78.8 Old, 70.7 New
Data on progression by social characteristics of students – does not examine intersection between disability, social background and type of impairment.
The proportion of full-time first year Scottish-domiciled entrants from different protected characteristic groups returning to study in year two

Source: HESA
Outcomes: UK wide

Outcomes by type of impairment but no examination of social background
Outcomes: employment rates, AGCAS, 2013
Outcomes: employment rates continued, AGCAS, 2013

![Graph showing employment rates for different disability categories from 2002/03 to 2009/2010.](image)
Qualitative data show

- Different impairment leads to different educational experiences and different outcomes

BUT

- For all – the impact of socioeconomic background play an important role
Different students – different needs – different outcomes (from Fuller, et al, 2009)

- I’m still having problems with attendance and stuff. But I’ve had another seizure as well which is a, a bit of a strange thing. I don’t know what happened (Teresa - epilepsy); Outcome: non completion

- Physical access has a knock on effect on everything else, I would end up sitting right up at the back with a little table, completely cut off; I had a note taker; [with no] knowledge of Spanish language, [but] was the PA who was doing the note taking [and by 4th year the course was taught in Spanish] (Karrie – cerebral palsy/wheelchair user); Outcome: 3rd class Honours

- she would use a lot of overheads for things and I would lose visual sight of what my aim was for this workshop, and then she would just put overheads up … and I found that so difficult. Personal life - university is geared to seventeen, eighteen year olds who don’t have a life (Jean – mature student, dyslexia); Outcome: First class Honours

- it’s like an ordinary radio mike that you’ve got on for the lecture and then I’ve just got the other end, the same sort of thing … [it worked] but the PE teachers wouldn’t wear it. (Lesley – hearing impairment); Outcome: Unknown
The impact social background on educational experiences of deaf students.

‘the social networks and advocacy power of their parents were closely related to their socio-economic status. They played a significant role in shaping the young people’s experiences of school education, as well as their post-school journeys’ (Fordyce, et al, 2013, p.113)
Issues and challenges

1. Disabled students are not a homogeneous group – they have:
   - different impairments which lead to different needs
   - different outcomes

2. Disabled students from disadvantaged backgrounds are potentially doubly disadvantaged because:
   - they do not necessarily have access to social networks that can help them
   - they are probably at greater risk of dropping out

3. We need more fine-grained analysis of access to university, retention and outcomes for disabled students by type of impairment … not just in Scotland and the UK but beyond!
References

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