

**Higher Education Funding Council for England
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Segal Quince Wicksteed Limited

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Guidance on base-level provision for disabled students in higher education institutions

Foreword

Students in higher education are increasingly diverse in nature and have different learning and support needs. Institutions in England and Wales are already working hard to address these needs. This work aims to allow all students, whatever their circumstances, to have access to, and benefit from, a high quality educational experience.

Building on this work, this report focuses on the learning and support needs of a single, albeit diverse, student group: disabled students. It offers guidance to institutions on the base-level of provision they should all aim to make for students with disabilities. By guiding institutions on what constitutes minimum levels of provision, we hope to offer a benchmark against which both students and institutions can assess current provision and encourage quality improvement and expansion.

Defining a base-level of provision for a group as diverse as disabled students is not an easy task. This report makes recommendations based on research that incorporated the views and ideas of most HE institutions in England and Wales. We hope and expect that the report will fuel further discussion and debate amongst staff with responsibility for disability issues, but that it will also engage other staff more widely including academic, information technology, estates and learning resources staff as well as senior management. Such a debate would further recognise that providing an inclusive learning environment for students with disabilities is a whole institution issue.

This report identifies the provision of comprehensive disability statements as one key aspect of base-level provision. This report will be a useful resource for institutions in ensuring their statements are as informative and wide ranging as possible.

We hope this report raises awareness amongst all staff in HE, and that it is useful in guiding the development of provision for students with disabilities.

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Contents

	Executive summary	1
Chapter 1	Introduction	5
Chapter 2	Key decision and discussion	6
	Why are students with disabilities an issue?	7
	Values and philosophy	8
	What is access?	9
	Numbers and statistics	9
	Types of disability	10
	Distinctive needs of students with disabilities	12
	Should all institutions be involved?	13
	Institutional obligations and individual responsibilities	15
	Scarcity of expertise and skills	19
	Possible extension of Disabled Students' Allowance	20
Chapter 3	Recommendations	21
	Base-level provision	21
	Approaches to funding	28
	Other initiatives to promote access	31
Annex A	Methodology	33
Annex B	Aide-memoire for case studies	34
Annex C	Questionnaire	38
Annex D	Study finding	48
Annex E	List of acronyms	64

Executive summary

Purpose

1. This report presents the findings and recommendations of a study of base-level provision for disabled students in higher education institutions (HEIs). The aims of the study are to:

- guide institutions on provision for disabled students
- act as a benchmark for students and institutions
- inform funding policy.

2. After the study was commissioned the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) asked the consultants to assess the implications of extending Disabled Student Allowances (DSAs) to those who become disabled and wish to obtain a second, higher educational qualification, as well as to part-time and postgraduate students.

Recommendations

3. The recommendations fall into three groups:

- base-level provision, and a statement of what every HEI should be expected to provide
- funding issues
- other initiatives to promote access for students with disabilities.

Base-level provision

4. Base-level provision means the minimum level of support that each HEI should provide. It is not the same as best practice and is open to quality improvement and expansion.

5. The base-level provision should include the following:

- a. A comprehensive disability statement that sets out the institution's policies, support services and implementation strategy for students with disabilities.
- b. An admissions policy and procedures that specifically address the needs of disabled students. Students should have opportunities to discuss their needs when they apply. If they make known a need for support, they should be invited to meet a designated officer on enrolment. All HEIs should maintain and monitor statistics about applications and enrolment rates for disabled students.
- c. Well-publicised arrangements for the assessment of individual needs, with target times for their completion. Each HEI should prepare a code of practice governing the circulation of personal information, to preserve appropriate levels of confidentiality.
- d. The provision of services to meet assessed needs.

- e. Clear internal communication and referral policies.
- f. Arrangements to monitor the provision of support services that have been agreed as necessary following professional assessment.
- g. Each HEI should ensure it has access to networks of suitably trained support workers.
- h. An institution-wide policy and procedure to cover examination and assessments.
- i. Staff development programmes to cover information about students with disabilities and the support available. These should be part of induction sessions and training programmes for staff new to the institution or sector. There should also be optional training sessions for more experienced staff, specific briefings for any staff who request them, and professional development opportunities for staff working directly with students with disabilities.
- j. Dedicated staff including a permanently employed disability co-ordinator, with other full or part-time staff depending on the numbers of students with disabilities who require support. In addition, there should be adequate administrative staff to support the co-ordinator. A member of the senior management team should be made responsible for disability issues.
- k. An estates strategy to cover physical access issues and to ensure the needs of all disabled groups are considered in the design or refurbishment of buildings. The issues to be covered should include wheel-chair access, signage, aids than can be incorporated into buildings (such as hearing loops), and amenities to help cope with emergencies.
- l. Procedures to ensure that policies, programmes and their impact and effectiveness are subject to regular monitoring and evaluation.

Funding issues

- 6. There is a strong case for the allocation of additional resources to HEIs, both to enable those with poor services to improve and to provide incentives for others to develop and enhance their provision.
- 7. All HEIs should have access to funds to support their work with students with disabilities. One way to make such funding available would be through a weighted premium based on numbers of disabled students. This would be a relatively straightforward approach and would be allocated through the mainstream formula funding method. This is the route the HEFCE has chosen to recognise the additional costs incurred by institutions in supporting part-time students. The HEFCW is presently considering such matters as part of its review of the funding method for teaching.

8. However, we do not recommend the introduction of a weighted premium as an immediate step. As an interim measure we propose that all HEIs should be eligible to apply for ring-fenced funding linked to an institutional development plan. If, after a period, an institution can demonstrate it has sufficiently improved and embedded provision for disabled students then it should be eligible for a weighted premium as part of the mainstream funding method. The use of a weighted premium would, however, require the funding bodies to both identify appropriate data on disabled student numbers, and consider further the cost to HEIs of provision for disabled students.

9. There should also be a competitive fund for special initiatives, and to encourage collaborative working by HEIs. Institutions that are supported through a competitive fund should be subject to review after two years. If, at that time, an institution has succeeded in establishing the base-level provision, additional funding should continue to be available through the mainstream funding method.

Other initiatives

10. Other initiatives which might be taken to widen the participation of students with disabilities in HE are to:

- a. Extend DSA payments to part-time and to postgraduate students.
- b. Clarify with professional bodies their policies about entry into the professions by people with disabilities. HEIs have said that in some professional areas this is a major influence on their willingness to recruit students with disabilities.
- c. Encourage those working with disabled students to seek the professional qualifications that are now being developed.
- d. Promote the establishment of a professional group for people working with students with disabilities.
- e. Maintain and develop a central resource to work with HEIs to develop their services and promote good practice.
- f. Review national promotional literature and materials and develop these in appropriate formats and media
- g. Consider establishing an independent complaints and grievance procedure to deal with any applicants who feel discriminated against on the grounds of their disability.
- h. Review with the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) its audit inspections, to ensure that these cover disability issues and that its staff and audit teams are trained to deal with these issues.
- i. Evaluate the developments in IT software and systems, and their impact on teaching regimes, so that these can be exploited more fully within the sector.

j. Encourage the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) and the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) to continue to review the utility of their statistics on disabled students, and to discuss with the sector possible improvements in the data.

k. Encourage the Institute of Learning and Teaching (ILT) to give a high priority to learning support for disabled students, since this will have wide-ranging implications for all students. This might include the ILT channelling funds to HEIs for research projects

l. Encourage student unions to review their own policies, practices and funding allocations. We recommend that a sabbatical officer or senior student representative is responsible for working with students with disabilities, to widen their opportunities to take part in sporting and extra-curricular activities.

Chapter 1: Introduction

11. The Higher Education Funding Councils for England and Wales commissioned Segal Quince Wicksteed Ltd (SQW) to undertake a study of base-level provision for disabled students in higher education. Sophie Corlett, Assistant Director of Skill (National Bureau for Students with Disabilities), worked with SQW throughout this study.

12. This study is designed to:

- guide higher education institutions on provision for disabled students
- act as a benchmark for students and institutions
- inform future funding policy.

13. The Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) also asked the study team to explore and assess the possible funding implications of extending Disabled Students Allowances (DSAs) to part-time and postgraduate students, and to those studying for a second degree since becoming disabled.

14. The study, which has aroused considerable interest in the sector, has been completed in a short time. This would not have been possible without the active co-operation and support of the 10 case-study institutions and the 96 higher education institutions (HEIs) that responded to the questionnaire. Their assistance gratefully acknowledged, as are their critical comments and ideas.

15. This report consists of the following:

- chapter two is a discussion of the major issues which emerged during the study
- chapter three contains recommendations
- annexes describe in more detail the methodology, the findings of the case studies and results of the analysis of the questionnaires.

Chapter 2: Key issues and discussion

Introduction

16. From our visits, discussions and responses to the questionnaire, it is evident that there is a good deal of activity in the HE sector to support students with disabilities. This activity can be characterised by its variety; the anecdotal nature of much information to describe it; and a general absence of monitoring and evaluation to assess the quality and impact of support to students with disabilities. It is therefore difficult to make generalisations about provision to assist disabled students in HEIs in England and Wales. Some institutions are grappling with disability issues with enthusiasm, and have developed institution-wide services and provision. Others assist individual students, usually in a caring way, but do not pursue a policy of attracting people with disabilities with anything approaching enthusiasm or commitment.

17. The picture is patchy, and different rates of progress are due to a variety of factors. These include the commitment of senior managers to effective equal opportunities initiatives; the dedication and enthusiasm of staff 'champions', who have pioneered the introduction of services and helped to mould positive attitudes; and the demands of students, which have been strengthened by their access to allowances to buy services. The availability of institutional funding is also important. In England funds have been available on a competitive basis for pilot initiatives to develop services. In Wales resources to improve the academic infrastructure have provided HEIs with discretionary funds, some of which have developed provision for disabled students. A minority of HEIs give such a priority to the needs of disabled students that annual budgets are top-sliced to fund support services before any other allocations are made. A few institutions have trust funds and other assets dedicated to the needs of students with disabilities.

18. Even institutions that are considered to be at the forefront of meeting the needs of students with disabilities believe that more could be done, but their efforts are constrained by resources. A common message is "that we are doing the best we can with the resources that we have". Responding to the needs of disabled students is yet another pressure faced by HEIs, and this is a reality which cannot be set aside lightly.

19. Additional resources would be an incentive to HEIs to develop services for disabled students. They would also be a significant indicator that affirmative action to enable people with disabilities to enter higher education is a national priority. But, however desirable additional resources might be, there is a great deal to be done to inform attitudes within the sector so that the diversity of students' experiences, perspectives and abilities are respected and valued.

20. Before we present our recommendations, we discuss in this chapter some of the issues that are key to the development of policy and practice to enable and encourage students with disabilities to make the most of the opportunities that higher education should offer to them.

Why are students with disabilities an issue?

21. The Government has accepted the objective of widening participation in higher education, and increasing the numbers of students with disabilities, in response to the report, *Higher Education in the Learning Society*. This report drew attention to the under-representation of certain groups in higher education, including people with disabilities. It also discussed the imperative of enhancing their opportunities for personal development, to enable them to enjoy a more rewarding life, to contribute fully to the economy, and to be recognised for their capabilities and talents. The HE funding councils also have a statutory responsibility to have regard to the needs of students with disabilities.

22. Many HEIs can point to support given to individual disabled students, but there is little doubt that disability has been a barrier to higher education. In spite of considerable progress, particularly since 1991-2, there is still discrimination to be tackled. This takes many forms and includes discrimination typified by reactions that applicants with certain disabilities cannot be offered places because they would make demands on already pressured staff. There is ignorance about the capacities of students with disabilities. Issues of physical access, while significant for many students, are used as reasons for not encouraging the recruitment of students with disabilities. There is indifference and in many institutions complacency, borne from the experience of supporting individual students. There are also difficulties in accessing information about higher education, which is a major barrier to potential students.

23. This is not to suggest, however, that progress has not been made in widening access to HE. In most of the HEIs surveyed there has been an increase in the numbers of students with disabilities. Between 1995-96 and 1997-98 increases range from just over 10 per cent to 105 per cent. There is a clear trend, but in some institutions the absolute numbers, as a percentage of total student numbers, are very small.

24. There are a number of factors to account for this rise in numbers:

- a. Policy changes which have accorded greater prominence to access for students with disabilities.
- b. Improved physical access and the development of support services.
- c. The positive impact of Disabled Students Allowance (DSAs) and a greater willingness among students to declare if they have a disability.
- d. The increase in the number of dedicated and specialist staff in HEIs and the effect of the funding initiatives by the HEFCE and HEFCW.
- e. Although the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) only applies fully to HEIs as employers and not providers of education, its impact is forcing a reassessment and is bringing a higher profile to disability issues.
- f. The development of Access programmes and the forging of links between HEIs and specialist further education colleges.
- g. The growth in the numbers of students with dyslexia and other 'hidden disabilities', and

the increasing numbers of such students who are identified as their studies progress.

h. 'Word of mouth' publicity by students with disabilities about the support and services available, has encouraged more people to apply.

25. The support provided to students with disabilities is of variable quality, and can best be described as 'patchy'. Through publishing disability statements all HEIs are required to define their approaches to access and support for students with disabilities. These statements are not invariably translated into effective programmes, but their preparation has stimulated interest and discussion. As the number of students with disabilities continues to grow, so will the pressures on already constrained resources. Even HEIs with well-developed provision are apprehensive about their ability to cope with additional demands. The possible extension of DSAs to part-time and postgraduate students, while welcomed as a progressive measure, will add to demands.

26. Addressing the needs of existing and potential students with disabilities continues to be an issue because there is more to be done to encourage and support their participation and to enhance the quality of their experience within HE. In a civilised and liberal society, affirmative action to enable disabled people to benefit from, and contribute to, HE should need little justification. There is a strong economic argument, since people will be better equipped to make a productive contribution to society. There is an equal opportunities argument, since no individual or group should suffer disadvantage or discrimination on the basis of disability. There is an academic argument, since enabling people with disabilities to access higher education more easily will result in a bigger pool of students and talent. We are also committed to a more cohesive society which values diversity, and which encourages individuals to play a full and active part within it.

Values and philosophy

27. During this study we have been struck by the different attitudes which influence approaches to the development of services and support for students with disabilities. Some institutions and individuals see their work with disabled students in a positive and enthusiastic way, and have a mission to empower students to develop their capacities to the full. Others may have no less caring an attitude, but see disabled students as disadvantaged people to be helped and assisted. This polarity, which might be defined as ranging from enabling to patronising, is a feature of much social policy and intervention, but these different values colour attitudes and ultimately affect the nature of services.

28. The different approaches raise interesting dilemmas. For example, is it empowering for a young student with disabilities, facing the challenges of higher education, to have to cope also with employing support workers and negotiating with lecturers for early access to lecture notes? Are these additional demands simply adding to burdens, and requiring students with disabilities to accept responsibilities not faced by their non-disabled peers? Is it sufficient for HEIs to put in place support and advisory services, and make individual students totally responsible for accessing them?

29. The differences of approach in HEIs are marked. For some, the services provided and the manner in which they are offered represent the implementation of institutional values. In others practice has simply evolved. The development of policy and practice on issues of disability is more than designing and implementing a range of services. Views about student entitlements are likely to influence the priority that is accorded to disability issues and how relationships are developed with students.

30. A second distinction can be drawn between those institutions that continue to deal with students with disabilities in an ad hoc way, usually adopting a 'case-work' approach, and those with institution-wide strategies. The first group tends to be reactive and deals with the needs of an individual as and when these arise. The second, pro-active group is better positioned to support larger numbers of disabled students, and has attempted to anticipate and plan for the needs of different groups of disabled students.

What is access?

31. An objective of public policy is to widen access to higher education. Access means more than physical entry to buildings, although this continues to be a significant issue. Widening access is about the implementation of strategies to support students with disabilities and learning difficulties so that they can enjoy the same quality of educational experience as non-disabled students. It is also about enabling students with disabilities to participate fully in institutional life, for example in extra-curricular and social activities, and to be valued for the contribution they can make. The priority in institutions is to help disabled students with their learning and accommodation, but other aspects of their lives as students should also be addressed.

Numbers and statistics

32. The 1995-96 Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) figures show that there were 46,598 disabled students in HE in the UK, or 3.3 per cent of the total student population. There has been a general presumption that disabled people are under-represented in HE. Labour Force Survey figures suggest that people with disabilities make up about 16.4 per cent of the total UK population. It would be disingenuous to make straightforward comparisons between the number of disabled students in higher education and the number of disabled people in the population as a whole. There are differences between the characteristics of the general population and of HE students. This will include the effects of ageing on disability, and the intellectual impairment which results from some disabilities and which would preclude study at this level. The recorded number of students with disabilities is not a wholly accurate reflection, since not all students declare disabilities. Taking these factors into consideration however, the assertion that disabled people are under-represented in higher education would seem to be justified.

33. Our comparison of HESA and institutional data indicates discrepancies between the two. This is primarily because HESA data give the numbers of students who declare they have a disability at enrolment. Information collected by institutions tends to reflect the numbers of students with disabilities who are using support services and whose needs may emerge at any time.

34. The HESA information gives only a partial indication of need. Not all students who declare a disability will require support, and not all students who will use support services make this known, even if at enrolment they are aware of a potential need. The quality of institutional data varies. Not all students who seek help in making DSA applications report the outcome. Not all institutions can monitor if assessed needs are met, due in part to the fragmented nature of programme delivery and the onus placed on students to negotiate their own support. Few institutions monitor the progress of students with disabilities as a distinct group, to assess if their academic progress is impeded or supported by the quality of services available to support their learning.

35. There are two principal concerns about numbers and statistics. The first relates to HEIs ability to monitor access and progression, and the degree of active participation within the sector by people with disabilities. Our research suggests that the HESA statistics may understate the numbers of students with disabilities by up to 40 per cent. But this assessment is based on a small number of HEIs that were able to provide data. All numbers need to be treated with caution: definitions are imprecise and there is a lack of comprehensive and systematically collated institutional data. However, the sector would seem to be supporting more students than published data suggests.

36. The second area of concern is the lack of information routinely available from the sector about the numbers and progression of disabled students, and the costs incurred in providing support services. A major disappointment in the response to the questionnaire was the poor quality of quantitative information. Assessments of the numbers of students with disabilities, and the potential number that might require support, are problematic. The accuracy of statistics, with unambiguous definitions, agreement about what needs to be measured and how data should be collated, analysed and presented, are all issues that require attention.

Types of disability

37. People with disabilities who seek access to higher education are as varied in their capacities and talents as non-disabled people. A similar disability may impact on individuals in different ways, and people cope with disabilities in individual ways. So while cautioning against generalisations and the use of labels we have reviewed a range of disabilities to consider the kinds of support that students might require. This indicates the services which base-level provision should offer:

- a. **Students with dyslexia.** Most HEIs have reported an increase in the numbers of students with dyslexia which is by far the largest group of identified disabled students in HE. Not all academic staff appreciate the significance of dyslexia and the impact it can have on learning. This needs to be recognised by institutions as a condition that might call for additional learning support, and by Local Education Authorities (LEAs) in their determination of DSAs. Teaching staff should be able to recognise the possible signs of dyslexia and have access to advice about how teaching strategies might be adapted. HEIs need to have screening arrangements, and where appropriate, assessments. These functions should be sign-posted and students made aware of the services available to them. Assessments need to cover examination arrangements and on-programme support (such as study skills, one to one tuition and proof-reading). Support groups could help to overcome any lack of confidence. A distinction needs to be drawn between dyslexic students identified by health professionals, who will be considered as disabled students, and those students with general literacy problems, although some of their needs may be similar. This second group may also make demands on

disability co-ordinators and add to the pressure of their work.

- b. **Students with hidden disabilities** (such as epilepsy, diabetes, asthma and ME). These are all conditions which might require medical aid, and students should be encouraged to inform the institution about them. HEIs need to be alive to their health and safety responsibilities but the conditions may not require any additional learning support. Individual assessment will determine this: for example, students may simply need longer deadlines to complete assignments.
- c. **Students with multiple disabilities.** Needs assessment will be crucial and the provision of support may include several departments and functions. The experience of the case-study institutions suggests that students with multiple disabilities are well supported.
- d. **Students with mental health difficulties.** Many HEIs comment on the growing numbers of students with mental health problems. These cover a range of temporary, episodic and chronic conditions, and their effects on learning will vary. Students need to be encouraged to air problems and be helped to find appropriate support. Assessments may need to involve mental health specialists. Students may require flexible deadlines and equipment to enable them to work from home, and adjustments in the design of their programmes, such as smaller teaching groups, part-time study, and longer time to complete courses. People with mental health difficulties are likely to benefit from the extension of DSAs to part-time students, since it will increase their options to choose the most appropriate mode of study. Issues go wider than learning support, since behaviour affects all aspects of an institution.
- e. **Students who are deaf or hard of hearing.** There should be a review of individual needs but a full assessment may not be required, and students should be put in touch with appropriate services. They might include note-takers, signers or the use of electronic equipment. Teaching staff must know that they have hearing impaired students and be encouraged to use microphones, sub-title videos, not to wander around while they are speaking and to make lecture notes available in advance.
- f. **Students who are blind or visually impaired.** Some students will benefit from large print; a totally blind student will require more support. Thus individual assessments of need are essential and students need to know about DSAs and the services available. The agreed level of support must be provided. In addition, lecturers should think about the formats of curriculum materials
- g. **Students with mobility problems.** These include students who use wheel-chairs as well as those with upper limb disorders, such as repetitive strain injuries (RSI) and other conditions like arthritis. Assessments, which may not always be necessary, will determine the nature of additional support. This may make no extra demands on teaching staff, but may involve extra time in exams or the provision of specialist furniture. Consideration may have to be given to adapted accommodation and personal living assistance.

38. The above list is by no means exhaustive and it is not sensible to attempt to be prescriptive about the needs of any particular 'group'. For example, adapted accommodation and personal assistance will apply to a wide range of disabled students. There is sufficient knowledge and experience within the sector to provide guidance and 'prompts' to help ensure that students receive appropriate support. Equally there is little excuse for any HEI not to be sensitive to the range of possible needs.

39. We were asked by the funding councils to review the range of needs and consider the case for a tariff approach to possible additional funding, that is a funding system based on the needs suggested by different types of disability. The arguments in favour of such an approach are based on the premise that there is a range of different disabilities, requiring distinctive levels of support and that costs might reflect this variety. The principal arguments against such an approach relate to the inherent complexity of assigning individuals to categories. Although it would be feasible to take a general approach to some levels of support, the determination of need would ideally be individualised, which would involve the exercise of judgement. A formula approach to the determination of needs and costs would require an attempt to cost support services on the basis of categories of disability. It would be difficult to define and apply either a standardised 'menu' of services or tariff of costs. In addition, this may involve a medical model approach to the assessment of need.

The distinctive needs of students with disabilities

40. Learning support services being developed for students with disabilities would often be of value to other students. For example, the desirability of a hearing-impaired student having advanced copies of lecture notes and visual aids is apparent, but the quality of learning for all students could be enhanced if they too had such material. Study-skill sessions and guidance on the organisation of work are valuable to dyslexic students, but many other students would benefit from improved induction to the demands of learning in higher education. With a more inclusive approach it might be inappropriate for DSAs to meet the costs of such provision, since it would be a responsibility of the institution to prepare all students for the demands of higher education.

41. The ideal for higher education would be to give substance to student-centred, inclusive learning. This means simply that all HEIs should seek to understand and respond to each learner's requirements and erase attitudes that identify students in terms of their problems or deficits. Within the sector there is much to do to encourage HEIs to be more responsive to students' demands and needs. The development of learning support strategies for disabled students will be geared to their specific needs, and this will have wider implications for teaching all higher education students.

Should all institutions be involved?

42. The majority of HEIs that responded to our queries believe that all institutions should provide opportunities for students with disabilities. A minority felt that, given the different circumstances of institutions, this was an unrealistic goal. Factors such as the total size of the student population, budgets, location, the range and mix of programmes, and the dilution of skills and expertise in providing adequate levels of support were cited in favour of a less comprehensive approach.

43. Some HEIs advocated the recognition of centres of excellence, to specialise in meeting the needs of defined groups, such as deaf and hard of hearing students. In practice some institutions have already established reputations for providing support services to particular groups of students with disabilities, and have introduced modules designed to increase understanding and awareness of specific disabilities and their impact. A commitment to centres of excellence allows for expertise and experience to be built-up. It is potentially a cost-effective and efficient approach since specialist equipment can be consolidated on selected sites, rather than being bought by a larger number of institutions which then use it infrequently or spasmodically. Such centres would be well-placed to build links with other organisations which serve their particular community of disabled students.

44. There are also strong arguments against such an approach. It might provide HEIs with a reason not to widen access or develop services for disabled students. This would reduce options for people with disabilities, and undermine attempts to create an inclusive HE sector that respects diversity. The concentration of students with a particular disability in a few institutions might engender a ghetto mentality, and be inimical to empowering people through their exposure to a wide range of experiences and influences.

45. The needs of part-time students must also be considered. Most part-time students attend a local HEI and, unless all institutions support disabled students their choice will be limited. The extension of DSAs to this group of students will add force to this argument. In their pursuit of lifelong learning objectives, all HEIs should be encouraging part-time learning and making this possible for all students.

46. We do not find the arguments in favour of centres of excellence persuasive. Issues concerning the most cost-effective ways to acquire equipment and to produce some economies of scale can be addressed through greater collaboration between HEIs.

47. Some HEIs have argued that the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) be extended to HEIs as providers of education. This is not an issue we discuss, but we note that the legislation is having an effect and that many HEIs are reconsidering their policies and re-appraising facilities for students with disabilities.

48. Notwithstanding the scope of the legislation, as a matter of principle it should not be open to any HEI to state that it will not enrol students with disabilities. All institutions are now required to produce disability statements explaining their policies towards, and provision for, disabled students. The issue is the extent to which they embrace the objectives of widening access and strive to ensure that appropriate support is available to disabled students. A number of issues are pertinent:

a. HEIs stress that issues of disability are irrelevant in making offer decisions and that a potential student who may require support will be given information about what the institution is able to offer. The student, on the basis of this information, makes the decision about the suitability of the HEI. It is open to HEIs, however, to turn down applicants on the grounds that the institution does not have the facilities to meet their needs. Indeed, UCAS application procedures recognise this since applicants can be offered further choices if they are rejected on these grounds.

b. The provision of some services is only viable if there is a critical mass of students. Support an individual student may be prohibitively expensive for one institution but add only marginally to costs in another.

c. New fee arrangements in 1998 may well affect patterns of student mobility and force disabled students to seek admission to a more local HEI, even if this does not have as much experience in providing support services of a more distant and preferred institution.

49. Against this background, all HEIs should be required to be more precise about their policies towards students with disabilities. Application, enrolment and progression rates in respect of students with disabilities should be published and monitored. This will involve producing more comprehensive disability statements, and a clearer relationship between statements of intent and implementation strategies. In addition, a strong case can be made for establishing an appeals and review mechanism that is independent of individual institutions, so that applicants can voice grievances about admissions procedures and even on-course support.

50. There are some well-developed links between institutions, and examples of HEIs providing services to the sector generally. These include:

a. The collaborative SUMMIT arrangements in Manchester, which bring together a number of institutions to organise assessments and share good practice.

b. The provision of support services by the City Literary Institute (an FE institution) for deaf and hard of hearing students in a number of HEIs in London.

c. The tactile diagram service offered by Loughborough University.

d. The consortium of Access Centres.

e. Links between HEIs and local or specialised FE colleges.

51. Active collaboration between HEIs to develop support for students with disabilities is not characteristic of the sector. Yet it is also clear from our studies that staff want to know more about good practice and to exchange experience and information. Nonetheless, we found some examples of initiatives, designed to foster collaborative working. These include:

- the development of access programmes
- joint training for note-takers and other support workers

- shared staff awareness programmes
- joint arrangements for DSA assessments
- pooling adapted residential accommodation
- regional/local resource centres for equipment loan and hire, and regional inventories of specialist equipment.

52. There is scope to develop further partnerships between HE institutions, and between HE and FE institutions to aid the dissemination of expertise, and help less experienced HEIs to introduce new activities and services.

Institutional obligations and individual responsibilities

53. Current arrangements to provide support to students with disabilities depend on the following:

- HEIs helping students to identify their needs, which can involve a variety of approaches including formal assessments using external agencies
- DSAs, administered by LEAs and used not only to provide disabled students with equipment but also to buy support services
- use of HEFCE competitive funds and HEFCW infrastructure funds to build up support services.

54. DSAs are key to the arrangements since they provide funds directly to students, and for those HEIs without special funding council grants they are the only additional source of finance to pay for the support costs of students with disabilities. The effective running of the 'system' depends on:

- effective arrangements to identify and assess the needs of students
- LEAs dealing with DSA applications in a timely and consistent way
- the provision of support services and other facilities to meet the assessed needs of disabled students. The DSAs enable students to buy services, but unless there is a 'market', and services are available, the value of the allowance is diminished. The provision of services requires the active involvement of HEIs.

55. The DfEE reviewed the operation of the DSAs in 1995 and highlighted a number of issues and problems. Some of these problems persist. The performance of LEAs continues to be mixed, with a minority making late payments: HEIs have unhappy stories of the length of time taken to deal with applications and to pay students. There is also continuing unease about inconsistencies in adjudications between LEAs, and about equipment procurement arrangements which may not be the most cost-effective and which do not necessarily reflect institutional systems.

56. The current arrangements are based on shared responsibilities and a number of issues arise:

- is the balance correct?
- what should DSAs buy, and what should institutions provide?
- are HEIs recompensed for the additional work?
- what is the position of those students with needs but who do not receive a DSA?

The question of balance

57. The DSAs are valuable not only in providing students not only with additional resources but also in giving them some leverage in the organisation with regard to their own support. The allowances are paid to students (though some make them over to HEIs to administer). In many countries, allowances to fund support services are paid directly to HEIs, which then have the duty to provide them. Some HEIs have suggested that this arrangement would be administratively more straightforward, would focus institutional responsibility, and would overcome some of the inadequacies of the present system. Such a change would also relieve students of burdens their peers do not have, both in the administration of finances and in negotiating provision.

58. There are aspects of the current arrangements that need to be improved, but we believe that making students responsible for payments and for the use of the DSA is positive and underscores the role of student as consumer. It is open to any student to arrange payment to their HEI if the responsibility for handling the DSA is too great, and if the institution agrees. However, we have noted that a number of HEIs are unwilling to set-up the systems to facilitate such arrangements.

59. The existing system places other burdens on students. In most HEIs, even though a student may make known a disability, the onus of making contact with support services lies with the student. In many institutions the student is also responsible for communicating agreed support needs to academic and examinations staff and for negotiating with staff, for example for the early release of lecture notes. In part this stems from a desire to maximise the role of the student; in part it reflects the workloads and pressures on staff who do not have the resources to 'follow up' students. Placing so much responsibility in the hands of students has benefits, but there can be drawbacks. For example, those who influence resource decisions, such as faculty deans, may be wholly ignorant of the needs of students, simply because students usually only communicate with staff whom they have direct contact.

60. The key to DSAs and to the determination of student support is the definition and assessment of needs. This can involve referral to an Access Centre, or to an external agency or professional educational psychologist. When a DSA is awarded, assessment costs are reimbursed. There are students for whom an assessment of need is necessary, but who do not get a DSA; even for those who do, the process is retrospective. We believe that the identification of need is so central to support for students that HEIs should be responsible for ensuring that assessments are undertaken (not necessarily by themselves) and should be funded appropriately. This would involve an adjustment of the elements covered by the DSA, but would provide HEIs with a resource to organise needs assessment.

61. It is likely that some students will continue to suffer because of the late payment of DSAs, as long as this responsibility lies with LEAs. In these circumstances, HEIs should be able to offer support those students. In some institutions there are discretionary funds which make this possible; in others this does not seem to be an option.

62. The DfEE might initiate action to monitor the performance of LEAs in administering DSAs. This could include setting target times for adjudications and payments, requiring reports on performance, improving the basis of statistical returns and encouraging HEIs to notify the Department of poor levels of service from LEAs.

What should DSAs buy?

63. What costs for providing additional support to disabled students should be borne by the institution and what should the DSA cover? Although there are always likely to be some 'grey areas', the DSA is intended to support the individual. Thus personal assistance, the employment of readers and signers and the acquisition of IT equipment for individual use are legitimate claims on individuals and the DSA. Institutional functions which may incur additional costs are the responsibility of HEIs. They may include, for example, costs in relation to admissions procedures and literature; specialist equipment; physical adaptations to plant, equipment and buildings, examination and assessment arrangements and the work of co-ordinators. This division of responsibilities is reflected in our recommendations about service provision and funding arrangements.

64. Once individual needs have been assessed and support services agreed, consideration should be given to setting these out in agreements between the HEI and the student. These would clarify responsibilities and levels of payment and provide a basis for monitoring whether agreed services are provided.

65. We believe that HEIs have a responsibility to ensure that support services purchased by students (such as signers and note-takers) are quality controlled. This may involve providing training for support workers, and maintaining registers of suitably qualified people who can work with disabled students. Some HEIs may wish to employ such support workers directly so as to maintain quality control. Employment arrangements, however, are not as crucial as giving students confidence that the services they use are reliable.

66. Where an institution is charging its students for services, these costs need to be identified and agreed in advance and set out in a learning support contract. It would be inappropriate for HEIs to charge for services on any basis other than cost-recovery or a contribution to costs.

Are HEIs recompensed for their additional work?

67. Currently HEIs receive no automatic income to recompense them for the additional costs of providing support services for students with disabilities. Most charge for some elements of the services provided, and DSAs cover, or contribute towards, these costs. But the institutional costs cannot be recovered in full in this way. Some institutions have used HEFCE special grants to build up their capacity to support students with disabilities. Similarly in Wales, funds to develop the HEI infrastructure have enabled universities and colleges to employ staff, purchase equipment and adapt buildings and plant to improve access for students with disabilities. However, those institutions which have not received HEFCE grants, or which have chosen to use infrastructure funds for other purposes, have had to rely on their own resources to meet the additional costs associated with disabled students.

68. Overall the additional costs are marginal. It could be argued that HEIs should be able to accommodate them through prudent management if disability issues are given any institutional priority. We found a handful of institutions where this is the case, but most maintain that their ability to expand services is constrained by resources, and that there are particular difficulties for small institutions with relatively modest budgets.

Students without DSAs

69. There are students who need additional support and who are not eligible for DSAs. If such students have been subject to professional assessment, if they are to benefit fully from their HE experience, the agreed levels of additional support should be provided. Meeting such costs will impose additional burdens on HEIs, but this is a group of students whose needs should not be overlooked because of present funding arrangements. The extension of DSAs to part-time and post-graduate students would be a considerable benefit in this regard. For some categories of students who may require support HEIs must retain discretion about whether they will meet costs, for example for international students.

Scarcity of expertise and skills

70. Most institutions said that more attention needs to be given to staff development and awareness raising. Within HEIs it would be useful if distinctions were drawn between staff induction programmes, staff development, support to course/programme teams and compulsory teaching certificate programmes.

71. We estimate that there are currently nearly 400 people in England and Wales working directly to support students with disabilities. Many of them have a part-time role and there is a high rate of staff turnover. The special initiatives funded by the HEFCE and the HEFCW have enabled people to acquire experience and it should be an objective not to dissipate this. One drawback of a project approach is that it does not guarantee long-term funding and makes for insecurity. One HEI offers a staff development programme, and there are other courses relevant to the personal and professional development of staff working directly with students with disabilities. Institutions should consider encouraging staff to pursue such programmes, and consider establishing an association to discuss professional issues.

72. There are emerging UK issues that require attention, for example the shortage of sign language interpreters and communication support workers for deaf students. This need has been identified, but it is not clear where the responsibility lies for taking appropriate action.

73. There is also scope for the greater use of IT in staff development. For example, a teacher faced for the first time with a hard of hearing student might access a web-site for immediate assistance. This might include details of the disability, hints and advice, prompts about inappropriate actions or language, and information about other staff with experience of hearing-impaired students.

74. In developing awareness programmes, non-disabled students need to be considered as a target audience. Inevitably they will spend time with students with disabilities, and a greater awareness of needs and sensitivities might add to their confidence in relating to and supporting disabled colleagues.

Possible extension of DSAs to part-time and post-graduate students

75. In our wide-ranging survey and discussions, all institutions welcomed the possible extension of DSAs to part-time and postgraduate students. Such a policy development would:

- extend equal opportunities in HE and improve access for a broad range of potential students
- provide further opportunities for graduates
- allow some students to shift from full-time to part-time study and so encourage them to study at a more appropriate pace or to adjust their learning as the nature of their disability changes.

76. No HEI was able to estimate the number of part-time students who might be attracted to HE if DSAs were extended. It was also impossible for HEIs to predict if patterns or modes of study would change if part-time education attracted DSA support. There are concerns that if part-time study is supported by DSAs, then demands on co-ordinators and others will increase.

77. We received details about the numbers of disabled postgraduate students from 21 institutions. Most were in single figures and it is difficult to draw any conclusions from such data. Five institutions supplied more detailed and substantial figures. These suggest that HESA statistics underestimate the numbers of disabled postgraduate students by between 30 and 40 per cent.

78. The extension of DSAs to postgraduate and part-time students would increase the demands on those responsible for co-ordinating of support services, which are already stretched. Two other comments are perhaps worthy of note:

- some postgraduate students might already have been provided with equipment as undergraduates, so demands on postgraduate DSA funds may not be as high as for undergraduate funds
- a minority of co-ordinators felt that some students with disabilities might find postgraduate courses too challenging and leave (particularly if they are unsupported), suggesting that care should be exercised in making grants for equipment.

Chapter 3: Recommendations

Introduction

79. In this chapter we put forward recommendations and proposals on the following:

- base-level provision
- approaches to funding
- other initiatives to promote access for students with disabilities.

Base-level provision

80. We have taken base-level provision to mean the minimum levels of service that each HEI should be expected to provide to meet the needs of disabled students and to deal effectively with applications. Such minimum standards should not be confused with best practice. Base-level provision is open to improvement and expansion, and indeed HEIs would be expected to seek to improve levels and standards of service. The case studies show that some HEIs already have services above the base-level proposed, but for some institutions establishing this level of provision will represent a significant step forward.

81. The objective of establishing minimum levels of service is to encourage HEIs to adopt a more robust and positive attitude towards access for disabled people, and thus increase their participation in the sector. For HEIs with relatively mature policies and practices, the objective of our funding recommendations is to reward them for efforts already made and to encourage them to maintain and develop their work.

82. The specific objectives of defining base-level provision proposed are to encourage students with disabilities to:

- encourage students with disabilities to consider applying
- inform their decision
- ensure that they receive sufficient support so that they can participate in the learning programmes of their choice once enrolled
- provide a template of provision for HEIs to enable them to meet the needs of disabled students
- consider the boundary of funding responsibility between DSAs and institutional funding.

83. We canvassed views from HEIs about what might constitute base-level provision. Six areas were most frequently mentioned:

- dedicated staff to promote and co-ordinate activities, with administrative back-up and a budget for them to use at their discretion

- policies to cover admissions and examinations
- comprehensive and honest information about support services and DSA application arrangements
- internally and externally credible arrangements for assessments
- learning support strategies, to include additional teaching and access to specialist equipment
- robust management information systems and statistics.

84. In light of these views and our own observations we recommend that each HEI should be expected to have the following minimum provision as a first step in the implementation of its disability statements. The detailed policies and procedures will need to reflect the requirements of individual institutions, but this basic provision should apply to all HEIs, and we believe should cover all students:

- written policies and procedures to cover the admission of students with disabilities
- clearly articulated arrangements to assess individual students' needs
- the provision of services to reflect agreed needs
- clearly defined internal referral arrangements to secure appropriate facilities for individual students
- written policies and procedures for examinations and assessments specifically for disabled students
- a staff development strategy, to include academic, administrative and support staff
- dedicated specialist staff and an identified budget
- an estates strategy to improve physical access to institutional facilities
- systems to collect and analyse data and monitor and evaluate policies.

Admissions

85. Most HEIs have arrangements to identify applicants who might require additional support. The main feature of such procedures is to identify candidates from UCAS forms, and to review with students the support likely to be required and the institution's ability to provide it. These arrangements seem to work well and should be extended by HEIs to cover all students, including non-UCAS admissions.

86. The admissions policy should cover the following:

- **Information.** Information about the institution and programmes should be prepared specifically to address the concerns of disabled applicants, perhaps with the assistance of current students with disabilities. A development from this base-level will be to prepare information in formats that can be used readily by disabled applicants. The information should specify any programmes which, exceptionally, might not be appropriate for students with disabilities, with an explanation as to why this might be.
- **Personal contact.** All potential students who indicate that they might require individualised support should be contacted by letter and their needs discussed by telephone or at interview.
- **An induction session.** All students who have stated that they have a disability should be invited to meet designated members of staff during enrolment. The purpose of such sessions will be to make sure that students know about the support services on offer and how to access them.
- **Statistics.** HEIs should collect information about applications and enrolments from applicants with disabilities. This information should be monitored by a member of the senior management team and be used to form a database so that the progress of students with disabilities can be tracked.

Identifying needs

87. Arrangements to assess the needs of students, and agree with them the support services required, are central to base-level provision. It is vital, therefore, that:

- HEIs are resourced to undertake or to arrange appropriate needs assessments for students. Students will identify needs throughout the year but most assessments will be at the start of the semester or term. Each HEI should establish targets and standards for assessments (for example, target times for the completion of assessments). There are reasons why target times might not be adhered to, for example because of extensive consultations and a desire to consider all possible options. However, targets will help to build expectations about service levels, and will help to determine resources.

- All appropriate staff (tutors, teaching staff, library and learning support staff) should be advised of assessed needs. To ensure that confidentiality is maintained, HEIs should produce a Code of Practice to set standards and protocols for the circulation of information about individual students.

88. Once needs are appraised it is essential to ensure that these are secured and provided. To this end the following recommendations are made:

- Arrangements should be put in place in each institution to monitor the provision of support which it has been agreed is required. These might take the form of student surveys, regular review sessions with students, or focus groups. Monitoring is easier if there is a learner agreement between the institution and each student, based on the agreed assessment of need.
- Each institution should be responsible for creating the networks of support workers (such as signers and note-takers) and should establish systems to quality control them, for example by ensuring that they are trained and appraised appropriately.
- A member of the senior management team should be designated to deal with unresolved issues. Co-ordinators are usually able to intervene to resolve problems but there are issues that affect the organisation of academic departments that might require the involvement of senior management.

Provision of services

89. In Chapter Two, we discuss a range of disabilities and suggest the types of support services and facilities that might be appropriate. There are various ways in which these services can be provided, but we believe that the responsibility lies with HEIs to ensure that they are in place.

90. There are also issues about improving access to a range of student services which are used by both disabled students and their contemporaries. For example, all students should be able to obtain professional advice and guidance about career opportunities. There are particular issues to be addressed in guiding and advising disabled students about jobs. Not all HEIs can have a specialist careers adviser who is able to deal solely with students with disabilities, but advisers need to be aware of the issues that might arise and be able to refer disabled students to appropriate sources of help.

Internal referral arrangements

91. The provision of support for disabled students depends upon students identifying themselves. The extent to which institutions publicise their support functions varies. Some seem reluctant to draw attention to the services available in case there is a demand that cannot be satisfied. Even in HEIs with well-developed support services, internal staff communications leave much to be desired. Key personnel, for example those who control departmental budgets, may not know about students who need support. These matters require regular review within institutions.

92. Many HEIs are developing a customer/client focus with imaginative sign-posting of services. Some have introduced 'one-stop-shops', to bring together advisory and support services in one place. Others are introducing mobile facilities to address the needs of students in multi-site institutions.

93. However an HEI chooses to organise its advisory and support services, these need to be made known to students. The development of policies to support disabled students should also address issues of internal communication and 'who needs to know'. Students must feel confident that personal information is handled in a sensitive way, but services are unlikely to be guaranteed unless those with authority and budgets know what is happening.

Examinations and assessment

94. When needs are first assessed, any special examination or course/programme assessment arrangements should be identified. To ensure that these are delivered, each HEI requires:

- a written policy on examination arrangements for students with disabilities which applies to the whole institution. This should cover arrangements for additional time, designated rooms, and approaches to marking and assessing of work
- a designated member of staff to arrange the necessary provision for disabled students through examination/assessment periods
- all invigilators to be briefed about special arrangements
- the examination and assessment arrangements to be reviewed annually.

Staff development

95. Our research shows that nearly all HEIs argue for improved staff development programmes to raise awareness about disability issues, and to provide practical support and assistance for staff who work with students with disabilities. The staff who should be involved will include academic, administrative and support staff. Experience suggests that disability awareness programmes evoke a mixed response. Against this background we make the following recommendations:

- induction programmes for all staff should include information about support services for students with disabilities, and key contacts within the institution
- training programmes for teaching staff who are new to HE should cover disability issues and

the implications for teaching

- for more experienced staff, optional sessions should be available, with targeted programmes relevant to the roles of particular staff (for example, admissions tutors, personal tutors, course leaders)
- briefing/discussion sessions should be arranged if required for any staff member who is teaching a student with disabilities for the first time
- co-ordinators and their colleagues need time and resources for their own professional development.

Dedicated staff

96. To deliver this base-level provision, institutions will need dedicated staff resources. As a minimum we believe that each HEI should employ a dedicated co-ordinator as a permanent member of staff. Given the range of work involved, the need to deal expeditiously with individual and personal needs, and the time-absorbing nature of this work either of the following possible approaches would be realistic in determining the number of dedicated staff:

- staffing based on total student numbers

Size of institution	FTE posts
up to 3,000 students	0.5
5,000 students	1.0
10,000 students	2.0
15,000 students	3.0
20,000 students	4.0

- staffing based student numbers, with a ratio of one co-ordinator to 200 students with disabilities.

97. Such staffing will allow for a more proactive approach to planning and providing services for students with disabilities, and should give a greater capacity to monitor whether agreed services are actually delivered. For larger institutions a team of staff, each specialising in the needs of particular groups of students, may be most appropriate. This could include, for example, a general disability co-ordinator, a co-ordinator for deaf students, a co-ordinator for visually impaired students and a co-ordinator for students with mental health problems. Some staff resources might be devoted to IT issues.

98. The senior co-ordinator needs sufficient authority to be able to intervene at any level within the institution. We propose that a member of the senior management team should be responsible for monitoring policies, and to whom the senior co-ordinator should have access, whatever line-management arrangements are adopted by the institution.

99. We have been struck by the amount of detailed administrative work that falls to co-ordinators. To function effectively they require administrative back-up, which we propose be based on the following ratios:

FTE disability posts	FTE administrative posts
0.5	0.5
1.0	0.5
2.0	1.0
3.0	2.0
4.0	2.5

Estates strategy

100. Issues of physical access are major considerations for HEIs. Old and historic buildings impose particular constraints, and the design of many buildings may be inappropriate. As we have noted, however, issues of physical access can be used as excuses and get in the way of developing services for disabled students. Many HEIs are adopting a strategic approach to access audits, and require all new building projects and renovations to address the needs of students with disabilities. Some do not, however. All HEIs should develop an estates strategy to address physical access issues and to ensure that the needs of all disabled students are taken into account. Such strategies should cover wheel-chair access, appropriate signage, the incorporation of aids such as hearing loops into buildings and amenities to facilitate evacuation from buildings. When allocating grants for capital projects and building renovation, the funding councils should require HEIs to address physical access issues and the needs of students with disabilities.

Policy and evaluation

101. Institutions' disability statements set out broad policies, but if progress is to be made operational plans are required against which activities can be measured and assessed. The recommendations above describe base-level provision, and if implemented will give each HEI a foundation of services. If these services are to be effective and developed, then that provision must be monitored and progress assessed. Each HEI should establish performance indicators, which might include:

- statistics on applications, admissions and comparative progression rates
- evaluations of provision, to include outcomes of quality audits and action taken to deal with shortcomings, an analysis of complaints and action taken to deal with them, and outcomes of student surveys
- numbers of staff 'trained'
- targets for service delivery and performance attained
- progress in implementing the estates strategy.

102. Governing bodies should be encouraged to review provision at least annually, and a member of the senior management should be made responsible for this policy area.

Approaches to funding

103. We believe there are strong arguments for additional resources to ensure that base-level provision is made in all HEIs and to provide incentives for development. HEIs need resources to develop the services that students can buy with their DSAs, and to develop learning support for those students assessed as not suitable for DSAs. Funding arrangements should also encourage innovation and the development of partnerships between HEIs to spread good practice, foster professional dialogue and encourage the sharing of equipment.

104. The objectives of funding in this policy area are to:

- provide incentives for those HEIs with poorly developed services to improve their provision
- ensure that institutions which have initiated programmes have the resources and recognition to develop them
- enable all HEIs to have a range of appropriate services for which charges can be made against DSAs
- encourage collaborative working.

105. Our survey sought views about possible future funding arrangements. We were interested particularly in views about:

- project grants
- formula-based funding
- specific grants.

Project Grants

106. In 1993 the HEFCE allocated funds to finance projects designed to improve student access, and to establish programmes to encourage participation in HE by people with disabilities. Funds have been increased, as has the duration of projects. HEIs compete for these grants which remain the principal financial incentive to encourage institutions to give priority to disability issues. Institutions have also used funds for the improvement of estates to address physical access problems. In Wales, a special initiative and subsequent substantial academic infrastructure allocations have enabled institutions to address both physical access and learning support issues.

107. The amount of activity and interest we have found in the sector is one indicator of the value of the funding councils' initiatives. Not every project has met its objectives, though there is much to be learnt from less successful ventures. A great deal of work is still required to ensure that the lessons and experience of the projects are shared more widely within the sector and that the activities generated by each project are embedded fully into mainstream institutional life. The grants have enabled initiatives to be taken, and a nucleus of people and skills to be developed. The work generated by these projects in England and Wales has increased understanding of disability issues in both sectors.

108. However, the competitive nature of the initiatives has meant that not all HEIs have benefited, certainly in England, and every bid requires an investment of time and energy. Although projects may be designed to influence 'permanent' provision, they are by definition temporary and this makes for uncertainties, especially in terms of careers and the consolidation of experience and expertise.

109. The present project grant arrangements are due to run in England until 1998-99, so it is timely to consider other funding regimes which could include all HEIs and meet the objectives set out above. In Wales the academic infrastructure funds have provided the opportunity for all institutions to set aside funds to improve the situation of students with disabilities, although not all institutions have chosen to do so. This approach has had the advantage of allowing all institutions the opportunity to consider how to use their allocations in the light of their own circumstances. However, the disadvantage has been that allowing institutions a choice in allocating these funds internally has meant that some institutions chose to spend little or no funds in this area.

Formula-based funding

110. The core HE teaching funding method in England is based on a formula which takes account of the number of students, including weightings for certain factors. If the provision of support services for disabled students is to be regarded as mainstream it is a persuasive argument to suggest that additional financial support should be made available within this funding method. The funding method is well understood and would involve HEIs in minimal extra work. This was the method chosen by the HEFCE to recognise the existence of additional costs associated with part-time students. In Wales a review of the teaching funding method is under way and the findings and recommendations of this report will help the HEFCW decide on a way forward appropriate to Welsh circumstances.

111. This study has confirmed that data about disabled students are unreliable. Base numbers are problematic: those routinely supplied by HEIs are not accurate, and do not reflect the demands made on institutions or the costs incurred by them. Aggregate cost data are available for DSAs, but it is not currently possible to obtain centrally an accurate picture of the number of individuals who receive DSAs at each HEI. Levels of provision and the quality of services available to disabled students vary throughout the sector and there are strong arguments in favour of dedicated funds to help ensure that baseline provision is established and developed.

112. The approach to funding used for part-time students was robust because definitions were clear and the relationship between cost and provision was reasonably straightforward. We do not believe that this is true for students with disabilities. If the funding bodies wish to include a weighted premium for disability in their mainstream funding methods, then further work will be required to identify appropriate data on disabled student numbers, and to examine the cost involved for HEIs in making appropriate provision for disabled students.

113. It was the strong view of the sector, and not just the disability co-ordinators, that any additional funding should be ring-fenced, as happens with Access Funds, to ensure that investment is made to address the needs of disabled students.

Specific grants

114. We believe there is a strong case for specific grants to be made to HEIs to develop services for disabled students. After a period, and evaluation of the range and quality of services, a shift to formula funding through the teaching funding method should be considered. In the medium term this would seem the most desirable course, but should be followed only when progress has been made in widening access and developing services for disabled students.

115. We suggest that all HEIs should be eligible for a grant, but that payment should be dependent on the production of a plan showing how base-level provision would be developed and describing strategies to improve and evaluate services. HEIs that already had base-level services would focus their plans on the extension and improvement of services. HEIs should be required to report annually on their provision and services, and show clear evidence of adequate internal monitoring and evaluation. This funding programme should also be externally evaluated after the first two years.

116. The benefits of this recommended approach are:

- all HEIs would have access to additional funds
- there would be resources not only to ensure minimum standards throughout the sector but also to fund improvements and developments
- HEIs would be held accountable for implementing their policies for disabled students, and the use of grants would be subject to evaluation.

117. In Wales it would be appropriate to consider these matters under the HEFCW's current review of its funding of teaching method. However, much of the above might be deliverable under present arrangements through earmarking an element of academic infrastructure funds, and making funding conditional upon progress in these areas.

118. In addition to this annual allocation, we recommend the creation of a fund against which bids might be made:

- to encourage HEIs to develop collaborative arrangements: for example, on assessments, staff

training, and the development of regional strategies; for partnerships between institutions with well-developed and less-developed services; and to encourage regional collaboration with FE sector services

- to provide incentives for HEIs to undertake research or introduce innovative approaches; this element might be on a matched funding basis.

Other initiatives to promote access for students with disabilities

119. There are a number of other important steps that the funding councils, DfEE and other organisations might take. These are:

- a. The early extension of DSA payments to postgraduate and part-time students.
- b. To clarify with professional bodies their policies about entry into the professions by people with disabilities. HEIs have said that in some professional areas this is a major influence on their willingness to recruit students with disabilities.
- c. To promote the professional qualification which is being developed for those working with disabled students.
- d. To promote the establishment of a professional group for those working with students with disabilities.
- e. To maintain and develop a central resource to work with HEIs to develop their services and promote good practice.
- f. To review national promotional literature and materials and develop these in appropriate formats and media.
- g. To consider establishing an independent complaints and grievance procedure to deal with any applicants who feel discriminated against on the grounds of their disability.
- h. To review with the QAA its audit inspections, to ensure that these cover disability issues and that its staff and audit teams are trained to deal with these issues.
- i. To evaluate the developments in IT software and systems and their impact on teaching regimes, so that these can be exploited more fully within the sector.
- j. To encourage UCAS and HESA to continue to review the utility of their statistics on disabled students, and to discuss options and the scope for change with disability co-ordinators in the sector.
- k. To encourage the Institute of Learning and Teaching to give a high priority to learning support for disabled students, since this will have wide-ranging implications for all students. This might include the Institute channelling funds to HEIs for research projects.

120. We were struck by the little consideration that is given to helping disabled students to benefit fully from university and college life. The totality of the student experience is an issue that should be of concern to HEIs. We would encourage Student Unions to review their own policies, practices and funding allocations and ensure that a sabbatical officer or senior student representative is responsible for working with students with disabilities, to widen their opportunities to take part in sporting and extra-curricular activities.

Guidance on base-level provision

Annex A: Methodology

1. In January 1998, the study team spent three days at an HEI to brief themselves fully on the issues and to hold in-depth discussions with a number of staff and students. This 'pilot' provided a great deal of data and identified a number of the topics and approaches that were pursued in the study.

2. Between January and March 1998, members of the study team visited another nine HEIs. Typically the visits lasted two days and involved discussions with senior managers; staff responsible for student services and support; disability co-ordinators; admissions, examinations, finance and careers guidance staff; and students with disabilities and their representatives. The institutions were selected on the basis of their size, age, location, geography and organisation. The selection also sought to capture also a representative sample of HEIs, including those with well-established provision and some with less developed services. The purpose of the visits was to understand how a variety of institutions ensure that students with disabilities share with their contemporaries 'a level playing-field' in terms of:

- access to the curriculum
- performance assessment
- use of the services, facilities and amenities which higher education offers.

3. Following the completion of these case studies, 161 HEIs in England and Wales were invited to complete a questionnaire. This was sent to vice-chancellors and principals. At the same time, we wrote to university and HEI staff with responsibilities for students with disabilities, and to Student Unions to tell them that this exercise was underway.

4. SQW held a well-attended workshop at the Skill National Conference in February and the study team had frequent contacts with the HEFCE's eQuip team to exchange ideas and explore issues. Skill is a national organisation to promote the interests of students with disabilities. eQuip is a small team funded by the HEFCE to support the projects established under its funding initiative and to promote good practice across the sector. Individuals and organisations have submitted reports and papers to inform the study.

5. A steering group, which met four times, guided the work of the project. The steering group was:

Cliff Allan (Chair)	HEFCE
Peter Baldwinson	DfEE
Roger Carter	HEFCW
Professor Alan Hurst	University of Central Lancashire and Chair of Skill
Sally Olohan	Nottingham Trent University
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Guidance on base-level provision

Annex B: Aide memoire for case-study visits

Introduction

1. This note gives guidance on the issues to be covered during the visits to HEIs. The purpose of the visits is:

- to understand the policy of the institution with regard to students with disabilities
- to find out about the practice and to assess the range and scale of current arrangements
- to obtain views about an appropriate baseline provision and to explore the constraints which influence implementation.

2. Prior to the visits, HEIs will be asked to provide relevant documentation and data about staffing and costs. We will obtain disability statements and key general statistics on each institution from HEFCE publications. It is unlikely that all requests for information will be answered before the visits, and so they will provide an opportunity to 'chase' data and to explore any problems/issues about their production.

3. During each visit there should be discussions with a senior manager (either the vice chancellor or a deputy); the chairs of internal committees with oversight of students with disabilities/equal opportunities; staff with designated responsibilities for students with disabilities/learning difficulties, (for example, co-ordinators, those running library and/or learning support services, those working directly with students with disabilities); staff concerned with student support/guidance/counselling; student union representatives and students with disabilities.

4. Immediately following each visit, a brief case-study report should be written, using the headings in this aide memoire to ensure a common format.

Policy

5. A copy of the appropriate disability statement will be obtained prior to the visit. We shall need to supplement this with information on:

- history of institution's policy and the focus for interest and promotion
- scope; for example, if the policy is concerned with both disabilities and learning difficulties
- if the policy is documented and deals with specific areas, for example application stage, admissions, on-course support, examinations
- arrangements to review and evaluate the policy
- views about the success of the policy

- is this a serious issue for the institution, or minimum compliance and health and safety preoccupations.

Students

6. We shall need data on the following:

- the numbers of students with disabilities and the methodology for obtaining this number
- opinions about under-reporting
- trends in numbers over the last five years
- differences in the catchment areas for recruitment and distribution within the university (as between disabled and non-disabled students)
- details about when students present themselves and how support services are publicised
- assessment arrangements and assistance provided to help students obtain DSAs
- is the institution an accredited assessment centre
- information about DSA applications, time taken for decisions and variations in practice
- evidence used to assess and support student claims for extra assistance
- research on student needs
- what happens to students who are failing
- arrangements for on-course support and for extra-curricular activities
- where lies responsibility for ensuring that student living and learning needs are covered
student views about provision and their assessment of attitudes towards them (for example, paternalistic or empowering).

Policy implementation

- description of how student support functions are organised
- what support services/functions are provided to help students with disabilities and length of time these have been in place
- where does responsibility for policy and review lie? for example with a committee or an individual
- staff responsibilities for policy implementation. If dedicated staff, details of numbers, background, reporting, training and appraisal arrangements

- staff training and awareness raising throughout the institution: are staff confident in dealing with students with disabilities
- reports prepared on students with disabilities and details of any recommendations
- examples of good practice
- are the experiences of students with disabilities considered in formal course reviews and curriculum design; recommendations and outcomes
- how are issues of physical access and building design handled; what is the assessment of accessibility and have initiatives been taken to help students with disabilities, for example with Braille signs
- appeal mechanisms for students who consider that they are not being helped sufficiently
- how adequate are current arrangements and the principal constraints on doing more
- contacts and networks, both internal and external
- is the approach paternalistic or empowering

Funding

- can assessments of the recurrent extra costs incurred by the HEI in supporting students with disabilities be provided
- what are the most significant costs
- how is policy implementation funded, from recurrent revenue, DSAs, funding council special initiatives, other sources
- are funds allocated on a regular/annual basis to improve physical access
- do the costs associated with assistance to disabled students represent value for money for the institution.

Student issues

- role of students' union and involvement in disability issues
- policies and practices
- examples of good practice.

Other issues

- use of volunteers

Future options

- views about what an adequate baseline provision should be
- constraints to be removed to enable this to be provided
- opinions about possible funding methods
- needs assessment and evidence
- implications for disabled students of changing HEI environment
- necessary conditions to ensure robust implementation.

Guidance on base-level provision

Annex C: Questionnaire

A BASIC INFORMATION

A1 What is the name of your institution?

A2 What is your position?

B POLICY

B1 In addition to the Disability Statement does the institution have written policies and guidelines to cover the following? *If yes, please supply copies*

	tick if yes
admissions	a
examinations and other assessments	b
on-programme support	c
other (please specify)	d

B2 Who makes the policies?

B3 Do students and staff with disabilities have an input?

Yes No

B4 How is policy on disabled students conveyed to students:

	tick if yes
undergraduate/postgraduate prospectus	a
literature sent to new students	b
other (please specify)	c

B5 Is the policy made available to the following:

	tick if yes
academic staff	a
administrative staff	b
support staff	c

B6 Is there an implementation strategy at institutional/department level?

Yes No

B7 Is there a committee responsible for overseeing the policy in relation to disabled students?

Yes No

B8 Do you conduct satisfaction surveys of disabled students to test the effectiveness of policy and support services?

Yes No

B9 What other methods are used to evaluate your policy? Please give specific examples.

C APPLICATIONS AND ADMISSIONS

C1 Are there special procedures to identify applications from prospective students who disclose a disability?

Yes No

C2 Are the needs of disabled students assessed before an offer is made?

Yes No

C3 Are admissions tutors/staff briefed about disabled students and the desirability of assessing whether they will require additional support?

Yes No

C4 Are student support service assessments available to potential students during the application stage?

Yes No

C5 Do you pay for disabled students to attend for interview/open days?

Yes No

C6 Are potential students with disabilities encouraged to speak directly to student support services to discuss their needs?

Yes No

C7 Are there special arrangements to assess support needs during Clearing?

Yes No

C8 What information about support services is provided to applicants in your prospectus?

C9 If students say they are disabled do you send them information?

Yes No

C10 Are assessments conducted by student support services?

Yes No

C11 Are you an Access Centre?

Yes No

C12 Are you seeking to become an Access Centre?

Yes No

C13 Do you have the services of an educational psychologist/other professionals during assessment?

Yes No

C14 Does your institution fund any assessments directly? Do you monitor the number of applicants who disclose disabilities and are offered places?

Yes No

C15 What proportion of all applicants are offered places? %

C16 What proportion of disabled applicants are offered places? %

Please tick this box if you do not monitor this.

D NUMBERS

D1 For the current academic year, we have the HESA statistics on the number of disabled students in your institution. If you have other information about the number of students with disabilities, please specify and state your source.

	number of disabled students	source of figure
full-time undergraduates		
part-time undergraduates		
postgraduates		

D2 Is the number of disabled students at your institution increasing or decreasing? (please tick)

Increasing a

Decreasing b

Constant c

D3 Do you have any comments about likely future trends in the number of disabled students at your institution?

D4 What proportion of all students failed to complete their programme in the last academic year? %

D5 What proportion of disabled students failed to complete their programme in the last academic year? %

E SUPPORT SERVICES

E1 Does the institution have a named co-ordinator for students with disabilities?

Yes

No

If no, please go to question E11

E2 If yes, please indicate his/her status: (tick appropriate box)

	full-time	part-time
academic staff	a	d
counselling staff	b	e
administrative staff	c	f

E3 Which of the following roles are undertaken by the co-ordinator:

	tick if yes
monitors applications	a
responsible for identifying and meeting student needs	b
Director/Head of Student Services	c
develops institutional policies on students with disabilities	d

E4 Please give numbers of other staff who work with the co-ordinator specifically to support disabled students:

	number
(i) full-time	
(ii) part-time	

E5 Does the co-ordinator have a budget and if so for what purposes?

	amount (£)
(i) wholly discretionary	
(ii) for assessments	
(iii) to meet hardship	
(iv) for equipment not funded by DSAs	
(v) to pay for learning support staff	
(vi) other (please specify)	

E6 Is there a committee to support the co-ordinator?

Yes No

If yes, please enclose terms of reference and membership details.

E7a Does this committee have a budget?

Yes No

E7b If yes, what is the budget? £

E8 Are there student representatives on the committee?

Yes No

E9 Please comment on any aspects of the role/responsibilities of the co-ordinator and any plans to develop the role.

E10 Are there representatives in each department /college with responsibilities for students with disabilities?

Yes

No

E11 If there is no co-ordinator, how are services to disabled students delivered?

F STAFF DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING

F1 Do you provide staff development training specifically about students with disabilities?

Yes

No

F2 Is such training included in induction programmes for the following:

	tick if yes
academic staff	a
administrative staff	b
support staff	c

F3 Are such programmes well attended by the following:

	tick if yes
academic staff	a
administrative staff	b
support staff	c

F4 Have you ever undertaken any evaluation of the effectiveness of such programmes?

Yes

No

F5 Please outline any plans for future staff development and awareness raising.



G ADVICE AND SUPPORT

G1 Are any of the following available to support disabled students?

	tick if yes
signers and interpreters	a
note takers	b
amanuenses	c
others (please specify)	d

G2 Are such support workers recruited and trained by the institution ?

Yes No

G3 Are support workers employed by the institution?

Yes No

G4a Do you make use of volunteers?

Yes No

G4b Please comment on the use of volunteers

G5 Is there a specific service for dyslexic students?

Yes No

G6 Do you screen students for dyslexia?

Yes No

G7 Do you have a formal assessment following screening students for dyslexia?

Yes No

G8a Do you provide learning support for dyslexic students?

Yes No

G8b If yes, please outline.

G9a Do you provide adapted residential accommodation for students with disabilities?

Yes No

G9b Approximately how many rooms/suites of rooms?

G10 Are special arrangements made for students with disabilities in terms of examinations and assessments?

	tick if yes
informal examinations	a
extended time	b
amanuenses	c
word processors	d
segregated examination rooms	e

G11 Do you provide markers/assessors with guidelines about how they mark scripts from students for whom special examination arrangements have been made?

Yes No

H FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT

H1 Do you provide any of the following learning support facilities?

	tick if yes
dedicated learning centre for students with disabilities	a
Braille service	b
extra loan time for library books	c
advance handouts of lecture notes and visual aids	d
subtitling for videos	e
loop systems for hearing impaired students	f
other (please specify)	g

H2 Are you undertaking or have you completed physical access audits to all your buildings?

Yes No

H3 Is there a strategic investment plan to implement access audit outcomes?

Yes No

H4 How would you assess the accessibility of your buildings? Please score on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1= not accessible and 5= readily accessible

	accessibility score (1-5)
(i) teaching buildings	
(ii) catering services	
(iii) library services	
(iv) residential	
(v) student union	

H5 Are there adapted toilets in all buildings?

Yes No

H6 Are there evacuation procedures and equipment in all buildings?

Yes No

H7 Please provide information about actual or planned co-operative initiatives with other HEIs to provide equipment or services.

H8 Please provide details of any service/initiative which you regard as good practice in your institution:

H9a Are there services which you have identified as desirable but are not providing?

Yes No

H9b If yes, please give details of these and the reasons for not providing them.

I POSTGRADUATE AND PART-TIME STUDENTS

I1a Do you have information about the numbers of postgraduate disabled students in receipt of grants (for example, PGCE, research council awards)?

Yes No

I1b If so, how many in total?

I2 Do you have any views about what the impact of extending DSAs to part-time and postgraduate students would be?

J FUNDING ISSUES

J1 Please provide estimates of the additional costs of support services for disabled students.

Description of service	Estimated cost	Source of funding (e.g. institution, HEFCE, DSAs)

J2 If additional funds were made available to support disabled students in higher education, how should this be arranged? Please score on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree.

	score (1-5)
(i) weighted capitation	
(ii) specific grant	
(iii) competitive grants	
(iv) ring-fenced any of above	
(v) no additional money since it is the duty of the institution to provide support to any student to access the curriculum	

K ANY OTHER COMMENTS

K1a Should all HEIs be required to provide support services to all disabled students?

Yes No

K1b If no, why not?

K2 Do you have any other comments about how HEIs might be further encouraged/supported to develop their services for disabled students?

K3 What should constitute base-line provision?

Guidance on base-level provision

Annex D: Study findings

Introduction

1. In this Annex we summarise briefly the policies and practices revealed by the case-studies and present a detailed analysis of the questionnaire responses.

Case studies

2. The following issues emerged from the visits to 10 higher education institutions (the aide-memoire used during these visits is at Annex B):

a. **Numbers and statistics.** There are wide variations in the numbers of students with disabilities. These range from less than 1 per cent of the total student population in one HEI to 7 per cent in another. There is little consistency between the numbers of students with disabilities published by HESA and institutional data (where these are kept).

b. **Strategies versus ad hoc approaches.** The most marked distinction is between those HEIs which assist students with disabilities on an individual, ad hoc basis and those which are developing a more strategic, institution-wide approach. The majority see the value of a strategic approach, but some HEIs continue to assist disabled students on a 'one-off' basis. Most institutions are seeking to provide access to students irrespective of their presenting disability. Others offer support particularly to students with a particular disability, for example deaf and hearing-impaired students.

c. **Physical access.** Issues of access to buildings and amenities are a major preoccupation for all HEIs. The nature of the problems faced by each varies, due to the age of buildings and the number and topography of sites. Problems of access are exacerbated by the introduction of modular options which make it more difficult to plan where students need to be. The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) has heightened concern about access to public facilities and services, and most of the institutions in our sample have completed access audits. Attempts have been made to reflect the needs of disabled people in the design of new buildings, though some developments would have benefited from more expert advice. In too many instances, however, access continues to be equated with wheelchair access. Improvements to older buildings have been made through the use of accumulated reserves and the poor estates programmes of the funding councils. Much remedial work depends on annual maintenance and minor works budgets, so it will take decades to bring estates to the required levels. In some institutions discussion about physical access tends to overshadow or substitute for a robust consideration of less visible attitudinal and cultural barriers faced by students with disabilities.

d. **Policy and implementation.** In addition to disability statements, most institutions have policies which cover admission and examination and assessment arrangements. Generally, a good deal of effort is taken to identify applicants with disabilities and to discuss with them any requirements for additional learning, and other, support that they might need. All institutions stress that offers are based solely on academic criteria. Potential students' decisions to accept or decline are based on discussions about levels of available support and issues of physical access. All institutions stated that every effort is made to assist a student with disabilities who enrolls, even if the need for additional support has not been identified and discussed previously.

In practice this is not always the case, and there are instances of students having to wait a long time for their needs to be addressed.

e. **Examinations and assessments.** All institutions have arrangements to assist students with disabilities. For example, extra time in examinations, the support of amanuenses and readers, the use of computers, and special locations for written examinations are commonplace. There are issues about who meets the additional costs involved. The promulgation of institution-wide policies has helped to assuage controversy about whether such arrangements are necessary, and whether they discriminate in favour of students with disabilities.

f. **Needs assessment.** There are a variety of arrangements to assess the additional learning support needs of students. DSA assessments are used generally as the basis to advise academic departments, libraries and other student support services about the particular needs of an individual. Some HEIs have developed special arrangements to assess students who might be dyslexic. The arrangements to assess student needs, to advise academic and other staff about them, and to deal with the instances of breakdowns in provision are a demanding and increasing workload.

g. **Student support services.** Despite different forms of organisation, a number of common themes are evident. Most HEIs in our sample of 10 have, or are committed to, 'one-stop shops' which bring together all student advisory and support functions within a single management structure and physical location. Most institutions have a dedicated team to support students with disabilities. Some have identified staff members in every department to liaise with this core team and to work with colleagues teaching disabled students.

h. **Staff development.** Most institutions offer opportunities for academic, administrative and support staff to learn about disability issues. The extent of such programmes and the response to them varies considerably but generally participation rates are not high, particularly from academic and teaching staff.

i. **Commitment to students with disabilities.** All institutions agree that the needs of students with disabilities must be addressed, but it is disingenuous to suggest that all share the same level of commitment and enthusiasm. Most institutions have committees to promote and discuss equal opportunities and disability issues, but few have good information about students with disabilities; their progression and their views about services. Without such data it is difficult to assess the effectiveness of policies and practice. For some individuals who work with students with disabilities, their ambition is to provide support so that students are empowered and encouraged to take as much responsibility as possible in organising their studies and university life. Others continue to view students with disabilities as a dependent case-load.

j. **Funding.** No institution was able to produce immediately information about the costs incurred in providing support to students with disabilities. It is argued that there are additional costs, such as the employment of co-ordinators and acquisition of equipment, but no institution was able to disaggregate these and provide a comprehensive analysis of costs. There are mixed views about how additional funds might be made available to HEIs, but a strong opinion that they need to be ring-fenced.

The sector response and view

3. In all, 161 questionnaires were sent out (a copy is included as Annex C). A total of 99 replies were received in time for analysis for this report (61.5 per cent). A further 10 have been received subsequently. Experience suggests that the overall level of response is high for the sector, and this is perhaps an indication of the level of interest in the topic.

4. Table 2.1 analyses the responses:

Table 2.1 Level of response by type of institution	
<i>Type of Institution</i>	<i>Percentage replies</i>
University established before 1960	76
University established between 1960 and 1991	63
University established 1992 and after	84
Non-university HEIs	50
HEIs in England	70
HEIs in Wales	36

5. The titles and designations used within HEIs vary, but table 2.2 shows the replies analysed according to the department which sent back the questionnaire:

Table 2.2. Responses by HEI function	
<i>Designation/function</i>	<i>Percentage responses</i>
Principal or registrars department	36
Personnel, HR directors and equal opportunities officers	10
Learning support managers	5
Student support staff (including disability co-ordinators and special needs advisers)	49

6. Many replies are detailed, thorough and indicate a good deal of thought and reflection. It is disappointing that a number are less complete. Sections of the questionnaire enabled respondents to comment on key issues. These sections produced the most incomplete responses. This might suggest that some respondents attach little significance to the study; that ideas about policy options and developments are ill-defined, or it could be related to the status of the person in the HEI, who might feel able to answer factual questions only.

7. Prompted by our letter, five student unions sent their views which are reported below.

Analysis of questionnaire

8. The responses to the questionnaire are analysed and discussed under the following headings:

- policy implementation and evaluation
- information
- application and admission procedures
- numbers and trends
- assessment of needs
- learning support

- examinations and assessments
- the infrastructure to support students with disabilities
- staff development
- physical access
- links between HEIs
- good practice and services not provided
- the nature of provision
- funding issues
- student unions' views.

Policy implementation and evaluation

9. All institutions have disability statements, and 56 per cent of respondents state that there are implementation strategies to give effect to their general policy statements. Four respondents state that they are reviewing and revising policies; a similar number say that policies and procedures will be reviewed when mergers with other HEIs are completed. The case study institutions suggest that in addition to broad access and equality of opportunity statements, specific and written policies and procedures are desirable to cover admissions, examinations and on-programme support. Only a minority of HEIs seem to have explicit policies covering all these areas. The majority have defined examination arrangements to cover the needs of students with disabilities, and most have addressed admissions procedures. The least developed area is on-programme support. About 5 per cent of respondents refer to student charters as evidence of their commitment to student-centred learning. A few HEIs draw a distinction between policy and guidelines and state that they prefer to work within a framework which suggests standards and good practice rather than prescription.

10. Senate, council or academic board are the most cited authorities for policy approval within HEIs. There is a variety of committee and consultative arrangements to advise on policy and implementation matters. A number of factors influence this, including institutional size, arrangements to oversee equal opportunities policies and the importance which an individual HEI places on disability issues. Some 68 per cent of respondents identify a committee which deals with disability issues, and a further number have established working groups and focus groups to investigate policy and services for students with disabilities.

11. Over 75 per cent of HEIs state that students are included in the membership of committees and focus groups. These are not necessarily disabled students, and may be student union representatives. There is no clear picture about the involvement of staff with disabilities in these structures.

12. All institutions which responded say that policy statements are freely available. In most they are distributed to staff, but in some they are available on demand only. In general, academic staff have greater access to policy documents than administrative or support staff.

13. Thirty-two per cent of institutions undertake satisfaction surveys to assess the views of students with disabilities about the quality of their higher education experience and the effectiveness of support services. For some of these institutions the views of students with disabilities are gathered as part of wider student surveys. Those HEIs that are reviewing policies have mounted major consultation

exercises to gather student views. Other activities to evaluate the effectiveness of policies to support students with disabilities include:

- formal annual reviews of provision and the preparation of a report to senate or the committee charged with quality assurance. In at least three HEIs these reviews include interviews with all students who are receiving support
- user groups, sometimes established by student unions, to review provision. Feedback is usually via the committee structures
- reliance on the monitoring of complaints
- regular contact with students and monitoring of provision to meet assessed needs, by the disability co-ordinator or equivalent.

Information

14. All institutions include a reference to students with disabilities in their promotional literature. This invariably consists of a statement welcoming applications and a plea to prospective students who think they might need assistance in their studies to make early contact. During the case study visits the point was made repeatedly by staff and students that information to prospective students with disabilities might be more frank. For example, the attitude of professional bodies to the employment of disabled people might suggest that certain programmes are not advisable. Physical constraints are an absolute barrier to some programmes. Such factors might be drawn to the attention of applicants.

15. Many institutions have prepared specialist literature for students with disabilities which describes services in more detail. Just over 80 per cent of HEIs which have customised information of this kind circulate it routinely; the others respond only to specific requests.

16. A number of HEIs refer to their web-sites which include information specifically addressed to students with disabilities. This is an imaginative use of technology, and helpful to some applicants with disabilities. But it is disappointing to find that few institutions have prepared information for prospective students which anticipate their needs as disabled people. There are some good examples of institutions which use cassettes, videos, Braille or enlarged print to provide information to applicants, even on request. The conventional forms in which information is made available could themselves be a barrier to higher education.

Application and admission procedures

17. Ninety-one per cent of respondents state they have procedures to identify applicants and prospective students. The main feature of such procedures is to 'flag-up' from UCAS forms applicants who declare a disability. Where student support services are well developed, the member of staff responsible for students with disabilities will also be advised.

18. Eighty-six per cent of institutions state that efforts are made to assess an individual's needs before a formal offer is made. All institutions claim that this is within the context of a clear distinction between academic suitability for a programme, and a mutual decision/discussion between the applicant and the institution about the levels of support which can reasonably be offered. The effectiveness of the arrangements to assess needs and an institution's ability to meet them, depends upon the willingness of applicants to declare that there is a possible issue and there being adequate time to discuss and consider possibilities.

19. Ninety-eight per cent of respondents believe that admission tutors/staff are sufficiently well briefed to deal with applications from students with disabilities, but a number of caveats are made:

- that it must be the responsibility of those concerned with admissions to seek advice as necessary
- that needs assessments should be carried out by specialist staff. Seventy-seven per cent of institutions state that student support services personnel are available during the application stage, which suggests an insufficiency of personnel to provide expert advice.

20. Only four respondents say that they pay for disabled applicants to attend for interview. However, though a number comment that this has never been an issue, so it may be that individual departments have met such costs. A number of HEIs provide and pay for other assistance for applicants with disabilities, for example, signers for interviews.

21. Just under 40 per cent of institutions have set up arrangements for handling applications from people with disabilities during Clearing. The case study institutions pointed to the value of this, and a number of the 60 per cent without such arrangements are planning to develop them.

22. About 40 per cent of institutions monitor applications from disabled applicants; 36 per cent of respondents supplied figures. These compare the percentages of offers to all applicants, with the offers to those who declare a disability on the UCAS form. The purpose of the question was to find out if applications from applicants with disabilities are monitored, rather than to draw other conclusions. Institution-wide figures will not reveal variations in patterns of offers within subject areas or modes of study. The figures that we have show that in 63 per cent of returns the rate of acceptances for all applicants and for disabled applicants are approximately the same. In the others there are variations of between 15 per cent and 100 per cent in the ratios of applications to offers, between all applicants and those with disabilities. At the very least figures of this kind should be prompting institutions to ask why disabled applicants are made fewer offers.

23. There are examples of innovative practices to help in the induction of students with disabilities. These include:

- additional induction sessions at the start of the academic year
- separate registration arrangements.

Numbers and trends

24. Only 21 HEIs were able to supply figures, other than HESA returns, about the numbers of students with disabilities. The HESA figures show that these institutions reported 5,853 students who had declared a disability. The figures supplied to us by the HEIs give a figure of 8,447 students but mask a number of contradictions. For five HEIs the HESA returns and their own figures are approximately the same (though they might not cover the same students), and in three the institutions' figures are lower than the HESA returns. The discrepancy of 44 per cent between the HESA numbers and those of the HEIs needs to be treated with caution, given the small sample size and the possibility that data are not strictly comparable. The figures confirm, however, that current national statistics tend to underestimate the numbers of students with disabilities in higher education. Nor will statistics provide a realistic basis on which to assess workloads.

25. There is a wide variation in the numbers of students with disabilities in the institutions which responded. Table 2.3 shows their numbers as a percentage of the total student population, by type of institution. These figures cover 21 institutions:

Table 2.3: Disabled students as a percentage of total student numbers	
<i>Type of institution</i>	<i>Percentage of total students</i>
HEIs (not universities)	0.3; 5.0; 2.5; 16.0
Universities (pre 1960)	0.9; 2.65; 3.2; 2.4; 0.2; 1.8; 1.9
Universities (1960-91)	6.7; 3.7; 6.0; 2.5
Universities (post 1992)	3.4; 8.5; 5.8; 4.2; 9.4; 1.6

26. These figures do not reveal a great deal, other than their broad range, and there are reasons for some of them. The HEI with the lowest percentage of students with disabilities has a large nursing and paramedical school, and professional attitudes towards the employment of people with disabilities may account for this. If this sample is representative of the sector as a whole, it suggests that the older universities have been the slowest to accept the challenge of accepting students with disabilities, and that perhaps their patterns of recruitment and access policies have changed only marginally.

27. Table 2.4 summarises responses about trends in the numbers of students with disabilities:

Table 2.4: Trends in numbers: percentage of responses			
<i>Increasing</i>	<i>Constant</i>	<i>Decreasing</i>	<i>Don't know</i>
79.0	14.0	1.0	6.0

28. With only a few exceptions, the HEIs which supplied detailed figures can point to an increase in the numbers of students with disabilities in recent years. Between 1995-96 and 1997-98, increases in the numbers of students with disabilities range from just over 10 per cent to 105 per cent. The trend is clear, but in some institutions the numbers, as a percentage of the total student population remain low.

Assessment of needs

29. Just over 75 per cent of respondents state that student support services take an active role in the preliminary assessment of student needs. In some institutions there are separate arrangements for screening for dyslexia, with referrals to educational psychologists for those who require in-depth assessment.

30. The extent to which HEI assessments are used for DSAs varies. The assessments of some HEIs are accepted by LEAs. Some LEAs require an independent assessment, at least for some types of disability.

31. There is no discernible pattern in the resources devoted to needs assessment. Some HEIs are able to use the services of educational psychologists and health care professionals. The extent to which academic staff are involved also varies.

32. Nine HEIs which responded are either accredited Access Centres or form part of a joint centre; five others are thinking about seeking accreditation. The relationship between HEIs, Access Centres and LEAs seems to work well, but there are points of friction. For example:

- some HEIs question the 'value-added' of such referrals since they believe they have the expertise required
- effective assessments need to reflect the conditions of the HEI which the student being assessed is attending. Access Centres, or other external assessment agencies, are not always fully aware of the opportunities and constraints of HEIs, and so their assessments may not take full account of local circumstances fully
- the speed with which LEAs deal with applications, and the consistency of responses, continue to be matters of concern.

33. Meeting the costs of assessments is problematic. It is possible to use the DSA to meet the costs of a full assessment of needs; but initial screening and diagnosis, to assess if there is a potential need, are not funded at present and these costs are met by HEIs. Some students do not require a full-blown assessment, but do need advice as to what additional support may be helpful in the context of their course.

Learning support

34. In terms of policies and procedures, the least well-developed area is learning support for students. When asked about services which are desirable and are not provided, learning support figured highly. The ability of HEIs to provide support depends to a degree on the numbers of students who have DSAs and are able to pay for extra provision.

35. Just over 69 per cent of respondents state that they have, or are developing, strategies to support dyslexic students. These include one-to-one coaching; regular study skills seminars; preferential access to IT equipment; credit bearing modules on methods of study and coping with dyslexia. The range and scope of such services largely depend on DSAs, and the attitude of the institution towards dyslexia as a condition which affects a student's ability to learn.

36. Other support to students with disabilities includes dedicated learning centres (a minority of HEIs); Braille and other services for blind and visually impaired students; extended loan periods for library books; advanced copies of lectures notes (some HEIs concede that this is only after negotiation and depends on the willingness of academic staff to co-operate); hearing induction loops and sub-titling of videos; large text VDUs and other specialist equipment; assistance to use IT and various equipment loan schemes. There is nothing surprising in this menu of facilities and services but:

- although we have not undertaken a detailed audit of provision, the availability of support services seems patchy
- the case studies demonstrate that while institutions claim to provide facilities and services their delivery is not always guaranteed
- the provision of services and facilities needs to be matched by an evaluation of their use.

37. All HEIs facilitate student access to signers, note-takers, amanuenses or readers. In some HEIs this support is limited to examinations. There is no common pattern of arrangements across the sector but the following comments are made:

- only a minority of HEIs train these support workers (27 per cent) and an even smaller proportion employ them directly (23 per cent). Most either maintain lists of support workers or help students make contact with them
- some HEIs rely on LEAs to provide support staff; most report that there are increasing difficulties in securing support workers, and that in some disciplines and locations there are skill shortages
- 42 per cent of HEIs make use of volunteers. Reasons given by others for not using them include their uncertain reliability; that students have a right to support and the involvement of volunteers smacks of a charity and welfare ethos; that the organisation of volunteers demands staff resources

- a minority of HEIs reported positively about the establishment of student job shops to recruit support workers from among the student body to work with disabled students.

Examinations and assessments

38. All institutions state that they have introduced adaptations and allow additional provision to be made to support students with disabilities in examinations and assessments. Most commonly these include extensions of time, the use of word processors, the provision of separate accommodation, and the employment of readers and amanuenses. Not all HEIs have institution-wide guidelines to cover examinations and assessments.

39. Although this would seem to be a well-developed area, the following comments are made:

- responsibility for meeting the costs of these arrangements is an unresolved issue in some HEIs
- in some, extra time for examinations means that the same allocation is made for all examinations, irrespective of the nature of the examination or the assessed needs of the student
- 36 per cent of institutions have prepared guidelines for examiners and assessors. Most institutions take the view that additional time and the kinds of facilities mentioned above create the 'level playing field', and that any other considerations would place students with disabilities at an advantage. Some examiners are made aware that students have had extra time, or are dyslexic, but there is no common practice or approach.

40. Thirty HEIs provided statistics which compare the failure rates of all students and those of students with disabilities. The figures do not reveal departmental or programme variations, and the data suggest that there are no marked differences in overall performance. However, there are some HEIs in which performance by disabled students seems less good, and even the crude figures should prompt questions and more detailed monitoring.

Infrastructure to support students with disabilities

41. Just over 95 per cent of respondents said that their institutions have a named disability co-ordinator. In some HEIs this is only one responsibility among a number which fall to an individual. The size of the institution will also help to determine the amount of time devoted to disability issues. For example, in one HEI, disability issues are supposed to account for 10 per cent of the designated officer's time; in 27 per cent of HEIs the role is half time or less. In 30 per cent of institutions co-ordinators are attached to academic or teaching departments; in nearly 60 per cent they are included within administrative services. The co-ordinators contribute to three principal functions:

- identification of student needs and providing on-going support
- monitoring applications
- contributing to the development of institutional policies.

42. The institutions without co-ordinators state that support for students with disabilities is ad hoc and fragmented.

43. Thirty-one HEIs give their co-ordinators small budgets, which range from £1,000 to £25,000. This money can be used for assessments, extra examination costs, staff training or to assist needy students. Some other co-ordinators, who do not have a specific budget, have access to student services and equal opportunities budgets, though some have commented that internal procedures to get money can be protracted.

44. Most co-ordinators work with an advisory group or an institution appointed committee, though again some HEIs are so small that such arrangements are unnecessary. The arrangements vary a good deal. Since the implementation of the DDA, some committees which were previously concerned with students only have widened their remits to look at the needs of staff with disabilities and questions of public access.

45. For most institutions disability co-ordinators are relatively new posts, but many comment on the growth of the role and its potential. Frequently mentioned points include:

- pivotal role in co-ordinating activities across the institution, a value noted particularly by collegiate bodies
- focus and stimulus for the consideration of disability issues, and a central source of information. Co-ordinators have become advocates for their clients
- scope to develop the role with a greater external focus, for example to develop links with local disability groups and with other FE and HE institutions
- co-ordinators mention the pressures of helping to develop strategic approaches and being expected to maintain a case-load, and the inadequacy of administrative support.

46. Fifty per cent of institutions have, or are planning to designate, staff in each department to be responsible for disability issues. Staff turnover and the unwillingness of some to take on this role suggest that it will take sustained effort to make such arrangements effective.

Staff development

47. Seventy-three per cent of institutions include disability awareness within staff development programmes. 42 per cent evaluate these activities. The programmes offered cover both awareness raising and specific disabilities and their impact on learning. HEIs suggest that this is an increasing area of activity and that disability awareness will feature in the induction programmes for new staff and for those academic staff who will be required to undergo training in learning and teaching methodologies. A number of issues have been raised through the questionnaire:

- evaluation of programmes in one institution suggests that awareness-raising sessions have little long-term impact

- academic staff would value practical advice and support on teaching methods when they have to teach students with disabilities
- in some institutions, training about disability issues is limited to academic staff, although administrative and support staff will also work with students with disabilities
- some HEIs suggest that staff need more training in recognising and assisting dyslexic students, and in mental health issues.

48. One university has developed a course for staff who support students with disabilities. It is important that the developmental needs of disability co-ordinators and other student support services personnel are addressed. These include staff from libraries; estates; residential and housing services, careers guidance, admissions, examinations and IT support. In many institutions part-time staff are responsible for disability issues. Because of their part-time status they may be excluded from personal development and training budgets and this is an issue which needs to be addressed.

Physical access

49. Some 60 per cent of respondents have undertaken access audits of their buildings, and about half have plans to improve access. Nearly all institutions look to new capital developments and major refurbishment opportunities to improve accommodation for people with disabilities. Many have earmarked funds from maintenance and minor works budgets to make annual improvements to their building stock, but major investments cannot be handled in this way. Respondents justifiably commented on the naivety of our questions about physical access, since they did not take sufficient account of the variety of buildings and sites which colleges and universities occupy. Thus it is difficult to draw any general conclusions. However, the rankings given suggest that library and catering facilities have better access than teaching buildings and residential accommodation, and that student union facilities tend to be the least accessible.

50. Physical access and the inadequacy of many facilities to accommodate disabled students are a significant pre-occupation within the sector and it will take time to remedy present inadequacies. The DDA has reminded HEIs of the need to improve access and make buildings safer and this has been an impetus to further action. But given limited funds, the protracted nature of building and planning permission procedures, the variable age and condition of the estate in the sector, the lack of awareness of many estates staff, and the temptation to excise access features when budgets are trimmed, there are no short-term solutions to the undeniable obstacles which exist. As we observed earlier, however, issues of physical access should not be used to deflect consideration of less visible barriers which face disabled students, or the consideration of teaching and learning strategies which circumvent the need to use inappropriate buildings.

Links between HEIs

51. There are some well-developed links between institutions. These include, for example:

- the collaborative SUMMIT arrangements between HEIs in Manchester
- the provision of support services for deaf and hearing-impaired students for a number of HEIs

in London by the City Literary Institute

- the embossed map and diagram service offered by Loughborough University to HEIs
- the National Federation of Access Centres.

52. More generally active collaboration between HEIs to develop support for students with disabilities is not well advanced. Some HEIs, through their working relationships with FE colleges are developing access programmes. It was a theme of the consultation that HEIs would like to know more about experience and good practice from others.

53. The following list of initiatives which have been taken or are planned by HEIs suggests that there is scope for collaborative working. But this requires staff resources to enable joint programmes to be developed and maintained. Initiatives include:

- development of access programmes
- joint training for note-takers and other support workers
- shared staff awareness programmes
- joint arrangements for DSA assessments
- pooling adapted residential accommodation
- regional/local resource centre for equipment loan and hire
- development of regional/local inventories of specialist equipment and shared access to equipment.

Good practice

54. HEIs produced an impressive list of activities and initiatives which they consider to be good practice. A selection is set out below to demonstrate the range of ideas and activity within the sector:

- establishment of a student job-shop to recruit support workers and train note-takers and other support workers
- personal assistance for students with physical disabilities
- specialist dyslexia services: at least six HEIs cited this and one has opened a free literacy clinic for initial diagnosis. In others diagnostic software is being developed
- development of learning support services, including dedicated facilities, and specialist tutors in every academic area
- academics established a special needs network

- annual monitoring of services
- contact established with all applicants, and the offer of a pre-programme module.

Services not provided

55. The above list suggests that HEIs have established different priorities, and that there is growing expertise in the sector. We now describe the services which HEIs would like to offer, but have not yet developed. The 'good practice' list confirms the need to improve arrangements to share knowledge and experience, and to disseminate information about what is happening in the sector.

56. Seventy-eight per cent of respondents identified services which they are not providing currently but would like to offer. The most frequently mentioned are:

- a full-time co-ordinator
- more imaginative information and marketing formats for prospective students
- drop-in study centres, learning support groups, and home-visiting tutors
- register of non-medical helpers, and quality assurance arrangements for support workers
- support services for dyslexic students, including study skills training and proof-reading
- support for students not able to claim DSAs but who need assistance, including equipment loan schemes
- more focused and specialist support for defined groups, such as deaf and hearing-impaired students.

The kind of provision?

57. HEIs were invited to address two questions:

- what actions might be taken to develop and promote the sector's responsiveness to the needs of disabled students?
- what should constitute base-level provision?

58. A number of clear themes emerged in the proposals to improve the sector's responsiveness to disabled students:

- financial incentives. It is suggested that there needs to be long-term guaranteed funding, more equitably distributed throughout the sector, with incentives to encourage collaborative arrangements. Some HEIs suggest that the sector should administer DSAs, audited by the funding councils
- HEIs to develop inclusive learning strategies. Some practical implications of this are the better integration of academic and administrative structures; the design and promulgation of teaching and learning strategies; and more training for senior managers
- the provisions of the DDA to be extended throughout HE to overcome the danger that disability statements will not lead to improvements
- improved information about performance, the publication of league tables and specific inclusion of disability issues in quality inspections and reviews; dissemination of good practice and advice; and development of accredited disability awareness course for HE staff.

Funding issues

59. HEIs were asked to assess three options for future funding from the funding councils to recognise the additional costs involved in supporting students with disabilities. The least favoured option is to continue the system of competitive grants. These are not liked because:

- allocations lack transparency
- bids are costly to prepare
- the approach engenders a 'project' approach to disability issues, with no guarantees that initiatives will be assimilated into mainstream provision.

60. Of the other two options there is a marginal preference for specific grants for all institutions to support provision rather than inclusion of disability as part of mainstream formula funding methods for teaching. The factors which appear to have influenced this view are:

- specific grants can be 'ring-fenced' more easily
- allocations are transparent and grant values are perhaps less susceptible to erosion than formula funding
- the operation of formula funding arrangements would not result automatically in all institutions receiving additional funds.

61. If new funds are to be made available there is an overwhelming view that these should be ring-fenced and used only to maintain and develop services for students with disabilities.

Student union views

62. Unsolicited views were obtained from five student unions. The major points raised are:

- not all students who require additional support are identified. Even those who declare a disability are not communicated with, and it is a matter for the student to contact support services. To overcome this problem more imaginative marketing strategies are needed
- ambiguities about numbers of disabled students and the ways in which contacts are established deter potential service providers from developing new services and facilities. Too little is done to market services and students are unaware of many of them. One suggestion is to develop integrated databases with details of students who declare a disability on enrolment so that they can be contacted. The compilation of such a database would require the consent of each student, and access to it would need to be controlled
- too much information is communicated through traditional media
- policies on examinations are often confusing, and are not sufficiently sensitive to the needs of students with different disabilities
- although assessments may result in extra time allocations in examinations, these can be changed without reference to the student
- insufficient attention is paid to physical access, and equipment to make access easier is not maintained
- there is a need for better signage in different formats and a 'one stop shop' for information for disabled students
- HEIs should set targets in terms of physical access and widening participation rates, and monitor progress
- when a disabled student is offered a place, the HEI should contract with the student to provide an educational experience qualitatively equal to that of other students.

63. The case studies showed increasing interest in disability issues in student unions and a number have a designated sabbatical officer to take the lead on these matters. However, we were struck by the low priority given to disabled students in the organisation of union affairs. There is more that student unions themselves could do to improve the quality of life for students with disabilities, for example in the organisation of social and recreational events.

Guidance on base-level provision

Annex E: List of acronyms

DDA	Disability Discrimination Act
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment
DSA	Disabled Students' Allowance
FE	Further education
FTE	Full-time equivalent
ILT	Institute for Learning and teaching
HE	Higher education
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEFCW	Higher Education Funding Council for Wales
HEI	Higher education institution
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
LEA	Local Education Authority
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency
UCAS	Universities and Colleges Admissions Service