Ulster University Academic Staff Disability Awareness Survey 2017

Summary of Data and Results

Introduction

As part of the review of the effectiveness of the University's Disability Action Plan, the Equality and Legal Manager carried out an Academic Staff Disability Awareness Survey, using an updated version of the questionnaire used in the 2011 Staff Disability Awareness Survey. This enabled some comparisons to be made with 2011 results, to demonstrate the effectiveness of the actions carried out since 2011.

The Academic Staff Disability Awareness Survey took place between 7 and 21 December 2017. The questionnaire was circulated electronically to all academic staff and one reminder was sent during the survey period. Despite this, the response rate was disappointing. 63 responses were received, constituting a 5.8% response rate. This compares with 115 responses, a 10.6% response rate, in 2011. Because the response rate is low, the results cannot be considered to be representative of all academic staff. However, they do provide a 'snapshot' of academic staff disability awareness of relevant issues in 2017.

Summary of responses

Percentages have been calculated using the total number of responses received for each question. A selection of qualitative comments is included for some questions, to represent the general nature of the comments received. Full comments are available on request.

Where possible, comparisons are made with the results of the 2011 Academic Staff Disability Awareness Survey results.

Demographics

56% (35) of the respondents were female. 73% (46) of respondents were lecturers and 19% (12) were research staff.

Awareness of legislation

Staff were asked to indicate their level of awareness/understanding of various legislation and internal guidance documents. Their responses were as follows:

Awareness of legislation: Please indicate your level of agreement / understanding of the following statements:	2017 Responses (n=63)			2011 Responses (n=115)		
	% Yes	% No	%Unsure	% Yes	% No	%Unsure
I have heard previously of the Special Education Needs and Disability Order	84%	11%	5%	87%	7.8%	5.2%
I have heard previously of the Disability Duties	49%	30%	21%	42.6%	37.4%	20%
I have heard previously of competence standards	49%	32%	19%	47.8%	33%	19.1%
I am aware of the issues of communication and confidentiality if a student declares a disability to me	91%	3%	6%	92.2%	1.7%	6.1%
I understand what the term 'reasonable adjustment' means in relation to disabled students	87%	3%	10%	87%	4.3%	8.7%
I am familiar with guidelines for positive communication and disability language etiquette	76%	14%	10%	63.5%	17.4%	19.1%
I understand the financial support arrangements available for disabled students**	33%	41%	26%	29.6%	43.5%	27%
I am eager to try to meet a wide range of student needs	96%	2%	2%	95.7%	0%	4.3%
I am aware of the accessibility issues around the use of online material, e.g. Blackboard VLE course content, University websites and web accessible documents	74%	13%	13%	64.3%	8.7%	27%
I am aware of accessibility issues around the use of electronic materials, e.g. Word documents, PowerPoint presentations and PDFs	72%	11%	17%	73%	8.7%	18.3%

In general, the results indicate that there has been little change in academic staff awareness of the legislation and various disability issues since 2011. However, there appears to be increased awareness about the guidelines for positive communication and disability language etiquette and accessibility issues around the use of online material.

Positive benefits to having disabled students in the learning environment

Staff were asked if they felt there are any positive benefits to having disabled students in the learning environment. Their responses were as follows:

Do you feel there are any positive benefits to having disabled students in the learning environment?	2017 (n=63)			2011 (n=115)		
	Yes	Makes No Difference	Other	Yes	Makes No Difference	No
	48 (76%)	10 (16%)	5 (8%)	108 (94%)	-	-

76% (48) of respondents felt that there are positive benefits to having disabled students in the learning environment, compared with 94% in 2011. This suggests less positive attitudes towards having disabled students in the learning environment.

63% (40) respondents described some of the positive benefits to having disabled students in the learning environment. These ranged from providing a different learning perspective, to increasing awareness of disability issues to other students. A sample of the comments received follows:

'Adjustments I have made to my teaching approaches, resources, learning environments to ensure accessibility for all, have positively benefited the learning experience of the whole student group. More importantly, I have observed time and time again within student cohorts where differences are a strength.'

'Makes staff more aware of different learning styles and pushes them to improve the way content is delivered.'

'Provides for a richer learning environment and facilitates awareness of the complexity of issues people have.'

'The presence of people with a range of learning needs, abilities and challenges is enriching for the learning and social experience. This reflects who we are a local, national and global societies and challenges us to consider ourselves in the context of others and how we respond to needs - our own and those of others. When managed properly, this richness can transform the learning experience as it creates a sense of a mutually supportive community of learners and challenges me as a

lecturer to seek assess for and respond to people who have needs I perhaps have been guilty of not considering as much as I should have.'

'In my view, including students with disabilities on our modules and courses enables their rights to participate and learn just as any able-bodied student. Able-bodied students learn from their unique perspectives, and can also form mutually enhancing friendships and working partnerships which dispel negative ideas and stereotypes and unfair treatment in future associations with disabled individuals.'

'It makes other students and staff aware of the challenges that disabled people face and hopefully makes them more aware and focussed on other people's needs.'

'It's good for non-disabled students to see that having a disability does not necessarily mean having a learning disability. It helps to break down stigma and stereotypes.'

'Provides examples to other students about what is possible to achieve and focuses on the person and not the disability.'

'It makes students as well as staff more aware of disability issues, and of the need to ensure that appropriate mechanisms are in place to meet the needs of people with disabilities.'

Recent experience teaching or supporting disabled students (n=63)

75% (47) respondents indicated that they had had recent experience teaching or supporting disabled students. 41% (26) of staff stated that they would be happy to discuss their experience further with a member of Staff Development.

The types of disability experienced by respondents are summarised below:

Experience of working with students with a specific disability	Number of staff reporting some experience
Mobility / physical disabilities	9
Dyslexia	9
Deaf / Hearing difficulty	6
Visual impairment	5
Autistic spectrum / Asperger's syndrome	5
Mental health issues	5
Unseen (mainly epilepsy)	5
Learning difficulty (ADHD, Dyspraxia)	4

Some of the respondents outlined the reasonable adjustments that they had made to accommodate disabled students. These are summarised as follows:

Experience of working with students with a specific disability	Reasonable adjustments made
Mobility / physical disabilities	Room locations adjusted Classroom arrangement adjusted Provided rest opportunities
Visual impairment	I spoke to them after the first lecture and asked them what their needs were. They helped me in ensuring that the material was suitable for them. Prepared examination papers with enlarged print Took account of their visual impairment when marking
Deaf / Hearing difficulty	Gave handouts in advance and spoke directly to the student with interpretation via signer Ensured that all videos I used in teaching sessions had subtitles and transcripts where made available online Position of the lecturer in the room was adjusted to enable the student to fully engage in the lecture
Dyslexia	Complied with adjustments proposed by student support Provided tutorials about their work; examples on their assessments on correcting mistakes; made sure was calling notes at slower pace to ensure they were abreast Mentor to write/record notes Additional time to complete online tests Lecture notes sent in advance Additional technology provided Made all material available on BBL, recorded lectures/revision sessions and again posted them on BBl; Used variety of supporting material including videos Always explain graphs and have little text on slides
Autistic spectrum / Asperger's syndrome	Agreed system to help student pick up on social cues:

	• devised an anonymous way for students to flag if there were issues they'd prefer not to be covered in projects • learned to gently flag with a student when a conversation should come to an end Assessments including group work were adjusted Ensured that in class their very informed but sometimes extensive verbal contributions were well handled so that they did not intimidate or take time from contributions by other students
Unseen (mainly epilepsy)	Extended time, adjustments as and when required
ADHD	Let them get up and leave the class whenever they want (which they do quite a lot), also I ignore behaviour from them which I wouldn't for others e.g. texting, looking at phone etc

21% (13) of respondents stated that they had experienced difficulties in implementing reasonable adjustments for disabled students. The difficulties reported mainly concerned conflicts with professional standards, alternative methods of assessment, delays in receiving information about reasonable adjustment required, determining 'reasonableness' and room design:

'Students who cannot make presentations or sit in a room with others are increasing in number. Some accrediting bodies require these competencies. I am not comfortable with some of the adjustments that have been made to accommodate students who say they cannot perform under these conditions. How can they perform in a stressful work environment? Since our area is health associated I am double concerned that some graduates may not have the professional skills although they may have the academic background. I am not sure that the difficulties have been resolved. I see students getting alternatives to presentations in front of a class etc. but I am not sure that it is helping in the long run. Do we follow up on the students on our books who have been given a set of adjustments and find out how they have done after graduating from Ulster? I fully appreciate that there is much more to this that an employment statistic but some basic numbers would be useful. In particular it would be good to show staff that reasonable adjustments can make a very positive difference.'

'Some staff are resistant and do not understand the law nor the students' needs. We also have issues relating to meeting professional communication standards for some student's and we can't change some things because of QAA and or HCPC requirements.'

'Not all disabilities can be accommodated on clinical placement to fulfil the course requirements.'

'Where there is a requirement for group work in learning outcomes, this can be an issue for students with mental health challenges.'

'In the instance of alternative assessment being recommended several approaches have been trialled. Difficulties included having a robust process that was externally verified and worked for the student, the course team, professional body etc'.

'Difficulty in severe disability and laboratory classes, re health & safety, had to build a special table, and permit group work.'

'Occasionally, it is difficult as the dissemination of information and RARs for students can be delayed or not communicated. In semester 1 last year, we had a student with a visual impairment, but our seminar tutor was not informed until week 4. There are also students that I know are on the autistic spectrum from them explicitly informing me, but I've never received an RAR for them. It's unclear whether this is due to confidentiality issues, the student not engaging with student support, or the information simply not being shared with all staff by the point of contact. And as there is no way to find the information bar an email search, it can be tricky to find the information necessary to make reasonable adjustments.'

'At times the so called recommended reasonable adjustments are unclear and vague, for example the person has 'slow information processing' and this should be 'taken into account'. When further delay was requested this was not provided and it was suggested we made the adjustments were felt were necessary. I have also requested the evidence to support amanuensis as an evidence based intervention and this has not been provided. Finally it has been my experience that the recommended reasonable adjustments are shared with the Examination office and put in place before being agreed if these are reasonable by the academic staff with professional accountability for the course.'

'Room design & location (a large physical distance between rooms.')

Programme has professional recognition (n=63)

56% (35) respondents indicated that their programme has professional recognition. Over 40% of these (43%, 15) indicated that this has had no effect on disabled students. However, 20% (7) indicated that there are issues with disabled students meeting the professional standards (i.e. in terms of intended learning outcomes and/or competence standards) for their courses. This seems to be a particular problem for courses such as nursing:

'As noted in the earlier response at times the recommended reasonable adjustments are not considered to the reasonable from a professional perspective. Whilst I accept there is a need to provide support, there have been instances when intensively supported students have not managed to perform to a satisfactory level in the profession when that level of support is not available.   I think there needs to be a much more joined up way in which the possible recommended reasonable adjustments are discussed in a professional context as these are being explored. The situation at present that RAR are made and if an academic member staff disagrees they are told to tell the student themselves and cautioned about a possible court case (which to my knowledge a court case has not occurred at Ulster) is in my view bullying.'

'Occasional difficulty in getting the right placement.'

'Some students may achieve the academic qualification (not the placement component) and so may not be suitable for registration as an HCPC professional.'

'Specific requirements of the course require certain physical needs to be met.'

'The reasonable adjustments that students receive in the learning environment will not be the same in paid employment and at times I think we are setting them up to fail in the real world.'

'Unsure - but students with dyslexia find it difficult to read/write ward documents.'

Flexibility within the Student Admissions Policy (n=63)

48% (30) of respondents indicated that they were aware of the flexibility within the University's Student Admissions Policy, which permits alternative methods of assessment to be considered for entry.   However, only 6% (4) of these indicated that they had used this aspect of the policy, for example, to consider reasonable adjustments:

'With support of student services, individual presentation not group and one member of staff asking questions rather than a whole group.'

'We are doing so now. However, I think it would be best if the CD or teaching teams of professional courses were asked before students had RAR's issued, given that some discussion needs to take place and some recommendations cannot be met. Some student's may meet the academic requirements (with support) but may never be eligible to register with the statutory regulation and they need to know that before they start the course.'

Confidence in ability to adapt module content for disabled students (n=63)

In 2017, academic staff were most confident in adapting their module content for students with wheelchair/mobility difficulties and specific learning difficulties (e.g. dyslexia); however, confidence has declined for both categories. Similar to 2011, staff were least confident in adapting their module content for students with multiple disabilities.

The greatest increases in confidence were observed for students with autism / Asperger's syndrome (+15%) and mental health difficulties (+7.9%). The greatest decreases in confidence were observed for students with specific learning difficulties (-11.3%) and unseen disability (-9.6%).

How confident are you of your ability to adapt your module content for students with the following disabilities:						
	2017 responses			**2011 responses (n=107)**		
Answer Options	**% Confident**	**% Not confident**	**% Unsure**	**% Confident**	**% Not confident**	**% Unsure**
Specific Learning Difficulties e.g. dyslexia	70%	6%	24%	81.3%	8.4%	10.3%
Blind/Partially Sighted	41%	26%	32%	38.3%	36.4%	25.2%
Deaf/ Partial Hearing	49%	24%	27%	55.1%	29%	15.9%
Wheelchair / Mobility Difficulties	75%	6%	19%	77.6%	14%	8.4%
Autistic Spectrum Disorder / Asperger's Syndrome	44%	21%	35%	29%	37.4%	33.6%
Mental Health Difficulties	49%	21%	30%	41.1%	30.8%	28%
Unseen Disability e.g. diabetes, epilepsy, Asthma	54%	16%	30%	63.6%	21.5%	15%
Multiple Disabilities	29%	29%	42%	23.4%	40.2%	36.4%

Confidence in ability to adapt teaching methods for disabled students (n=63)

Similar to 2011, academic staff in 2017 were most confident in adapting their teaching methods for students with wheelchair/mobility difficulties and specific

learning difficulties. However, there appears to be a decrease in the level of confidence for these disability types compared with 2011. Staff were least confident in adapting their teaching methods for students who are blind or partially sighted (29% were 'Not confident').

The greatest increases in confidence were observed for students with Autistic Spectrum Disorder / Asperger's Syndrome (+18.8%), mental health difficulties 9+11.7%) and multiple disabilities (+11.6%). The greatest decreases in confidence were observed for students with specific learning difficulties (-9.4%) and students who are deaf or have partial hearing (-8.2%)

How confident are you of your ability to adapt your teaching methods for students with the following disabilities:						
	2017 responses			2011 responses (n=107)		
Answer Options	% Confident	% Not confident	% Unsure	% Confident	% Not confident	% Unsure
Specific Learning Difficulties e.g. dyslexia	70%	8%	22%	79.4%	10.3%	10.3%
Blind/Partially Sighted	46%	29%	25%	42.1%	38.3%	19.6%
Deaf/ Partial Hearing	46%	24%	30%	54.2%	26.2%	19.6%
Wheelchair / Mobility Difficulties	75%	5%	20%	82.2%	9.3%	8.4%
Autistic Spectrum Disorder / Asperger's Syndrome	44%	24%	32%	25.2%	37.4%	37.4%
Mental Health Difficulties	51%	21%	28%	39.3%	29%	31.8%
Unseen Disability e.g. diabetes, epilepsy, Asthma	56%	14%	30%	58.9%	18.7%	22.4%
Multiple Disabilities	35%	25%	40%	23.4%	39.3%	37.4%

Confidence in ability to adapt assessment methods for disabled students

In general, the results indicate a decrease in confidence in ability to adapt assessment methods for disabled students, compared with 2011. Only three disability types (Mental Health Difficulties, Blind/Partially sighted, multiple disabilities) corresponded with an increase in confidence.

Similar to 2011, academic staff in 2017 were most confident in adapting their assessment methods for students with wheelchair / mobility difficulties and specific learning difficulties. However, there appears to be a decrease in the level of confidence for these disability types compared with 2011. Staff were least confident in adapting their assessment methods for students with multiple disabilities, Autistic Spectrum Disorder / Asperger's Syndrome, and for students who are blind / partially sighted. The greatest increase in confidence was observed for students with mental health difficulties (+10%). The greatest decrease in confidence was observed for students with Autistic Spectrum Disorder / Asperger's Syndrome (-15.4%).

How confident are you of your ability to adapt your assessment methods for students with the following disabilities:						
	2017 responses (n=63)			**2011 responses(n=105)**		
Answer Options	**% Confident**	**% Not confident**	**% Unsure**	**% Confident**	**% Not confident**	**% Unsure**
Specific Learning Difficulties e.g. dyslexia	70%	6%	24%	74.3%	8.6%	17.1%
Blind/Partially Sighted	46%	24%	30%	41%	33.3%	25.7%
Deaf/ Partial Hearing	54%	17%	29%	54.3%	23.8%	21.9%
Wheelchair / Mobility Difficulties	73%	6%	21%	76.2%	13.3%	10.5%
Autistic Spectrum Disorder / Asperger's Syndrome	43%	25%	32%	27.6%	37.1%	35.2%
Mental Health Difficulties	51%	19%	30%	41%	27.6%	31.4%
Unseen Disability e.g. diabetes, epilepsy, Asthma	60%	10%	30%	61.9%	18.1%	20%
Multiple Disabilities	32%	27%	41%	28.6%	37.1%	34.3%

At what stage in the admissions and /or teaching process would you like to be informed about a prospective disabled student? (n=64)

The majority of respondents stated that they would like to be informed about a prospective disabled student 'as early as possible'. Responses to this question were as follows:

Stage would like to be informed about a prospective disabled student	Number of respondents
As early as possible	15
At start or early in semester/module	11
On application	8
Before teaching commences	7
Prior to or at registration/enrolment	5
Before or at admissions	4
Once student has been accepted	4
When they accept their place	2
When teaching	1
Before classes are timetabled	1
When School is informed	1

Support and advice centres

The greatest proportions of respondents indicated that they would seek support and advice from colleagues (86%) and Accessibility Advisers/Student Support (78%), whilst fewer indicated that they would seek support and advice from the Student Support website (54%), Staff Development (44%) and the Equality and Legal Manager (28%). Compared with 2011, there has been a marked decrease in the proportions seeking advice from Accessibility Advisers/Student Support (-14.4%) and the Equality and Legal Manager (-27.7%).

Respondents also indicated that they would seek support and advice from other sources such as disability organisations, Heads of School of the Learning and Teaching Executive Dean.

Where would you seek support and advice from within the University?						
	2017 responses (n=63)			2011 responses (n=105)		
Answer Options	**% Yes**	**% No**	**% Unsure**	**% Yes**	**% No**	**% Unsure**
Accessibility Advisers (Student Support)	78%	5%	17%	92.4%	2.9%	4.8%
Student Support Website	54%	24%	22%	53.3%	20%	26.7%
Staff Development	44%	32%	24%	34.3%	36.2%	29.5%
Colleagues	86%	5%	9%	82.9%	6.7%	10.5%
People and Culture (Equality and Legal Manager)	28%	36%	36%	65.7%	13.3%	21%

Training topics (n=63)

With the exception of 'SENDO and Programme Design' (-2.1%) and 'Designing Accessible Curricula' (-27.6%), total percentages for 'Very important' and 'important' are greater than those for 2011. Significantly, the proportion of respondents who felt that input on 'Advice on implications of SENDO legislation' is very important is greater (+8.6%), compared with 2011.

Other training requested included '*input on how to meet external professional requirements*' (one respondent), and '*safeguarding vulnerable people*' (one respondent).

In order to identify and prioritise training, please indicate how important input on the following would be to you:							
	2017 responses (n=63)				2011 responses (n=105)			
Answer Options	% Very important	% Important	% Less important	% Not interested	% Very important	% Important	% Less important	% Not interested
Advice on implications of SENDO legislation	35	46	16	3	34.3	38.1	21.9	5.7
SENDO and Recruitment	25	42	25	8	25.7	36.2	29.5	8.6
SENDO and Programme Design	38	38	19	5	38.1	40	16.2	5.7
Advice on implications of Disability Duties	51	35	11	3	31.4	53.3	13.3	1.9
Designing Accessible Curricula	51	39	10	0	48.6	39	9.5	2.9
Positive Communication and Disability language Etiquette	41	46	13	0	38.1	43.8	15.2	2.9
Health and Safety	57	25	18	0	42.9	36.2	16.2	4.8

Information on specific disabilities

Compared with 2011, the proportions of respondents who felt that input on specific disabilities was 'Very important' and 'important' increased, regardless of disability type. The most significant increase (+12.2%) was for input on 'Autistic Spectrum Disorder / Asperger's Syndrome'. The smallest increase was for input on 'Specific Learning Difficulties' (+4.3%).

One respondent suggested that input regarding reasonable adjustments should be provided '*as and when required, rather than universal*'. Another suggested that input should be provided to assist them to:

> *'Understand how student's assessments for special requirements/reasonable adjustments are allocated and managed. For example, the excessive number of exams that have to be scheduled for individual students in individual rooms, in addition to the extra time afforded. This is not representative of the world of work or adequately contributing to the employability of such students. Additionally when students chose not to avail of the additional support, at what point is there oversight of such wasted resources and Student Support reassessing needs regularly?'*

Information on specific disabilities

In order to identify and prioritise training, please indicate how important input on specific disabilities would be to you:							
	2017 responses (n=63)				2011 responses (n=104)		
Answer Options	% Very important	% Important	% Less important	% Not interested	% Very important	% Important	% Less important	% Not interested
Specific Learning Difficulties	47%	40%	13%	47%	39.4%	43.3%	15.4%	1.9%
Blind/ Partially Sighted	32%	52%	16%	32%	30.8%	45.2%	23.1%	1%
Deaf/ partial sighted	35%	51%	14%	35%	26%	51.9%	21.2%	1%
Wheelchair/ Mobility Difficulties	23%	47%	30%	23%	18.3%	42.3%	34.6%	4.8%
Autistic Spectrum Disorder/ Asperger's Syndrome	64%	30%	6%	64%	38.5%	43.3%	16.3%	1.9%
Mental Health Difficulties	62%	30%	6%	62%	40.4%	43.3%	14.4%	1.9%
Unseen disability e.g. diabetes, epilepsy, asthma	43%	32%	25%	43%	26.9%	38.5%	30.8%	3.8%

Importance of input on reasonable adjustments for specific teaching and learning approaches

Compared with 2011, greater proportions of respondents felt that input on reasonable adjustments was very/important in all approaches, with the exception of 'Lecturers, seminars and Tutorials' (-5.4%) and 'Using Blackboard Virtual Learning Environment' (-0.9%). The greatest increases in importance were for 'Fieldwork, laboratory and practical classes' (+12.7%), 'Placement and Work based learning' (+9.4%) and 'Competence standards' (+9.1%). The smallest increase was for 'Creating Accessible e-learning content' (+4.1%).

In order to identify and prioritise training, please indicate how important input on reasonable adjustments for specific teaching and learning approaches would be to you:								
	2017 responses (n=63)				**2011 responses (n=104)**			
Answer Options	**% Very important**	**% Important**	**% Less important**	**% Not interested**	**% Very important**	**% Important**	**% Less important**	**% Not interested**
Lecturers, seminars and Tutorials	60%	25%	10%	5%	47.1%	43.3%	6.7%	2.9%
Fieldwork, Laboratory, and practical classes	46%	22%	27%	5%	26.2%	29.1%	22.3%	22.3%
Placement and Work based learning	45%	25%	24%	6%	32.7%	27.9%	25%	14.4%
Using Blackboard Virtual Learning Environment	37%	41%	19%	3%	32.7%	46.2%	16.3%	4.8%
Creating Accessible e-learning content	47%	35%	14%	3%	35.6%	42.3%	18.3%	3.8%
Competence standards	38%	43%	14%	5%	28.2%	43.7%	17.5%	10.7%
Disability Disclosure and Confidentiality	37%	41%	19%	3%	31.7%	40.4%	21.2%	6.7%

Formats for receiving information

Staff were asked in what format they would like to receive information. Their responses were as follows:

In what format would you like to receive information?				
	2017 responses (n=63)		2011 responses(n=104)	
Answer Options	**Yes**	**No**	**Yes**	**No**
Briefing Sessions/ Workshops	87%	13%	67.3%	28.6%
Advice Leaflets	71%	29%	70.2%	25.5%
Web Materials	87%	13%	78.8%	17.2%

Other formats suggested included 'focus groups', the Staff Disability Forum and:

'Dedicated trained staff who have a full understanding of both student needs and academic needs i.e. can look at matters objectively and offer practical and realistic solutions.'

'Having clear points of contact for student or course specific issues.'

Comments on the implementation of SENDO legislation at Ulster

Staff were asked about their views on the implementation of the SENDO legislation at Ulster. Responses indicated that awareness of SENDO varies throughout academic staff:

'Having worked in my current roles at universities across London also I believe that UU approach is comparatively mostly excellent.'

'We comply to a high standard.'

'So far so good.'

'It's acceptable in my view.'

'I think it's important to have this type of legislation in place and implement it consistently.'

'Legislation is not useful when not transmitted to staff in a suitable format.'

'Ensure good engagement strategies are in place.'

'Staff need more support and training.'

'Staff pressures make additional info and duties onerous.'

'Are staff aware of what is considered "reasonable"? I am not sure that they are. I am not. I am happy to try to accommodate all needs but I do not fully understand how far I am expected to go.'

'I feel a lot of staff are unprepared to know how to support students.'

'Seems quite formulaic. For example, reasonable adjustment in assessment seems to mainly mean a sticker for dyslexic students. More creative ways of making reasonable adjustments would be welcome.'

Comments regarding Ulster's procedures for responding to and supporting staff working with disabled students (n=38)

Staff were asked about their views on Ulster's procedures for responding to and supporting staff working with disabled students. Only 21% (8) of those who responded felt that the procedures were either excellent or good. Comments included:

'Ulster has treated this as a priority.'

'My experience thus far is that advice, guidance and support has been readily available when I sought it out. I would only say that having a comprehensive understanding of what is available, who to contact and why would be very useful.'

'Help is generally there if asked for, but more liaison between staff and student support would be useful.'

'Exploration of the impact of students with specific needs might be helpful.'

'I can only comment in relation to what colleagues have said and I think that they feel well supported and that any gaps in procedures are taken on board when flagged up.'

'I have found them reasonable and proportionate.'

'I think those procedures are reasonable on the whole.'

'I think more needs to be done to guide use specifically in the assessment of students with special needs.'

Ulster is very supportive of students. However, there is a disconnect between a RAR being issued and the detail or recommendations to staff on how that can be achieved, particularly in exceptional circumstance.

'I think there is a need for a more joined up approach. I think the current situation that 'advisor' are seen as the only real advocates for students and academic staff who raise concerns about RARs are seen as difficult is unhelpful and can lead to unnecessary adversial positions.'

'More practical guidance for colleagues on the adaptation of teaching, learning and assessment, particularly for students with mental health problems as this is becoming more and more commonly reported.'

'I think we need more help, advice and support.'

'More support and training is needed.'

'Are there procedures?'

'Apart from an email informing me which students in my classes have disabilities and online questionnaires I have not received any formal training. I do think this could be offered in an annual seminar session.'

'Absence of communication lines between those in my role and academic staff which is occasionally necessary and the absence of which negatively impacts the student and sometimes adds to their disability.'

'Horrendous. The increasing and varying disabilities which students present themselves is overwhelming. How we as academics respond and/or manage is often very reactive. The increasing number of students presenting with extensive mental health issues is alarming, yet teaching staff are ill equipped to manage these appropriately, as this is quite specialised. Arrangements around offering multiple exam locations for students who may or may not avail of these results in staff having excessive invigilation duties. These arrangements are often made once and never reviewed. I am aware of a student who hurt his arm in a car accident in Year 1, which he recovered from within weeks. However he was allocated extra time in his assessments and a note taker for the remainder of his studies. This was an unfair advantage to his peers.'

'I have had a semester from hell with a student. Only my Hos And Associate HoS have been able to help. I believe that Student Support need to think about other students and staff who have been tortured by one student.'

'Very poor, we need more help early on in the programme.'

'Seriously lacking'.

'Student support for field trips has been problematic in the past. Not sure what it is like now.'

'I think it is much better than how they respond to and support disabled staff.'

'What about staff with disabilities?'

Comments regarding Ulster's procedures for responding to and supporting disabled students (n=28)

Staff were asked about their views on Ulster's procedures for responding to and supporting disabled students. One quarter of those who responded felt that the procedures were either excellent or good. Comments included:

'From looking at existing policies and procedures and my attendance at training workshops as part of compulsory training, I think the policies are very comprehensive.'

'From speaking with students and support staff the impression externally is that Ulster is extremely supportive and encouraging.'

'Those students I have dealt with in recent years seem well satisfied that their needs have been accommodated.'

'Fine within existing financial constraints.'

'Insufficient resources and specialist knowledge to deal with increasingly diverse student needs. For example, staff in Student Support who deal with students initially are clerical with minimal relevant experience to triage students. There are often lengthy delays in accessing a face-to-face counsellor. Students tend not to want to use telephone services and prefer face-to-face.'

'I get the impression that more resources are needed for this area.'

'I am supportive of widening access and supporting disabled students and have done so successfully, however I think the current university policy does not adequately recognise the professional requirements of some courses and the limitations this may place on possible reasonable adjustments.'

'They are ok but students with disabilities should not be using them to get around the way in which the learning outcomes should be met. Reasonable adjustments are just that, reasonable.'

'Thus far I see it as positive when activated.'

'More than adequate.'

'Mediocre.'

'Sometimes too slow.'

Comments regarding the implementation of the Disability Action Plan (n=5)

Staff were asked about their views on the implementation of the Disability Action Plan at Ulster. Reponses indicated that some staff are not aware of its existence:

'No awareness.'

'What is it?'

'I would like to see it.'

'More publicity about this would be good.'

'I think it is very positive that the university has a plan to bring down with the barriers that prevent discrimination against people with disabilities.'

Comments regarding action the University could take to better promote positive attitudes towards disabled people (n=48)

Staff were asked about their views on the actions the University could take to better promote positive attitudes towards disabled people. Suggestions ranged from 'improved information/communication' to 'increased use of role models/visibility':

'A more centralized source of information, both general and confidential (i.e. being able to look up student RARs.')

'More easily accessed and widely available general information directed to supporting staff to assist students would be very good.'

'At admission, information events to promote the university's actions.'

'Audio-visual materials on the UU site and via the SU...'

'Allow disabled people to talk to the staff and be involved in staff training on disabled issues.'

'Invite people with disabilities and those who support them to staff events to explain their challenges and contributions.'

'Creating confidence in the staff cohort regarding appropriate ways in which to support students.'

'Gosh, I'm not sure, but have more role models, more staff with disabilities in prominent positions, more visible in student union etc..'

'Greater representation of disabled people in promotional materials (e.g. prospectus, advertisements, website) to make the public aware they are a visible, included and welcomed presence in all aspects of university life.'

'More people with disabilities visible in the University's official materials (advertising, reports, press, releases)?'

'Inclusion in media campaigns.'

'More visible information/case studies about successes.'

'Video vignettes from them to thank staff for what they have done to help.'

'More visible reminders to students not only to mind their own mental health but to be simply courteous and kind to other students, who may be suffering from stresses and pressures that others are unaware of (and which in some cases could constitute mental/emotional health problems).'

'More students union led events.'

'Hire more at higher level.'

'Continue reviewing practices and putting measures in place to help disabled people.'

'I feel that disabled staff are wary about disclosing disabilities or challenges in case this is used against them. The climate at Ulster feels increasingly pressured and competitive which mitigates against staff feeling comfortable disclosing disabilities.'

'It could treat its own disabled staff and staff who acquire a disability better and this would definitely help promote more positive attitudes towards disabled people generally.'

'Promotion of more positive workplace for everyone, rather than anything targeted.'

'Start renaming learning difficulties as learning differences/use less oppressive language/ run compulsory workshops and courses for all non-disabled staff and students where disabled students Inc spld can present on how their disability affects them/ (positives as well as negatives) what it means and how they feel they can be better supported.'

'The university could help raise awareness in these matters with schools with the promotion of events involving children and young people.'

Comments regarding actions the University could take to encourage greater participation of disabled people in University or public life (n=33)

Staff were asked about their views on the actions the University could take to encourage greater participation of disabled people in University or public life. Suggestions ranged from 'ask if they are interested' to 'showcase success stories/role models':

'Ask them directly if they'd like to sit on A,B,C or have an interest in...X,Y,Z.'

'Talk to them; I do not have an informed opinion on this, and would hesitate to conjecture.'

'Meaningful engagement - authentic, not just quick press release type stories once in a while.'

'By showcasing the achievements of disabled people who have graduated/are studying/working at the university and let others know what life at Ulster University was/is like.'

'Disabled graduates who are advocates of the University could assist with good news stories and promotion.'

'Profile existing collaborations where staff engage with organisations that encourage participation in university life.'

'Perhaps highlight achievements of disabled graduates, employ disabled individuals within the university, invite guest lecturers/speakers who are disabled to address the student body at graduation, conferences, symposia etc.'

'More visible information/case studies about successes.'

'Have it reflected in who is appointed to senior management teams.'

'Better respect from senior leadership for staff in general would encourage a more inclusive environment.'

'Promote the high level of understanding and flexibility within UU.'

'Remove barriers that prevent them for fully engaging in University life!   Provide more support to staff and students explaining the needs of people with disabilities.'

'The University could take seriously its duties under the Disability Discrimination Act and be more positive about how it approaches colleagues' need for reasonable adjustments.'

'Provide mechanisms to a healthy workplace for all, adopt a culture of people supporting each other, ensure new buildings are fully compliant.'

'Encourage events which are accessible to all.'

'Training for students and staff, not the statutory regulations but practical stuff that would be helpful day to day.'

'More integration/ dispelling myths and inaccuracies.'

'Recognise difference and embrace it, but don't marginalise it.'

'I think that Ulster is already doing enough to encourage greater participation of disabled people in University and public life.'

'Does the university have statistics on guest speakers/guest lecturers, etc.? If so, does the proportion of them with a disability come close to the prevalence of disability in the general population? Also, I couldn't help notice that at Jordanstown, while there are automatic doors everywhere, there isn't one in the final double doors leading to the Board Room. Is this a subtle exclusion of wheelchair users from the 'top table'? With the move to Belfast, I wouldn't spend money on a new door... but I hope the new campus doesn't have the same limit placed on accessibility.'

Key findings:

- Significant experience of working with or supporting disabled students exists and some staff are willing to share this experience;
- Over three quarters of all respondents (76%, 48) felt that there are positive benefits to having disabled students in the learning environment. These benefits ranged from providing a different learning perspective to increasing awareness of disability issues to other students;
- Few (21%, 13) respondents had encountered difficulties in implementing reasonable adjustments for students. In general these difficulties concerned conflicts with professional standards and alternative methods of assessment;
- Over 40% of the respondents whose courses have professional recognition (43%, 15) indicated that this had no effect on disabled students. However, 20% (7) indicated that there are issues with disabled students meeting professional standards (in terms of intended learning outcomes/ competence standards) for their courses;
- Almost half of respondents (48%, 30) are aware that there is flexibility within the University's Student Admissions Policy, which permits alternative methods of assessment to be considered for entry. Only 6% (4) of respondents indicated that they had used it. In addition, almost half of respondents indicated that they had heard of competence standards (49%, 31); and
- Many staff are unfamiliar with the Disability Duties. Less than half of respondents indicated that they had heard previously of the Disability Duties (49%, 31).

In general, the results indicate that, compared with 2011:

- awareness of the SENDO legislation and various disability issues such as competence standards, confidentiality and disclosure, reasonable adjustments, positive communication and disability language etiquette, and financial support arrangements available for disabled students has changed very little. Awareness of the Disability Duties and accessibility issues around the use of online material has increased;
- confidence in ability to adapt **module content** for disabled students increased in regard to students on the Autistic Spectrum/with Asperger's Syndrome, students with mental health difficulties, students with multiple disabilities and students who are blind/partially sighted. However, there appears to have been decrease in confidence in ability to adapt module content for students with specific learning difficulties (-11.3%), students with unseen disabilities (-9.6%), students who are deaf of have partial hearing (-6.1%) and students with mobility difficulties (-2.6%);
- confidence in ability to adapt **teaching methods** for disabled students increased in regard to students with Autistic Spectrum Disorder/Asperger's

Syndrome (+18.8%), students with mental health difficulties (+11.7%), students with multiple disabilities (+11.6%) and students who are blind/partially sighted (+3.9%). However, there appears to have been decrease in confidence in ability to adapt teaching methods for students with specific learning difficulties (-9.4%), students who are deaf of have partial hearing (-8.2%), students with mobility difficulties (-7.2%), and students with unseen disabilities (-2.9%); and

- confidence in ability to adapt **assessment methods** for disabled students increased in regard to students with mental health difficulties (+10%), students who are blind/partially sighted (+5%) and students with multiple disabilities (+3.4%). However, there appears to have been decrease in confidence in ability to adapt assessment methods for students with all other disability types, most noticeably Autistic Spectrum Disorder/Asperger's Syndrome (-15.4%).

With regard to advice and support about disability:

- greater proportions of respondents would seek support and advice from colleagues (86%), and AccessAbility Advisors/Student Support (78%, a drop of 14.4% compared with 2011). The most noticeable change is the decrease in staff seeking support from People and Culture/Equality and Legal Manager (28%, compared with 65.7% in 2011); and
- The majority of staff would prefer information to be provided about a disabled student 'as early as possible' or 'at start or early in the semester/module'.

In relation to training requirements, similar proportions of respondents felt that input was very/important in regard to all options presented, compared with 2011, with the exception of 'Designing Accessible Curricula' (-27.6%).

Increased proportions of respondents felt that input was very/important concerning all disability types, most noticeably Autistic Spectrum Disorder/Asperger's Syndrome (+12.2%).

The majority of respondents (87%) indicate that they would prefer training and support to be provided as briefing sessions/workshops or as web materials. 71% indicated that they would prefer advice leaflets.

General comments from respondents indicate that:

- some staff are either unaware of the SENDO legislation, or they require **more practical input** on the implications of this legislation ,
- **information** about the University's Disability Action Plan is not reaching some staff, and that demand for advice on the implications of the Disability Duties has changed little since 2011; and

- the **support** available to staff and students regarding disability is generally good/excellent at the University, but some **issues remain unresolved** regarding 'fitness to practice'**.**

Recommended actions

Based on the results of the survey, the following positive actions could be implemented to address some of the issues identified (and continue to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people):

- the survey results (key findings) should be considered in the development of the University's Second Disability Action Plan;
- the survey report should be disseminated to all academic staff and to Student Support;
- the University's Disability Action Plan could be communicated more effectively to staff, to increase awareness and understanding.