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**INCLUSIVE
ASSESSMENT: WHAT
CAN WE LEARN
FROM THE LIVED
EXPERIENCE OF
HEALTHCARE
UNDERGRADUATES?**

ITL FELLOWSHIP 2022-24

**PROJECT
REPORT**

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ITL Fellow 2022-24

JENNIFER SILVERTHORNE NTF PFHEA



Jenny is a Reader in Clinical Pharmacy in the School of Health Sciences. Her main role is in providing experiential learning for pharmacy undergraduates and she has also introduced a scaffolded, clinically relevant enquiry-based learning curriculum in pharmacy. She is particularly interested in novel interventions and technologies to support isolated and disadvantaged learners. Jenny is a National Teaching Fellow (NTF) and Principal Fellow of Advance HE (PFHEA).

Fellowship Student Partner Intern

JESY LUYENGI

INCLUSIVE ASSESSMENT: WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF HEALTHCARE UNDERGRADUATES?

Context of the Fellowship project

The Office for Students (OfS, 2019) insight brief (Beyond the bare minimum: Are universities and colleges doing enough for disabled students) identified gaps in progression, continuation and satisfaction for disabled students in higher education. At this time, the OfS (key performance measure 5) tasked universities with eliminating attainment gaps for disabled students by 2025 (OfS, 2019).

In regulated healthcare programmes, where there are specific health entry requirements, there is a stigma around disclosing invisible disabilities

s(Chew-Graham et al, 2003) and accessing support, which may be exacerbating the attainment gap. Furthermore, healthcare students with disabilities are reluctant disclosing a long-term condition or revealing the full extent of an impairment for fear that it will lead to discrimination, fitness to practise proceedings or exclusion from their programme (Winter et al, 2017; Morris & Turnbull, 2007).

Implementing inclusive assessment strategies is important in reducing attainment gaps. In healthcare, where assessment and its quality assurance are scrutinised by accrediting regulatory bodies, programmes often take a contingent approach (making individual reasonable adjustments e.g. additional time, rest breaks) rather than using a flexible range of assessments available to all. However, contingent assessment practices single out disabled students from their peers and satisfaction with “special arrangements” is not universally positive (Waterfield & West, 2006). The findings of the recent QAA project (Firth et al, 2023) will go some way towards enabling educators to implement inclusive approaches.

There remains little research on disabled students’ lived experiences of assessment on healthcare courses. This ITL fellowship project aimed to address this gap.

Objectives of the Fellowship project

My project aimed to explore undergraduate healthcare students’ lived experiences of assessment in higher education and to make recommendations to address the disability attainment gap.

My objectives were:

- To identify inclusive assessment practices in higher education and methods for monitoring performance against them
- To explore disabled healthcare students’ experiences; their assessment challenges and facilitators for success
- To share the stories of disabled staff (as role models for disabled students)

Activities

The project was undertaken in two concurrent workstreams.

Workstream 1

I undertook a small interview study to explore healthcare undergraduates' lived experiences of assessment. With ethical approval, seven students took part in an individual interview.

All seven participants were neurodivergent, with three students living with more than one disability. Despite all students having contingent assessment arrangements via the Disability Advice and Support Service (DASS), the words students associated with their experience of assessment included "overwhelming", "lonely", "stressful" and "unfair". Sensory overwhelm during timed on-campus assessment was experienced by three students and two students described negative experiences of assessment feedback (with rejection sensitive dysphoria possibly being a factor). Assessment formats and conditions that allowed individuals to perform their best varied between individuals.

This small study highlighted assessment challenges faced by disabled students. There is a need to further embed inclusive assessment design, to amplify the disabled student voice and to work with employers and statutory and regulatory bodies to enable disabled students to achieve their potential.

Workstream 2

I undertook a scoping review of the literature on disabled learners' experiences of assessment in higher education and explored a range of higher education resources identifying interventions to make assessment more inclusive.

I had wanted to develop a toolkit for measuring the inclusivity of assessment design and processes using my findings, however during my fellowship, the EAT framework (Evans, 2022) was published. I have now begun implementing the EAT framework as a case study for wider dissemination but also have added a number of key resources on inclusive assessment to the University's assessment toolkit for staff.

A small-scale disabled role-model profile template was developed for staff self-completion, for sharing with pharmacy students, which could be rolled out to other areas in the university. This resource will support the Advance HE Disabled Student Commitment; in enabling disabled students to understand the employment they could undertake in the future.

Challenges faced

Adjustments were needed to access the disabled community in order to co-create resources and understand lived experiences. Time constraints coupled with the daily challenges faced by disabled students meant that 14 who had initially wanted to take part in the interview study were unable to.

Student partnership

Jesy Luyengi led on the interview study; he contributed significantly to the development of interview questions and conducted one of the interviews.

Collaborative work

Outside of the core project team, the following colleagues were instrumental in helping shape the project; their advice and support was invaluable.

- **Louise Pepper-Kernott** – Head of Disability Advisory Support Service
- **Prof Gabrielle Finn** - Associate Vice-President for Teaching, Learning and Students (formerly Vice-President Teaching, Learning and Students, Faculty of Biology, Medicine and Health)
- **Prof Jackie Carter** - University Academic Lead for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (Disability)
- **Sally Hickson** – ITL fellow 2020-21 and Lecturer in Education Development (formerly Deputy Head of School Operations, School of Health Sciences)
- **Dr Miriam Firth** - University Academic Theme Lead (Assessment, Flexible Learning Programme)
- **Rachel Heyes** – Learning Technologist, Faculty of Biology, Medicine and Health, and University of Manchester Disability Staff Network Co-chair

Outputs

- **Conference presentation:** The findings of the interview study were presented at the Assessment in Higher Education Network Conference in Manchester in June 2024. Available at: <https://virtual.oxfordabstracts.com/event/5177/submission/69>
 - **Assessment toolkit entry:** A short descriptive overview and resources on the EAT framework for inclusive assessment is available in the [University of Manchester Assessment Toolkit \(for Staff\)](#).
 - **Inclusive assessment Padlet (ITL workshop):** I created an inclusive assessment Padlet which contains a slide set plus a range of inclusive assessment resources, available at <https://padlet.com/jennifersilverthorne1/inclusive-assessment-itl-open-workshop-8bxuiudktgrh22j0>
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Impact

I presented the findings of my interview study at an international assessment conference to raise awareness of disabled student experiences. I have introduced resources on the EAT framework, a toolkit for implementing inclusive assessment, to the University's Assessment Toolkit for Staff which is available to all colleagues across the institution. I delivered an ITL open workshop and a pharmacy staff away day session on Inclusive Assessment.

Reflection

The project has further revealed the enduring challenges of disabled individuals and that more work is needed to make The University of Manchester a truly inclusive employer and higher education institute. The fellowship was a catalyst for me to join influential colleagues in moving inclusive assessment practice higher on Manchester's 2035 agenda.

Next steps

Moving forward, I plan to build on the project's initial outputs, this includes:

- **Assessment toolkit:** I will work with Miriam Firth to ensure inclusive assessment resources have a presence in the Assessment Toolkit and are updated annually.
- **EAT Framework:** I will implement in the MPharm undergraduate programme as a case study for wider dissemination at the ITL conference. I will connect with any other colleagues using or considering the EAT framework via running a seminar through the ITL open workshop programme.
- **Role models resource:** I will work with Jackie Carter and Rachel Heyes to raise the profile of the resource and expand into more areas of the University.
- **Improving disabled learners' experiences:** I will champion signing up to the Advance HE Disabled Student Commitment, via introducing influential colleagues to it, in order that it becomes part of the university's 2035 vision.

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