

**Inclusive teaching practice at
Sheffield Hallam University**

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Executive Summary

1. The research took place at Sheffield Hallam University from January to September 2009 and had the aim of answering three questions as follows
 - What are the attitudes and perceptions of teaching staff towards inclusive practice?
 - What drives and hinders staff engagement with the issues
 - What is the best approach for an educational developer to adopt to achieve changes in teaching practice?
2. A mixed methodology was used which included background interviews at four other UK institutions followed by research in two of Sheffield Hallam's faculties; D & S and ACES. This research comprised of 21 interviews with managers/key staff and a small survey of teaching staff.
3. In a general sense, teaching staff hold very liberal attitudes with the majority agreeing with statements such as 'I believe that all students, irrespective of disability status, are entitled to higher education' or 'I'm keen to make things as inclusive as possible for disabled students'.
4. However, attitudes were more reserved when it came to issues of applying inclusive practice on their particular course or subject area with just under a third stating that they thought implementing inclusive practice in their subject area was difficult.

5. A significant minority of staff voiced concern about academic standards both in terms of the individual ability of students and in terms of slowing down teaching for other students. A number of managers and key staff believed that it was important to have a debate about academic standards in relation to inclusive practice.
6. The majority of academic staff reported being extremely short on time to dedicate to inclusive practice, a situation which is supported by previous research which states that lecturers are often overwhelmed by workloads. Thus, teaching staff were keen to have inclusive practice training built into academic work planning, although they were less enthusiastic at the prospect of compulsory attendance at such staff development events. A number of key staff voiced concerns about the inadequacy of the induction for new staff.
7. Teaching staff believed that academics should be involved in the running of any inclusive practice training as it was felt that only academics could understand and sympathise with the issues that teaching staff face in their work.
8. The research revealed that at least half of staff were unsure of the requirements of the Disability Equality Duty, thus suggesting a need for basic information. Additionally, staff were most likely to state that they would like advice concerning the practical or 'front line' aspects of teaching

such as course materials or curriculum design. They were also most likely to state that they wanted this advice from a named contact or a web site that had information. This reflects the staff perception that time is short and that therefore 'quick fixes' are needed.

9. A number of successful approaches to staff development on inclusive practice were mentioned by practitioners and key staff which included

- Making use of faculty or departmental events
- Support of senior staff in the university
- Working with enthusiastic staff
- 'Top tips'
- A non-confrontational approach
- Adopting a sophisticated approach
- Financial stability for disability support units
- Accepting the time frame of cultural change