A Risky Business: preparing disabled students for professional practice

- Dr. Janet Hargreaves
- University of Huddersfield
- J.hargreaves@hud.ac.uk/ 01484 471822

Inspiring tomorrow’s professionals
The dilemma - -

Student learning in practice

PSRB concerns

The Equality Act

University learning strategies

Placement concerns

Inspiring tomorrow’s professionals
Three recurring questions . .

• When is it okay (or not) for a student not to declare an impairment to their placement provider?

• When is an adjustment ‘reasonable’?

• Can assessment of competence be compromised?
The Equality Act 2010

• The Equality Act sets out the different ways in which it is unlawful to treat someone, such as direct and indirect discrimination, harassment, victimisation and failing to make a reasonable adjustment for a disabled person

• BUT schedule 13 paragraph 4(2) exempts competence standards from this duty
PSRBs regulate & guard the professions including

- Public protection
- The reputation of the professions
- Standards of education and practice
Disability and impairment 1

• The equality act definition:
  ‘A person (P) has a disability if—(a) P has a physical or mental impairment, and (b) the impairment has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on P’s ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities’.

• (the Equality Act [1], Part 2, Chapter 1, 6.1)
Disability and impairment 2

- The Act states that the disability is a direct result of impairment – this is seen by some as a ‘medical’ model of disability
- The contrast is a ‘social’ model of disability – here the impairment may have long term effects but they adversely effect the person because society is ordered in ways that are discriminatory

- Barnes, C and Mercer, G (2010)
• Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund (U of H), 2006-9: ‘Transition of disabled students into Higher Education’

• SHA funding with the University of Bradford, 2009-10 ‘Managing impairment in professional practice’

• Assessment and Learning in Practice Settings (ALPS) and U of H innovation fund, 2010 –present ‘Preparation for Practice self assessment tool’
Key messages from the data

- Understanding disability
- Tackling Fitness to Practice
- Student experience
- Qualified staff experience
- Disclosure
- ‘The patient comes first’
Thoughts from this...

- You cannot assume that you know if a student is disabled
- Disability is an emotive subject
- There is ambivalence about disability rights – medical and social model confusion
- There is ambivalence about students’ fitness to practice generally, not just regarding disability
- Risk assessment is necessary, but can be complex
Three recurring questions . .

• When is it okay (or not) for a student not to declare an impairment to their placement provider?

• When is an adjustment ‘reasonable’?

• Can assessment of competence be compromised?
Case study one

- Chris is dyslexic, s/he has additional time to prepare for and complete assessments, and uses an electronic personal organiser to help with spelling, grammar, note taking and time management.
- Disclosure?
- Adjustments?
- Competence?
Case study two

• Alex has had periods of depression and has currently been passed as fit to be on the course by Occupational Health, s/he has regular contact with a student counselor and personal tutor.
• Disclosure?
• Adjustments?
• Competence?
Case study three

- Sam has structural changes to the right arm which means that s/he wears a prosthesis and needs some assistive software for using a computer and other adjustments to handle certain machinery.

- Disclosure?
- Adjustments?
- Competence?
An ideal model

1. Disclosure: identifying and assessing need(s)
2. Establishing support systems and processes in practice
3. Mid-placement review; determine alternative strategies
4. Development of detailed plans and models of support; establish critical information base
5. End of placement review; evaluation
6. Revise support strategy

Griffith et al (2010:135)
Core principles disclosure:

Does the student have an impairment that, in the context of the practice placement:

• Is disabling?
• Presents a risk to themselves or others?
• Requires adjustments that are reasonable?

Then disclosure is a reasonable professional expectation.
Does the student have an impairment that, in the context of the practice placement:

• Could be overcome by an adjustment?
• The adjustment is reasonable (time, cost, acceptability)?

Then adjustments should be available AND – if they can be made routine they should become normal practice for all.
Core principles competence:

In the context of competency assessment in this practice placement is the:

- Threshold standard set the same for all students
- Adjustment agreed and actioned OR
- Lack of adjustment clearly documented and justified

Then the student, is judged to be competent or regardless of impairment
Concluding thoughts

- It's always risky preparing students for professional practice
- Risk assessment needs to be individual & based on principles
- We can do things differently to remove barriers
- We need to be confident to set standards and be prepared to fail people
References and resources


The Equality Act 2012