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Original Citation

Hargreaves, Janet (2012) A risky business : preparing students for professional practice. In: Annual professional education conference, 5th October 2012, University of York. (Unpublished)

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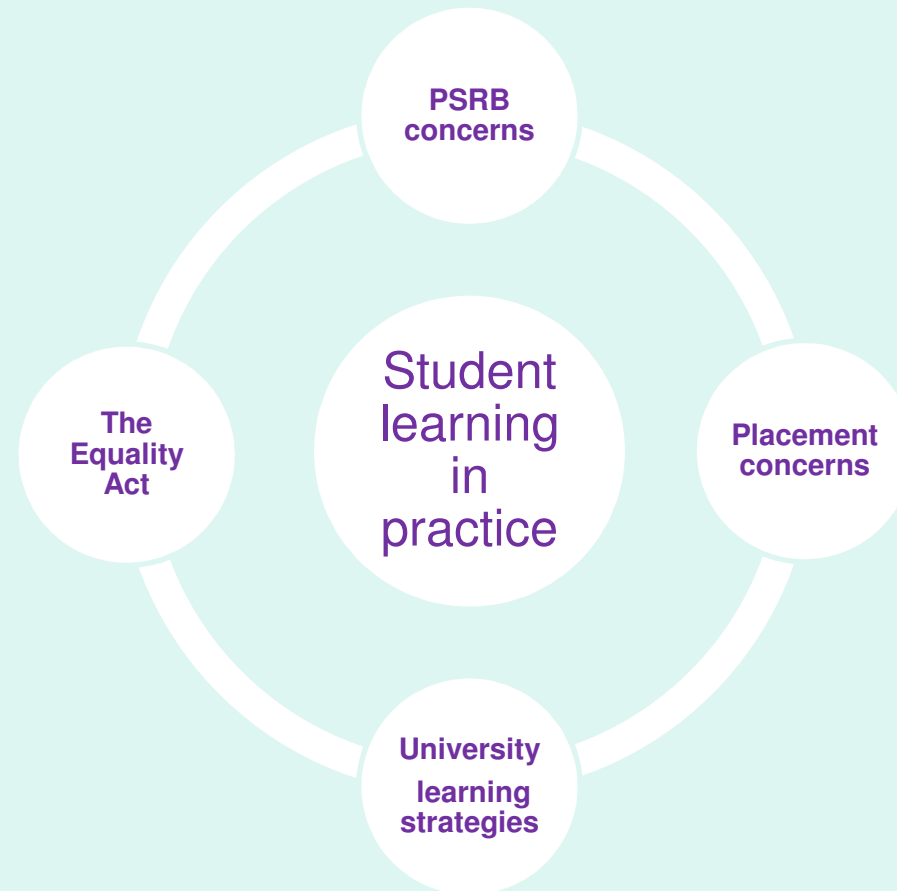
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A Risky Business: preparing disabled students for professional practice



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The dilemma - -



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

Professional Statuary and Regulatory Bodies



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)



My interest

- 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

Core principles reasonable adjustments:



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

- Its 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 confidence to set standards and be prepared to fail people

References and resources

- Barnes, C and Mercer, G (2010) 2nd ed *Exploring Disability*. Cambridge, Polity Press
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