Mixed method data collection on a hard-to-reach population: using questionnaires and interviews to understand disabled students experience with careers development activities

Project background

- In the United Kingdom, 17% of university students have a disability [1], which encompasses both physical and mental impairments which negatively impact daily living [2]
- Higher education institutes such as universities allow for students to engage in career development activities which help to develop essential skills [3] and knowledge for post-education employment [4]
- However, disabled students have been found to access these activities less than non-disabled peers, whilst also not engaging well [5]

Aims

This project aimed to:
- Identify challenges disabled students have with engagement
- Identify reasonable accommodations
- Explore how these events could be redesigned to avoid the challenges

Results

The results of this research revealed the complexities of ensuring accessibility of these activities to disabled students, with the environment of these activities being a recurring topic. The issues surrounding the environment was further reflected when discussing how to create a more inclusive design, in which flexibility in location (eg. online option or private room availability) was indicated to increase the inclusivity.

Despite this, the variation in responses gathered from the questionnaire and interviews highlighted that whilst aiming for complete accessibility would be a priority, it may be that more individual accommodations are required to ensure that full participation is possible.

Conclusion and reflection

Creating a fully inclusive may be difficult to achieve, therefore allowing for more accommodations tailored to the individual may be the most beneficial solution when aiming to engage disabled students in career development activities.

©ClayHR

Participants and Method

This research was conducted in two parts, using a mixed method of data collection. To access a larger sample, 16 universities across the UK were selected and contacted regarding recruitment assistance.

A total of 55 participants completed Part 1, which involved an online questionnaire. Participants read Event 1 and 2, responding with the challenges they would face, reasonable accommodations and event redesign.

Part 2 involved five students from the University of Lincoln completing in-person, semi-structured interviews discussing each event. All interviews were audio recorded for analysis.

Any quantifiable data was analysed using SPSS, whilst qualitative responses were analysed via a content analysis.

Event 1

Event details
- Careers Guidance is a process that enables you to make a well-informed, realistic decision about your future career.
- The appointments are booked via an online triage quiz and can support with exploring career ideas, the decision-making process, and addressing barriers that are affecting your career aims.
- This appointment takes place face to face in the university careers centre.
- You enter the double door, greeted by a receptionist, and directed to the waiting area. A Careers Adviser meets you and you move to both sit in a sound-reduction pod within a bright room. There are other appointments taking place at the same time.
- During the appointment you are asked open questions and your statements are challenged so that you can gain a clearer understanding and plan your next steps. You are encouraged to take notes and a summary of your action plan is sent to you via email.

Event 2

Event details
An Employer Project is an opportunity to work on a real brief provided by a real client. It is organised by an Employability Skills Coordinator from the university. There are several elements to the Employer Project which takes place over 8 weeks during term time.
- Working with Organisation X: As part of a group of students you work with Organisation X to research equipment that is used in emergency response situations in the UK and internationally. Your group must write a report about the usefulness of this equipment and offer a cost-benefit analysis.
- There is an introduction session at Organisation X's premises, and you need to arrange your own transport. On entering the building, your group are met by the Employability Skills Coordinator and sign in. You meet the client and are escorted to a first-floor meeting room via stairs or the lift. The client talks through the project brief and your group ask questions to ensure understanding. At the end of the 8 weeks, your group deliver a presentation to Organisation X at their premises. You all take part and are assessed on your contribution and communication skills.
- Project work and group meetings: Your group meet regularly over the 8 weeks to plan and undertake project tasks. You will complete project tasks assigned to you by the group and keep an activity log. At the end of the project, you contribute towards the report.
- Weekly Checkpoints: Your group attend weekly 30-minute checkpoints with the Employability Skills Coordinator, either online or face-to-face, to talk about your progress and any issues.
- University Skills Sessions: You attend three sessions with your group, either online or face-to-face. These each last 1.5 hours and cover project skills, understanding behaviours and presentation skills.
- University Employability Award: You complete extra activities related to this. This includes: 3 Reflection exercises to Explore, Develop and Apply your employability skills; two Skills Assessments; creating a CV and scoring it with the CV Review Tool and watching a video on 'Communicating Skills to Employers'.

References

1. Hubble, S. and Bolton, P. (2021). *Support for disabled students in higher education in England* . [online] Available at: https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/id/eprint/37390/13/CBP-8716%20(redacted).pdf [Accessed 30 May 2023].
2. GOV.UK (2010). *Definition of Disability under the Equality Act 2010*. [online] GOV.UK. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/definition-of-disability-under-equality-act-2010.
3. Kumar, A. (2008). *Personal, academic and career development in higher education : SOARing to success*. London ; New York: Routledge.
4. Pitan, O.S. and Atiku, S.O. (2017). Structural determinants of students' employability: Influence of career guidance activities. *South African Journal of Education*, 37(4), pp.1–13. doi:https://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v37n4a1424.
5. Chipchase, S.Y., Seddon, A., Tyers, H. & Thomas, S. (2023). Experience of university life by disabled undergraduate students: the need to consider extra-curricular opportunities. *Disability & Society*. doi;https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2023.2233687

Student Researcher: Sophie Thomas   **Supervisor:** Susan Chipchase

UNIVERSITY OF LINCOLN
Lincoln Academy of Learning and Teaching

Undergraduate Research Opportunities Scheme

DISCOVER_
Find out more about UROS and this research project at:
LNCN.AC/UROS