Designing for Inclusion

An experimental module in creative arts for students with complex disabilities

University of Cumbria

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Introduction

There is an overriding concern amongst policy makers to enhance the record of higher education in promoting equal opportunities (CRE, 2006; HEFCE, 2006) and this is certainly the case in relation to equality on the grounds of disability. The Quality Assurance Agency in the UK (1999:17) states 'Assessment and examination policies, practices and procedures should provide disabled students with the same opportunity as their peers to demonstrate the achievement of learning outcomes'. This policy drive is supported in law by The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (2001, SENDA) which places a legal obligation on all higher education institutions (HEIs) to make 'reasonable adjustments' for students with disabilities, including adjustments to assessment. Following the implementation of the amended Disability Discrimination Act Part IV, in 2002, it became unlawful to discriminate against disabled students through failing to make such adjustments; from December 2006, higher education institutions also had to comply with the Disability Act, which required public sector institutions to take the initiative in promoting equality for disabled people, and to demonstrate progress in this respect in relation to specific targets.

Maintenance of academic standards is paramount and protected within UK legislation. Offering reasonable adjustments does not suggest changing or lowering academic standards to accommodate students with disabilities. It implies designing or adjusting assessment methods so that students with disabilities have an equal opportunity to demonstrate their learning. For example, students might be given longer to complete an assignment, might be able to use customised software or an amanuensis in controlled conditions, or be allowed to submit coursework on tape rather than in written form. In some cases creating equality of opportunity may require an alternative assessment, as compensation for a difference in skill.

Therefore, in principle, making reasonable adjustments requires tutors to work out exactly what is being assessed by each assignment and ensure that these learning outcomes are the focus of the assessment design. On this basis, adjustments can then be agreed which enable students to demonstrate their learning without being disadvantaged by demands unrelated to the learning outcomes. For example, if accurate written English is not a specified learning outcome of an assignment, other methods such as oral or visual presentation of learning may be suitable to assess students' learning. If the ability to demonstrate accuracy in written English within a time limit is a legitimate learning

outcome, then an examination which includes literacy skills as an assessment criterion may be fair and appropriate.

As Robson (2005:86) argues, genuine alternatives assess the same learning outcomes but allow students to demonstrate their learning in ways that suit their preferences. This sort of flexibility may be particularly important in relation to fieldwork and practical activities which may be inaccessible to students with certain disabilities.

On this basis, marking assignments by students with disabilities should also reflect the learning outcomes for the work and the assessment criteria. Thus in order to maintain academic standards, it seems logical that marking should not be adjusted for students with disabilities but reasonable adjustments should be made, as necessary, at the stage of setting and completing the assessment task.

The 'modification of learning requirements' is becoming a well-established and accepted component of inclusion (BICPA 2002-2005). A number of institutions are now devising ways to ensure that assessment provides fair opportunities for students with disabilities. These include the University of Gloucestershire Department of Education TLRP research project, 'Enhancing the quality and outcomes of disabled students' learning in higher education' (2002-2008), and the Plymouth University study for the South-West Academic Network for Disability Support (1999-2002) on students' views and preferences on current methods of assessment, which analysed the views of both disabled and non-disabled students.

The research reported here examined an experimental module in the creative arts. The aim of the module was to develop a curriculum and methods of assessment for students with complex disabilities. Accordingly the research examined the 'reasonable adjustments' in the module which were designed to accommodate the students' needs.

Theoretical perspectives
Although the number of disabled people in HE has recently increased, they are still under-represented as a proportion of the population as a whole. Moreover, research studies on the participation of disabled people in HE have been less numerous than those concerned with other social groups (Riddell et al 2006:616) and the scale of such studies has often been relatively small (Fuller 2004: 306).

Earlier medical models of disability cast disabled people as victims of impairment, unquestioning recipients of interventions by professionals and policy makers. In the 1970s a more progressive interpretation emerged in the work of social theorists who drew on comparable studies of sexism and racism to argue that the disadvantaged situation of disabled people arose from their experience of social oppression (Fernie and Henning 2006: 24-25).

By the 1990s Oliver was developing a socio-political model of disability which expressed the active participation of disabled people in a campaign towards 'empowerment'. Recognising the process of integration as 'a struggle that has to be joined,' he renamed it as 'inclusion'. This social, or 'social barriers' model acknowledges but does not concentrate on the personal impact of impairment, confronting instead the disabling effects of socially and environmentally constructed barriers. In the higher education context, the social model implies a fundamental re-appraisal of the existing modus operandi in which disabled students are positioned as disadvantaged and dependent.

Following campaigns by disabled people themselves, and recent legislation, researchers have commonly adopted the social model approach and have frequently examined the experience of disabled students from the perspective of the students themselves(for example, Jacklin et al 2007). Much of this research has focused on access to and participation in HE, and the physical and socially constructed barriers confronting disabled students on arrival at university. Interviews with disabled students in longitudinal studies in particular (Jacklin (2007), Fuller et al (2004), Riddell et al (2006)) have exposed their potential vulnerability in the first year, when becoming a student also involves 'becoming' and 'being' a disabled student, and the effects of this on the student experience' (Jacklin 2007: 9). In addition to the fundamental shift in culture and attitudes the social model implies, the importance of transition arrangements and mutual understanding of learning requirements is relatively well testified. Comparative studies have also demonstrated that local factors, 'the idiosyncracies of particular institutions'(Riddell 2007:628), and differences between members of higher education staff (Fuller 2004: 316) have a major impact on the way national policies and the imperative to widen access and participation are interpreted in local contexts.

More recently the research emphasis has started to move away from the social barriers model to 'a more pluralistic approach' (Goode 2007: 35). Citing Williams' earlier study (2001), Goode recognises the need to embrace the implications of both earlier medical and social models if the personal and collective experience of disabled people in 'negotiating' their everyday life is to be thoroughly understood. Fuller demonstrated the range and diversity of disabled student populations in higher education. (2004: 315). Other researchers have considered the multiple identities of disabled students; for them, as for non-disabled students, a learner identity and a person with impairment identity are only two of many temporal constructed selves, and at any one time may not necessarily be a disabled student's main concern (Jacklin 2007:10).

This recent recognition of pluralities has led some contemporary researchers of higher education to a different model of disability in which argument for inclusion centres on a recognition of difference, and 'the creation of a rigorous framework that reflects that position', in the belief that 'good practice for disabled students is

generally good practice for all students' (Adams and Brown 2006: 4). Inclusion is conceptualised as a response to an increasingly diverse student population; diverse and flexible learning opportunities become the explicit and implicit practice of an underlying institutional ethos of access and participation. Students with disabilities and non-disabled students become equal members of a learning community where diversity is pre-eminent.

There has so far been relatively little systematic analysis of assessment practice relating to students with disabilities, particularly from a social justice perspective. The social justice perspective acquired considerable importance over the duration of the research discussed in the following article, in a consideration of reasonable adjustments in the design and experience of assessment.

In an examination of what is perceived as conceptual confusion informing the practices of assessment boards, Stowell (2004) considers equity, justice and academic standards in the assessment of the full range of different social groups She criticises a superficial conceptualisation of 'equity' (497) seeing it commonly understood to mean 'everyone should be treated the same', regardless of such differences as background, race or gender. Regarding disabled students, Stowell sees such a definition as confusing 'fairness' with 'sameness'. In order to be 'fair' to students with disabilities, for example, special arrangements are made for assessment, a clear example of 'differential treatment justified in terms of fairness'. In her view, in the context of assessment, equity, 'fair treatment', means 'openness and transparency', together with consistent application of 'objective and verifiable criteria'. Accordingly, 'best practice' involves using published assessment criteria, explicit marking schemes, and anonymous and blind double marking procedures.

However, although such assessment procedures are intended to enhance equitable treatment and ensure 'just outcomes', this is seen to depend on interpretations of the concept of justice. Justice is concerned with outcomes and opportunities and can be conceptualised in distributive terms as ensuring everyone receives 'what is due to them on the basis of particular relevant characteristics and circumstances'. Invoking Miller's (1976) three main principles of distributive justice, 'rights, deserts and needs', 'deserts' and 'needs' are identified as particularly problematic in the context of educational assessment.

In educational terms, just outcomes as deserts (498) implies a student's academic merit or achievement. While rewarding merit or achievement is prescribed by anti-discrimination law and permeates the discourse and culture of academic institutions, 'in reality', what constitutes merit or academic achievement is 'a social decision and a product of social relations.' And in spite of the apparent explicitness and objectivity of published criteria, marking schemes and grade descriptors, the principle of 'desert' is ultimately applied 'within the confidential proceedings of exam. boards', and are subject to political and social

assumptions that structure social contexts for decision-making about standards and the quality of individual candidates' performance.

Taking Miller's third principle of 'needs' to suggest that individuals are entitled to the things that are necessary to them, Stowell understands this principle as a rationale for differential treatment, or reasonable adjustments 'where it is warranted'. But she also sees this principle to apply much more widely than in the case by case practice of making special arrangements for students with disabilities. It is also crucial to the design of assessments and impacts on the assumptions of assessors. And as in the case of 'deserts, the concept of 'need' is seen to be shaped by changing social and political assumptions concerning group differences in performance (497- 498).

Stowell's argument for 'equitable outcomes' for the diverse groups across the student population as a whole recurs in studies specifically considering reasonable adjustments in relation to the assessment of disabled students.

A recent four year investigation (Riddell 2006) of institutional responses to widening participation policy considered how four different HE institutions interpreted the concept of reasonable adjustments in relation to teaching, learning and assessment. In spite of 'the perceived symbolic importance' of the 2002 Act in recognising the political claims of disabled people, the authors claim there is continued 'unease' within the disability movement about its potential to enhance their position in the UK. Interviews with academic staff in four different institutions uncovered fears of compromising academic standards associated with reasonable adjustments in assessment. Institutions, individual departments and staff members varied widely in their willingness to adapt teaching and learning practices and some felt the difficulties raised by certain types of impairment might result in unfair treatment for other students. Reflecting Stowell's discussion of the conflicting and contradictory practices pervading the formal assessment process, the authors reported academic staff interviewees' comments on the pre-eminence of professional judgment in decisions on the adaptation of assessment methods, and concerns related to 'laxity in marking adjustments made by individuals' which was seen as 'in danger of positively discriminating in favour of disabled students'. Some interviewees expressed a sense of 'irreconcilable' tension between the agendas of widening access and quality assurance (Riddell 625-7).

A similar theme emerges from a study of assessment in higher education in Ireland (Hanafin 2007). Here, too, until relatively recently, research on disabled students has concentrated on equality of physical access rather than access to curriculum and assessment procedures. Noting the relatively well-documented detrimental effects of written assessment for many students with impairments, the researchers draw attention to the 'competitive individualism intrinsic to an assessment structure', which relies on an implicit expectation that the student's own motivation will result in their acquiring materials necessary to succeed.

In this environment, many disabled students have no choice but to become 'recipients of charity', to be granted special privilege' or, 'at worst, to become 'a nuisance', one more item on an academic task list.

Many of the difficulties experienced by participants in the present study arose directly from assessment. Hanafin refers (445) to the 'pervasive backwash' effects of assessment on learning, contending that whatever learning takes place may be more a function of the assessment structure than of the aims, objectives or understanding goals of the curriculum.

Exploring questions raised by Stowell and Riddell above concerning formal assessment practice and reasonable adjustments, Hanafin calls for critical analysis of longstanding assessment practices and of the unquestioning assumption of their 'objectivity'. Invoking Eisner's rejection of such objectivity, 'a concept built upon a faulty epistemology' (Eisner, 1992:14), she claims such willingness to take assessment practices for granted can conceal discrimination in which achievement and underachievement can be explained 'in terms of individual deficit rather than in unjust and partial institutional practices'.

Accordingly it is recommended that 'embedded epistemologies of assessment' be made explicit. While hidden, assessment practices can be assumed to have no effect on students, and any negative effects can be assumed as similar for disabled and non-disabled students. In practice, it is the authors' view that choices about assessment practices made by HE institutions, such as modes and techniques of assessment; and referencing, purpose and audience priorities, clearly affect students differentially and frequently negatively. It follows that current assessment practices impinge even more negatively on disabled students.

From Hanafin's perspective (448-49), as for Jacklin (2007:48), the solution is inclusive assessment for all. More inclusive assessment practices, the continuing availability of a range of assessment options, rather than the substitution of one in preference to another, are seen as likely to benefit many students. Referring to research on the development of higher order thinking (Tynja"la", 1998; Quarstein and Peterson 2001), Hanafin argues learner-focused approaches leading to improvement in curriculum design and pedagogy would also be of institutional benefit. Academic standards are perceived to remain intact if inclusion is realised through opportunities to demonstrate learning which match diversity in individual students' ways of learning and the expression of that learning.

Designing for students with multiple disabilities
The voice of the disabled has been less audible among those of different social groups, particularly in relation to academic standards and reasonable adjustments in assessment. The voice of those with multiple disabilities has

been similarly muted within the literature on inclusion and assessment in higher education.

Fuller's 18 month study (2004), which examined disabled students' experiences of teaching learning and assessment, was funded by the University of Gloucestershire's Scholarship of Learning and Teaching Fund and also by SCOPE, the disability organization for people with cerebral palsy. Significantly, the researchers claim their study to be 'one of the first' in terms of scale and systematic analysis applied to research in this area (306). In the first phase of the research they sought the views of students with a wide range of disabilities. Those with multiple disabilities were found to have experienced barriers to learning and assessment more intensively and more frequently than other participants in learning both on and off campus,

The discussion below relates to the perceived appropriateness of the arts for those with complex disabilities. In Fuller's study of the 12% of disabled students whose choice of discipline had been influenced by their disability, this was most frequently the case for students in the arts. Within a much smaller sample, Hanafin also noted that arts degrees were among the most popular choice for students with disabilities.

In the debate on reasonable adjustments and academic standards, the arts present a singular dilemma for assessment of students with complex disabilities. The challenges of measuring creativity are well-documented. A recent analysis of 'assessing highly-creative ability' by Australian researchers (Cowdroya and de Graaff 2005) offers a perspective that may be relevant to assessment of the initial conception and practical execution of a work of art and the quest for some kind of reliable criteria. Although the educational focus is generic and theoretical, the authors' recommendation of 'authenticative assessment' may resonate with the present research, in which defining the 'authenticity' of students' work in order to gauge the measure of their achievement emerged as an intractable problem for academic staff, and a pressing question for further investigation.

The creative arts: an appropriate curriculum for inclusion
The creative and performing arts may present greater opportunities than other subject disciplines for the education of students with complex disabilities. As a tutors involved in this research explained, their open-endedness has unique appeal :

> Because they have more chance to do their own person-centred journey whatever media they are using but also they have more chance of making an impact on others through that than always that sense that they are below par because there's only a right and a wrong answer anything where there's a right or a wrong answer doesn't work so well but where there's a creative space for them to

make their mark. If it's done with you know with meaning and authenticity, then it's valid and worthy in the arts.

Post-modern theory recognises that interpretations and perceptions of work in the creative arts are based on individual experience (Jackson 2007:271; Nicholson 2005: 167). This allows for differences in ability and point of view in practitioners as well as spectators. Disabilities may present physical constraints in making work, but positively contribute to the range of points of view which may be expressed. At the same time, the arts also offer scope for teamwork and the development of communication skills.

This research examined a module which emerged from collaboration between a university and a specialist further education college (SFEC). It was designed specifically for six students from the college who were experienced in imaginative and creative work and were invited to apply for the course on the strength of their aptitude and ability in this respect.

Since the Act of 2001, research on the learning and assessment experiences of students with disabilities in higher education has steadily increased. However, these studies often cover a range of disabilities, and a variety of subjects. It has been the role of specialist professional or community arts organisations rather than academic institutions to offer, and evaluate, opportunities in higher education in the creative arts. Graeae, for example, is 'a disabled-led theatre company which profiles the skills of actors, writers and directors with physical and mental impairments'. Since 2003, the company has been offering a one year training programme accredited as an access course by the Open College Network through London Metropolitan University. The Liverpool Institute for the Performing Arts (LIPA) has been running a Certificate of Higher Education course since 2001. In response to the need for information, and the dissemination of good practice, PALATINE (The Higher Education Academy Subject Centre for Dance Drama and Music) is building a set of links and resources on disability issues relating to higher education in the performing arts in the context of recent legislation.

An initiative with particular relevance to this research was the BICPA (Being Inclusive in the Creative and Performing Arts) study, which ended in 2005. This was a three year project funded by the HEFCE (Higher Education Funding Council of England) with the aim of 'developing and disseminating resources relating to the learning and teaching of disabled students'. The research was undertaken in the form of eight case studies by the eight member institutions of the Consortium of Arts and Design Institutions in Southern England (CADISE). Interesting parallels with this research emerged, particularly in relation to the 'authenticity' of students' work, and this will be referred to later in this report.

Planning the module

The project emerged from discussions between both institutions as a contribution to widening participation at the university particularly in relation to students with complex disabilities. There is no higher education (HE) provision at the Specialist Further Education College (SFEC) and the university is currently working with the college to research the feasibility of establishing a centre for the college within the university campus. As the SFEC students spend much of their time working on creative arts projects, a combined arts module seemed appropriate for an experimental approach. As the course was a pilot project, in anticipation of the development of future modules, a research study was set up to track the progress of the module in order to make a detailed body of data available to staff for critical evaluation.

Senior managers from the university, and the academic and technical staff involved, visited the college and met their colleagues in the creative arts department there about six months before the course began. As a combined arts course, the module had two components, fine art and performing arts. The aim was to integrate the 'product 'of the two in a final performance as part of the students' summative assessment.

A course proposal was produced and the four academic staff, two from the university and two from the college, decided on ways of combining fine art and performing arts in an integrated module. Other meetings for discussing themes and suitable materials followed, and the university tutors submitted an accredited module which was validated by the university. The university tutors gave a presentation at the college to invited students selected for their particular interests and capabilities. Students from the university schools of performing arts and fine art made DVDs which were also presented to the SFEC students, to give them an insight into life on the university campus. Those who were interested took away further details, and application forms and interviews were held in the university's studio theatre. This occasion offered the SFEC students a chance to meet some current university drama students, to look round the campus and see the creative arts facilities for themselves.

The selection process

The students at BC had no experience of the application process. For an HE level course it was important for the students to be involved in making their applications, but it was not clear how far it had been possible to facilitate this, and whether in some cases the students' parents had completed the forms without them. During the selection interviews, it was important to consider the individual student's ability to respond to the demands of the course, not only in practical and physical terms, but also in relation to the independence and initiative required for research and critical reflection at HE level. Bearing equal opportunities in mind, a set of criteria for parity was devised, but there were still cases where individual students posed something of a dilemma for staff.

It was suggested that the students might have benefited from some form of preparation for the experience of being interviewed, particularly those with communication difficulties. Striking the balance between preparing students and over-burdening them might be a challenge, but it was felt that something needed to be done to help students particularly disadvantaged by application procedures.

Timing
Collaboration on the module between academic staff at both institutions took place in the summer of 2007. Ideally, in order to make sure the course fitted into the students' timetable at the college, it would have run for ten weeks during the autumn term, but it was delayed until January 2008 because of problems with booking the university's theatre for the final performance. Negotiating a time for the weekly workshops to take place was a challenge. Time had to be found when the students, the academic staff at both institutions and the required number of support staff were all available. The university art studios were only available for the first three sessions; ideally, the university studio theatre would have been used for the final few weeks of rehearsals to allow the students to become familiar with the space; however, it was unavailable until the day of the performance.

Student support
As the college's academic staff acknowledged, providing the most appropriate support for the course was 'a tricky balance' to achieve because of the nature of the shift system of the college and the different responsibilities of the learning support staff, and the students' key workers, who provide the high levels of personal care they need. The learning support staff are used to working with students in an educational context and have more technical understanding of the impact of the students' disabilities on their learning. The key workers, however, have a closer personal relationship with the students, so they were chosen to support the students in the unfamiliar context of higher education. Continuity of learning support is unusual in the college; senior management commitment to the project was very much appreciated in ensuring that, in most cases, key workers were available to support their students throughout the ten weeks.

Many students at the SFEC are able to move around the college buildings on their own. The university had limited provision for students with disabilities. Each student was accompanied on campus at all times by a key worker who ensured they were able to gain access to the facilities they needed. This was essential, but at the same time felt to be a compromise to the development of social independence, an important component of higher education. The number of students in the group was deliberately restricted to allow a staff-student ratio similar to that at the college; 'giving people time' was felt to be a priority.

A curriculum for inclusion in Fine and Performing Arts
The course was designed specifically for students with disabilities. In this respect it had similarities with two of the eight BICPA studies referred to earlier. Of these, one involved a music college in redesigning two modules in Applied Music Technology on its BMus. programme to make them fully accessible to students with visual impairments; the second focused on the adjustments made by a School of Art in curriculum design, resources, access and support in order to make an MA in Drawing fully inclusive for a postgraduate student with complex physical disabilities. In this case, the academic staff from the university and SFEC worked together to design the course, and the strategy for assessment. Researchers on a third BICPA case study, on practical drama, referred to the importance of this type of 'dialogue' between staff with complementary areas of expertise, in considering the students' needs and their implications for making reasonable adjustments.

Fine Art
It was seen as important for the students to study fine art in the professional environment of the university art studios. There was no printing equipment in the fine art department at the college so this would be an opportunity to experiment in a different medium. The three weeks the art studios were available were felt to be just long enough to allow them to learn the principles behind the process of printmaking, and to experiment with creating their own designs. Given the time limit, mono-printing was initially chosen as the form of 'mark making' because the techniques produce results relatively quickly. In practice, some students experienced difficulties with mono-printing because of problems with the presses and the heights of the tables, so they moved on to silk screen printing instead. This enabled them to prepare the artwork themselves while the actual printing process was carried out by a technician.

A wide variety of tools was provided for students to choose from. In recognition of the difficulties with physical co-ordination, there were no fine instruments for drawing on paper; the range of implements aimed to allow the students to find something which might appeal to their individual creativity while matching their level of manual dexterity. A sponge on a stick, a felt tip pen, or a paintbrush, for example, might be relatively easy to manipulate, and would also be used by non-disabled students for specific creative purposes.

It was intended that the prints from the students' designs would be projected on to a screen as part of the backdrop for the performance and thus contribute to the fine art final assessment. The design work and printmaking would also feature in the students' portfolios. In similar fine art modules for non-disabled students, the portfolio would require evidence of detailed research and critical reflection as a significant element in a student's final mark. It was difficult to gauge in advance how far the SFEC students would be able to fulfill this requirement.

Performing Arts

The structure of the course was based on an existing module in which the emphasis was weighted in favour of practical work. The lecturer chose a theme, or a story, and suggested material such as a poem or other text to provide a framework; within that the students created character, developed a structure and worked on their own performance style. They also decided on the music, the lighting, and the set design.

In this case, the theme of 'angels' emerged from the initial meetings between academic staff from both institutions; part of its appeal was the availability of a visual source (a VW Polo commercial drawing on ideas from the film *Wings of Desire*), which was perceived to have potential for wide-ranging discussion and which also 'fitted everybody's concentration span'. The fact that the context of the source was 'the city' offered the possibility of involving the students' wheelchairs in the performance as vehicles. The city context provided an additional dimension of interpretation for individual performance pieces and contributions for the soundtrack.

The early sessions involved group discussions of the joint themes of 'angels' and 'the city'; as in the original module, students were asked to do some research for interpretations of these themes and to bring them to the following session to share with the rest of the group. The materials they found were used for further exploration of the themes and as a source of ideas for the students' printing designs.

Assessment

Most of the students had no experience of assessment or accreditation and only two of the six were able to read the module guide. The SFEC had just introduced the Arts Award[1] so future students would be more familiar with the concepts of criteria and learning outcomes. But at this stage there was no precedent, and no portfolios by previous students for the present group to use as models for their own. At the college, all the students' work was stored electronically so that wherever possible they could access information for themselves, or with a support worker. But the emphasis of an activity was on the process; the students were not used to 'classifying' their experience, conceptually or materially, in files and folders, and record-keeping and critical reflection was a responsibility for staff. Capturing evidence of learning, which might be as ephemeral as responding with signs during an exchange with a support worker, would have been too 'time and people-intensive' to present in the written form expected at HE level. Staff worked instead on adaptations and innovations which could work

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[1] The Arts Award is a national qualification that recognises how young people develop as artists, practitioners and arts leaders. Young people aged between 11- 25 can achieve Arts Awards at levels 1,2, and 3 on the national qualifications framework.

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in parallel with assessment methods employed in a similar module in performing arts for the university first year students.

Formative assessment

Formative assessment was perceived in some respects to resemble that in a similar module for non-disabled students. Staff frequently praised the students for their hard work and discussed with them how to overcome specific difficulties as they occurred. The main difference was 'making sure the support workers know as well as the students themselves what needs to be done' (college tutor) in order to tailor their support to allow the students to demonstrate the authenticity of their learning. The crucial role of support staff, with their specialist knowledge of student needs, in mediating between the students and the academic requirements of the course also emerged in two of the BICPA case studies, in reference to a practical drama course and a course in art and design.

During the devising workshops, the role of the lecturer differed from that in the original module. Rather than offer the students support through a 'verbal approach', with an emphasis on texts for them to use as starting points, it was more appropriate in this case to engage with them directly by co-coordinating movement, incorporating their suggestions and shaping the performance structurally and visually. The hoists in the SFEC drama studios were used to enhance the students' opportunities for creative expression through movement.

Summative assessment

Summative assessment comprised the final individual and group performance pieces and the students' completed portfolios. For the performance, students were assessed on their individual contribution to the group performance piece, which happened live on the day itself, and on their own individual pieces.   During the early devising work, the decision was taken to record the individual pieces on film in advance, in order to allow the students as much time as they needed to produce their best work.

The critical reflection component of the module usually took the form of a written portfolio where the student reflects on artistic experience and process during the course and provides evidence of research and creative thinking related to their final work. In order to offer the SFEC students a similar opportunity for critical reflection, they were asked to produce a 'video diary' as an alternative method of assessment. After the first few sessions, it became apparent that this was not necessarily any easier for some students, and because the process was too time-consuming, a more traditional portfolio was produced with help from the students' support workers. In order to clarify the extent of the support workers' role, it was decided to follow one of the SFEC practices for recording project learning outcomes: all support staff completed witness statements in explicit recognition of the extent of their involvement in work the students submitted for

assessment. Academic staff consulted students regularly on the progress of their portfolios, and reminded them of the need to keep them up to date. On one occasion, a member of university staff was able to attend one of the weekly personal development sessions at the college which was the time the students used for recording and reflecting on the experience of the course.

The research

The research took an ethnographic approach and adopted the form of a case study. The aim was to investigate a specific case in detail in order to explore and illuminate the complexity of its nature from the perspectives of all participants. At the same time, certain features emerged along the way which it was felt might be relevant to wider educational contexts.

According to Winston (2006), case study has been found to be particularly appropriate for research in the performing arts. It contributes to knowledge in a way defined by Bruner (1986, cited by Winston), 'which, like fictional art forms, can challenge understandings, raise questions and see experiences from unfamiliar perspectives'. As in creating a piece of theatre, this open-ended approach to methodology involves the researcher in the process of designing, adapting, reviewing and refining as the work proceeds. In this case the exploratory and open-ended research design matched the explicitly experimental nature of the project as a whole. It was not the original intention, for example, to interview the support staff, but the importance of their role, especially regarding the authenticity of students' work, emerged during observations of the workshops and with their consent, they were included in collection of the data.

Ethics and data collection

The research was conducted according to the university's code of conduct for research and approved by the university ethics sub-committee. A range of data collection methods were deployed:

- a review of the literature and other documents relevant to the study
- observation of the programme in action
- interviews with staff, students and learning support staff
- recordings of two academic team discussions:
  - one for the interim review
  - the final evaluation
- a questionnaire on moderation issues for the two university tutors

With a case study, as Winston points out, it is worth bearing in mind that triangulation implies you are seeking a single 'correct interpretation', when you may need to report alternative understandings of the same event. The approach taken here involved Geertz's concept of 'thick description' (1973: 5-6, 9-10), that is, recording the meaning which particular social actions have for the individuals whose actions they are.

The method for obtaining the students' informed consent for the interviews was of particular importance. It was essential firstly that they understood the principles of informed consent and the purpose, methods and anticipated outcomes of the project, and secondly, that they also understood that their views would make an active and valuable contribution to the development of the module. As some of the students did not read, an oral explanation was provided by the college tutors, and time was allowed for the students to discuss the project with them and their key workers and to ask questions. The students' consent was obtained in a form appropriate to individual communication skills; in some cases, for example, this was in the form of the student's 'mark' rather than as a conventional signature.

Because of students' preferences or practical considerations, the student interviews were not recorded and the researcher took notes instead. Once these had been typed up, the researcher checked through these notes with each student individually and incorporated any changes they requested in the data. The students all received a summary of the research findings, presented in the format most appropriate to individual abilities, in an oral version, for example, or a written summary in an appropriate font size.

In terms of subjectivity, this was the researcher's first experience of research with students with complex disabilities. It was important to acknowledge and avoid as far as possible any preconceptions or assumptions on the researcher's part in relation to perceptions or interpretations of these disabilities. This was a priority throughout the project, and the guidance of the two SFEC tutors was very much appreciated in this respect.

Findings of the research
The data identified the following themes in relation to the practice and challenges of the module: pace and timing; the authenticity of students' work in relation to the role of student support; capturing evidence of learning, and creating a framework for interpreting the assessment criteria. These are discussed in turn below.

Pace and timing
The course followed a typical university timetable; ten weekly two hour workshops across a term/semester with the expectation that the students would find the time in between to work on their portfolios. This timetable, normal in HE, is not one to which 'reasonable adjustments' are usually applied, except perhaps to provide extensions to coursework deadlines or extra time in examinations. The pace of the module as a whole, and within sessions, was a very different experience for the SFEC students, who were accustomed to projects which allowed them to work at their own pace. The pivotal importance of pace and timing recurred throughout the data: within and between individual sessions, and

across the entire ten weeks, there was universal agreement that the students needed more time, in order to fulfill the requirements of the module to the best of their ability.

Physical constraints: comfort, concentration and time to experiment
The sessions in the art studio demonstrated the importance of allowing extra time for students to cover course content. Making sure they were comfortable before they started work was a priority; one student needed two support workers to experiment with various positions before she was able to reach the paper with her brush from her electric wheelchair, and in her interview at the end of the course she remembered that she had still felt 'too high' to be able to work without discomfort.

The data appears to support the contention (BICPA 2005) that students with complex disabilities may have difficulty with concentration because of physical and mental fatigue, rather than because they deliberately allow their attention to wander, or lack the intellectual capacity for this level of work. The sheer effort of sustaining a particular physical position can be very exhausting for them and they may need longer and possibly additional breaks during sessions. They also may need longer to cover the same ground as other students because of difficulties with physical co-ordination or oral articulation. The mid-session breaks during this module were longer than those on similar modules to ensure students had time to reach university or college facilities, either on their own or with their support worker. At the same time, because of the demand on the studio space, and the transport arrangements back to the college, there were no opportunities to extend the sessions for students who wished to complete unfinished work.

The potential for improvisation in the context of a range of disabilities was also limited by time. As one of the college tutors said, with more time

> … we would have done it all live and we would have had a lot more complex scene changes and clouds to hang up and harness … people to put in harnesses ready to come on stage …you know, just before the next one. We do … we've done that before so that … and they are capable, a lot of them, of getting …learning them and doing them at the time so it doesn't mean to say they couldn't have done it had they had more time live and more rehearsal time.

More time to learn
The module had been designed as an equivalent but different higher education learning experience for students with complex disabilities. The aim, according to one of the university tutors had been 'to provide an environment in which these students can flourish because they are not disadvantaged by not being able to process things quickly …'

However, the timescale of the module directly affected the extent to which the students were able to develop both their understanding and ideas in art and drama. As some of the students had considerable difficulty with orally articulating their views, the pace of group discussions was slower, and this had implications for opportunities to explore ideas in depth. While tutors may have been content with an emphasis on the learning process, the students were used to working on projects which had a definite end product. Rather than concentrate on process, it was felt it would be more rewarding for them to end with a final performance in order to leave them with a memorable sense of their achievement.

Another concern was 'speed of processing', the speed at which students were able to assimilate new learning. It was argued that such students need a recursive approach which the module struggled to provide in the time. As one student's key worker explained:

> … when you repeat things with our students, it all clicks together after a while, but … we were cramming it … into ten weeks and that was not really long enough ...

Although the pacing of activities was slower than it would have been for non-disabled students, one lecturer said that she had deliberately avoided adjusting the intellectual pace; she had introduced new techniques and new vocabulary as she would for her other first year classes. She allowed more time for the students to respond, but not for them to assimilate new concepts, such as the scientific principles behind the process of screen printing. How far the intellectual pace can be adjusted in order to provide an inclusive experience is debatable, but the evidence of this study suggests that equal educational opportunities will be denied to students with complex disabilities unless a way can be found to accommodate their needs in this respect.

More time to do the independent work
Higher education requires students to spend considerable time on independent study and these students likewise were expected to fulfill the requirements of a higher education module. However, they also continued to follow a full programme of further education. Consequently, most of them reported that they had very little time at college during the rest of the week to work with support staff on their portfolios.

One older student who no longer attended the college said that although she had got out of the habit of writing, she was familiar with the drafting process so she had written her work in rough first and then typed it out without any problems. But another individual recommended giving students considerably more time. He was unable to write and needed to use the college audio-visual resources. As a

day student he had had to complete his homework within the hours he was at college, in addition to attending all his timetabled sessions. Having to finish his video journal in time for the final session of the course had been 'very stressful' and he had had to lock himself in a room to avoid being interrupted.

More time to achieve: creative approaches to assessment
One alternative approach to assessment was thought to have worked particularly well. This was the decision to film the individual pieces for the final performance in advance rather than present them live. This 'reasonable adjustment', ' … a new departure for them and for us', released the students from the pressure to sustain a 'perfect' performance for assessment on the day; it allowed them as much time as they needed to get it right on screen, it offered the possibility of editing, and it also avoided the need for a lot of set changes.

> So like Mandy's voiceover …she couldn't have remembered all that and said it in the sequence that …so…she wrote the words, and somebody would say it a line at a time … and then she would be recorded just her saying her line so it sounded like … so that it was butted together. And that would have been harder for her…because you see when her delivery…you know, she gets anxious and then it's difficult to get words out …she loses breath … (college tutor)

This imaginative approach to assessment removed the pressure to sustain concentration within a designated timescale and created a reassuring environment where the students could demonstrate their skills and knowledge in the subject.

According to the data here, making reasonable adjustments to pace and timing which do not compromise academic standards is a priority for providing an inclusive learning experience.

'Authenticity' and the role of the support worker
Recent research has drawn attention to the complexity of the relationships between students, academic and support staff, and perceptions of their roles (BICPA 2002-2005). The authors outlined the difficulties of defining the 'authenticity' of students' work in cases where students may be dependent on support staff for the presentation or execution of their original ideas.

In one study for example, involving a large number of dyslexic students, discussion between academic staff and facilitators confirmed 'clear boundaries' in the facilitator role. Facilitators were offered advice on how to help students with research methods, structure and expression rather than on how to provide

content, in order that students' understanding of content could be assessed. In another case study, a studio assistant carried out practical artwork under the direction of a postgraduate student with highly complex physical disabilities, thus enabling him to be assessed for creative and theoretical processes in the same way as other students.

The role of the students' key workers as learning facilitators in this project was crucial; however, the nature and extent of their involvement in the students' portfolios was a matter of concern. With regard to research, the key worker's role was to facilitate electronic access and help to transfer chosen materials to the student's portfolio. In supporting critical reflection, the key workers themselves were acutely aware of the problem of 'authenticity' (of who had done the work) particularly when the students became very anxious about the approaching deadline for the portfolios. One key worker described her efforts to avoid influencing a student's articulation of her views:

> I had to write questions without any lead in them … and get her to give me the answers so I wasn't putting words in her mouth … it was hard work … I had to prompt her once or twice and say 'do you mean this way or do mean you that way?' and she did actually come up with the answer, but it was hard …

Retaining the authenticity of student achievement proved equally exacting for tutors. As explained in the earlier discussion of assessment, all support staff completed witness statements in explicit recognition of the extent of their involvement in the work the students submitted for assessment. Nevertheless, the difficulty of defining authenticity continued:

> UT1: He was also sort of technically polished, the work he produced. Now, how much that's down to John and how much is down to David [*support worker*]…
> CT1: I would think it's mostly…the majority it's down to David but I think he has taken John with him on the choice of…
> UT1: Certainly, John's awareness of what's technically polished.
> UT2: And he says that's a skill that he's learnt so he's learnt through that process.

John's achievement in the presentation of his work seems to be recognised as his new awareness, 'a skill that he's learnt' of what was 'technically polished'. But while the quality of the execution was certainly perceived to be due to David his key worker, the uncertainty about who was responsible for 'the choice' (of what ? content? medium ? layout?) illustrates the dilemmas for tutors trying to categorise achievement in terms of conventional marking in such a specialised local context. The discussion will return to marking in more detail later.

Intensive support: catching up after absence
Unforeseen absence can happen to any student; for those with complex disabilities the role of a support worker is essential. Because she missed the second and third sessions because of a stay in hospital, one student missed participation in developing the conceptual framework for the printmaking and the performance. Her support worker was committed to helping her but lacked the experience required in either HE or the performing arts to help her overcome this disadvantage.

Continuity of support: conflicting views
Continuity of support throughout the course was a new experience for students and support workers. Some of the key workers had found themselves very stretched by this arrangement and timetabling for them would need to be reviewed for any future modules. Continuity of support could prove to be a negative experience if the nature of the support itself was a matter for concern. Generally, however, it was clear that most students and their key workers had thoroughly appreciated the opportunities of continuity for developing collaboration and rapport. Support staff developed and sustained an enthusiastic level of engagement and students acknowledged the difference this had made to what they felt they had achieved. Key workers had appreciated the opportunity to learn more about the way an individual student's disabilities affected their learning and the time to develop more effective ways to help them. College academic staff noted that a unique opportunity to work alongside the same key workers over a period of time had developed closer professional relationships between them. Having perceived the benefits of continuity of support in this case, academic staff were considering its feasibility as a model on other courses at the SFEC in the future.

Consultation and training for HE level support
The students' key workers felt they were inadequately prepared for their role as learning facilitators on an HE level course. They said they would have appreciated some specific guidance in advance to help them understand the nature and the limits of such an exacting role, and to explain how best to help the students' to develop independence and initiative. Other suggestions included having information on the content and structure of individual workshops a week in advance. The key workers also suggested that if at all possible tutors might attend the portfolio sessions to explain to them in more detail what was required.

Students with a range of complex disabilities between them need a high level of practical support and personal care; making them feel safe and supported in an HE context, without stifling their capacity for initiative and independence is an exacting task. Both the academic staff and the students' key workers agreed that

some kind of formal consultation with and preparation for support staff would be needed before any future course took place.

In one of the BICPA case studies, as in this project, time for academic and support staff to meet and discuss individual student needs and progress was severely limited. However, when it had been possible to include facilitators in team meetings, as a way of sharing expertise, and developing mutual awareness of and respect for one another's professional roles, it was felt that this had been very beneficial for all staff and student relationships. Together with 'Effective Communication', 'Defining the Role of the Facilitator' emerged as a key recommendation of the study; it may be worth noting that the authors underlined the importance of explaining the role of the facilitator not only to staff but also to students.

The difficulty of capturing evidence of learning
The tutors faced not only the familiar challenge of assessment in the creative arts, 'measuring the unmeasurable', but in this instance, they had to elicit evidence of a learning process all the more elusive in students for whom the standard methods of communicating learning might be totally inappropriate.

At the college, the emphasis is on 'distance travelled', the recognition of progress and achievement in relation to the individual student's initial starting point. There are expected outcomes to ensure that each student is making progress, but each student 'travels' from wherever they happen to be.

Performance, for example, is devised to accommodate what the student can do. Accordingly, it is accepted that 'evidence of learning' may be completely inaccessible in relation to some students; college staff are very experienced in looking for 'evidence', which may be 'fleeting' and almost impossible to record. What is produced is film, image and performance, but very little about the students' own generation of evidence because, although they may be 'cognitively' able to do it, many students cannot generate the words:

> … one sign means a lot, but you can't actually write that down and show it easily'. (College tutor)

Scaffolding students' learning on the course demanded considerable sensitivity to nuances in their response:

> It's difficult to know. Just looking at it, you'll see the struggle I had which was…I asked her the quest…the open-ended question or whatever, and this is what she gave me and then I asked her this and so she…then, gave me that, so it's quite complex. So it's a

fine art actually, knowing how to support somebody, to acknowledge for evidence and accreditation.
(college tutor)

It was what we were saying about awareness of Rebecca,… the more I kept seeing her have her head up…you know, this sort of struggling to have her head up, it just felt like…as the weeks went on and we saw more of her and I thought…for me that felt like it was a real engagement with what was going…(university tutor)

The articulation of a single word, or even a significant gesture, in a particular learning context, might encapsulate a student's ability to recall and apply earlier learning in new contexts:

Yes, but it's still… the fact Rebecca said one word that led on to something else…that one word is really critical…that she's acknowledged saying … and that idea came from her even if it was one word …. Do you know what I mean? … Because that's critical, that that's captured, and it's not put into a sentence…but it's her word that she said which started something else happening…
(college tutor)

… so it just shows that he'd remembered. That's…yeah…that's, that's significant learning that he's translated that … and connected it back to all those weeks ago… it was like 8 weeks ago?   (College tutor)

Accordingly, apparently small indications of engagement or assimilation of content were given considerable value.

Interpreting the assessment criteria: an alternative framework
Given the sensitivity required for capturing evidence of learning, marking students' work involved academic staff in continuing debate. As suggested above, the difficulty these students faced in expressing themselves orally or in writing led the staff to use subtle and ephemeral forms of expression as testimony of more significant thinking. They also drew on professional experience regarding students' disabilities in their discussion of potential achievements.

But that's to do with the nature of her disability, the hydrocephalus and spina bifida.… It's often a limiting for them for their creative flow…tends to be because of the, you know, the nature of the

disability. You often find that someone who's got hydrocephalus struggles with that. (College tutor)

Effort and working to one's strengths were clearly valued in the module documentation, and it was seen as fair to give the students credit in this respect.

> Well, I mean, things like attendance, time-keeping, awareness of group needs, self-discipline, focus and concentration …they are all in the criteria, so the students should be credited for that. (University tutor)

However, just how far a student's disability, or any medication they were taking, affected motivation and commitment could be very difficult to determine.

> It's always very hard to know to what extent…well, we have some background knowledge as to how someone's diagnosed…… disability impacts on their learning or their way of being … but then it's very difficult to say where that stops and where someone has … perhaps just not done very much anyway towards the performance or…but then… you've got a lot of students on medication that can affect their motivation levels so… it's a very difficult…there's layer upon layer of things that can impact on the way the student is at any one time … (College tutor)

Interestingly, this college tutor referred to the assessment role of:

> that intuitive knowing of how much a student has given or put effort into it

This 'intuitive knowing' seemed to underline the special importance placed on professional knowledge and experience, and the tutor-student relationship, when a student's commitment and engagement might only be discernible intermittently through single words or fleeting gestures.

The staff debate seemed to question the distinctions between ability and disability, and there was some discussion about equivalence with marking on similar university modules. At the moderation stage, academic staff resolved the difficulties of deciding marks, and maintaining university marking standards, by seeing the process as different:

UT1: I think we had this discussion last week…….whether it would be on a par with the level 1 students and you felt it was, didn't you?

UT2 : Yes, I mean in terms …they…

UT1 : Given the limitations…

UT2: The college students…yeah, because of their disabilities, hadn't got the kind of cognitive academic skill…well, speed of….

CT1: Speed of processing?

UT2: Processing, thank you, that's it, yes.

UT1: But I don't think we're marking like with like.

While they felt the students were disadvantaged by the speed at which they were able to assimilate new concepts, the university tutors commented on the 'freshness' of the students' approach to their learning. Their perspective seemed to be less 'streetwise' than that of their non-disabled peers and consequently very open and receptive to new experience:

UT1: I guess what they haven't got is the kind of conventional vocabulary that students here will pick up… how?… through reading I guess.

UT2: Reading and usage and application.

UT1: Usage…contact with other students… sort of almost like … the jargon.

UT2: The buzzwords and the …

UT1: They express things differently which *is extremely fresh and innovative.* (our italics)

This perceived difference in the students' perspective allowed the tutors to recast student achievement as different rather than inferior. They did apportion marks based on normal grade descriptors for Level 4 (year 1) modules but they altered their interpretation of the assessment criteria to take into account the new context of working with students with complex disabilities.

CT2: So…we would think here, we look at quite a wide context when we're marking work but we're looking at specific things that they can do and whether they meet the criteria there. Because any other students possibly could move round the stage freely and locate where they are …

CT1: They would experiment, try things out different ways.

CT2: Where we realise that some students actually can't do that…. so we're working specifically in choreography work with specifics, where they can travel from particular spaces …

As the tutors saw it, the students were disadvantaged in the context of the module criteria, as in the example above, by the impact of their physical impairments on their practical work, and by their 'speed of processing', the relatively slower speed at which they were able to assimilate new learning. Consequently, they narrowed the expectations to what they considered fair.

In terms of the reflective component of the course, they directed their assessment towards the students' ability to select resources, and the way they applied their thought processes to the work in relation to the theme. This reorientation of approach foregrounds the need to think more laterally in order to to assess students unable to demonstrate depth of conceptual and imaginative response through the physical application of a technique. In the case of some students, as here, who have no access to oral communication, this becomes even more difficult. Again, the importance of giving the students' time was fundamental for achievement

> CT1: [time] needs to be extended… for them to meet that criteria… given longer time to process it… we are actually working within a moveable framework really, aren't we? (College tutor)

However, in spite of reasonable adjustments, incorporated in advance and in practice, the tutors perceived undeniable limits to what the students could achieve within the criteria and standards of this particular module:

> UT1: …a first would be 'the work shows an outstanding level of professionalism in process and performance. Flair and originality are combined with use of well-structured and appropriate material.' … I don't know… I don't think we would put anyone in that band.

> CT2: …that's where we didn't quite make it work for John … because he will never be able to do what we were expecting him to do really, because of his permanent visual impairment.

The second comment above describes the way one student's visual impairment caused spatial (dis)orientation which presented difficulties for final assessment of his performance. Recommendations following one of the BICPA case studies, the audit of a programme at Rose Bruford College, included the provision of alternative opportunities for students to communicate and express themselves, through sign language as well as 'in writing and through oral and practical work'.

The experience of students with disabilities in both cases implies a need for changes in curriculum and learning outcomes, as well as in assessment, if these students are to be offered equal opportunities in higher education.

Marking in HE: connoisseurship

This was a course in the creative arts. The academic staff involved saw drama and the visual arts as opportunities for disabled and non-disabled students alike to build on their strengths and explore their potential in whatever direction it takes. The exploratory nature of the subject discipline was perceived to offer greater scope for a flexible approach to assessment criteria than might be possible in other disciplines.

The recasting of the marking in the light of this special local context illuminates the particular nature of assessment criteria in higher education. Making judgments about assignments involves a deliberative process similar to evaluations undertaken by other professionals, a doctor constructing a diagnosis, for example, or a critic writing a review of a book or film. Each individual student's performance, academic or artistic, involves a unique permutation of a range of components, some of which are shared with others and some more idiosyncratic. Once these components form a whole, they are difficult to differentiate and they present a challenge for conventional assessment. In the absence of 'scientific' measurement, academic staff draw on 'connoisseurship' (Eisner, 1985), the well-informed subjective judgment which accrues through years of immersion in a subject discipline.

This connoisseurship, although subjective at one level, gains objectivity from being informed by the standards, norms and rules of the particular field, be it fine art, drama, history or engineering (Shay 2005). However, it allows for an element of professional and local interpretation. This is what appears to have taken place in the marking of students' work under discussion. In recent years, there have been efforts to reduce the apparent subjectivity (Sadler 2008) with which staff decide marks, and also to make marking more transparent for students. This has resulted in the use of learning outcomes, assessment criteria and grade descriptors, the professional tools the staff applied in this case to decide the students' marks.

The inherent weaknesses in such assessment tools are giving rise to serious concern among higher education researchers and policy makers (Sadler, 2008, O'Donovan et al 2008). In this instance, their use was tempered by the exercise of connoisseurship, and this may have created an assessment framework more conducive to appraising the learning of these particular students. In relation to their complex disabilities, the college tutor's reference to 'intuitive knowing' quoted earlier on, would seem to be particularly relevant.

Assessment criteria at HE level are relatively meaningless unless you have a context in which to understand them (Knight and Yorke 2003; Price & Rust 1999; Ecclestone 2001). Such frameworks are provided by tacit knowledge of disciplinary standards, achieved through many years of working in the field. One explanation of what took place in this module, might be that academic staff interpreted semantically 'loose' learning outcomes and grade descriptors in the light of a new framework for judging the students' performance. This framework could be seen to have emerged from a synthesis of the tutors' collective connoisseurship, and their searching analysis of the nature of the students' learning and their response to the academic challenges of the course, both while it was in progress and during moderation. Are tools designed specifically to create consistency in standards giving staff permission to create new frameworks in order to make judgments in a more inclusive way? Or could it be that ambiguities in criteria disguise a lowering of standards for students with complex disabilities? From this standpoint, the concept of 'reasonable adjustments' does not take into account the complexities of academic judgment and therefore the legal requirement, while sound in intention, is considerably more contentious in application.

Whatever the case, a recognition of the difficulty of judging their achievements, particularly through 'written' work, led the team to adjust the assessment weighting for subsequent modules further towards practical work, and to reduce the requirements for critical evaluation and the production of a portfolio. This will work to students' strengths, in creativity, imagination, and commitment, and, as noted by university staff, will also give recognition to the 'freshness', 'originality', and alternative perspective they bring to their learning.

From the data overall, timing and pace emerged as an area of particular concern, together with the crucial role of support staff, the difficulty of capturing evidence of learning and the challenge of interpreting the assessment criteria. In relation to assessment, the following gave rise to continuing debate between academic staff: mediation of the criteria; defining the authenticity of student's work; and the concept of tacit knowledge, or 'connoisseurship', in the interpretation of evidence of student achievement.

Conclusion
The experimental nature of this project allowed exploration of a range of reasonable adjustments in offering the experience of higher education to students with complex disabilities. From the perspective of the individual students, the thrill of the HE experience was a recurring theme. In spite of difficulties with access and the demands of deadlines, they were undoubtedly impressed with their taste of university life. One student's comments were telling:

> Don't get me wrong… but we're here at college day after day … it's good to get the experience of going to the university when you're in a wheelchair…   to be like the other people there.

What they had appreciated was being part of the 'real world', working in an institution with a professional purpose and the facilities to match.

Themes for change: a model for design
This was a study of a collaborative project between an HE institution and an SFEC to offer an experience of higher education to students with complex disabilities. However, the findings may be relevant to any HE institution considering inclusion strategies for widening participation among those with disabilities. Findings from this research suggest certain components may have a pivotal role in designing for inclusion in higher education.

Fig. 1   Designing for inclusion; a genealogy' of 'reasonable adjustments'

generic provision
(senior management)

commitment of institution(s) involved

funding   access   ongoing student consultation /preparation

institutional planning
(senior mgt/academic staff)

aims + type of programme   *roles + responsibilities*   *timing of course*
                                    of academic staff   (immediate/longer term deptl/institutional aims)

consultation/ preparation   *selection of students*
of support staff

course/module design

curriculum + assessment design   *time management*
emphasis on assessment for learning

                                    pace   timetable
                                    longer / more frequent breaks   indiv. work a.s.a.p after workshops
                                    flexible assignment deadlines   opportunities for one to one sessions
                                                                            regular staff review
                                                                            consultations with support staff
                                                                            availability of subject/student-specific resources

flexibility within curriculum

pace   content   pedagogy   *assessment and moderation in practice*
of sessions

                            role of support staff   role of connoisseurship in mediation of assessment criteria
                            authenticity of students' work   to determine student achievement
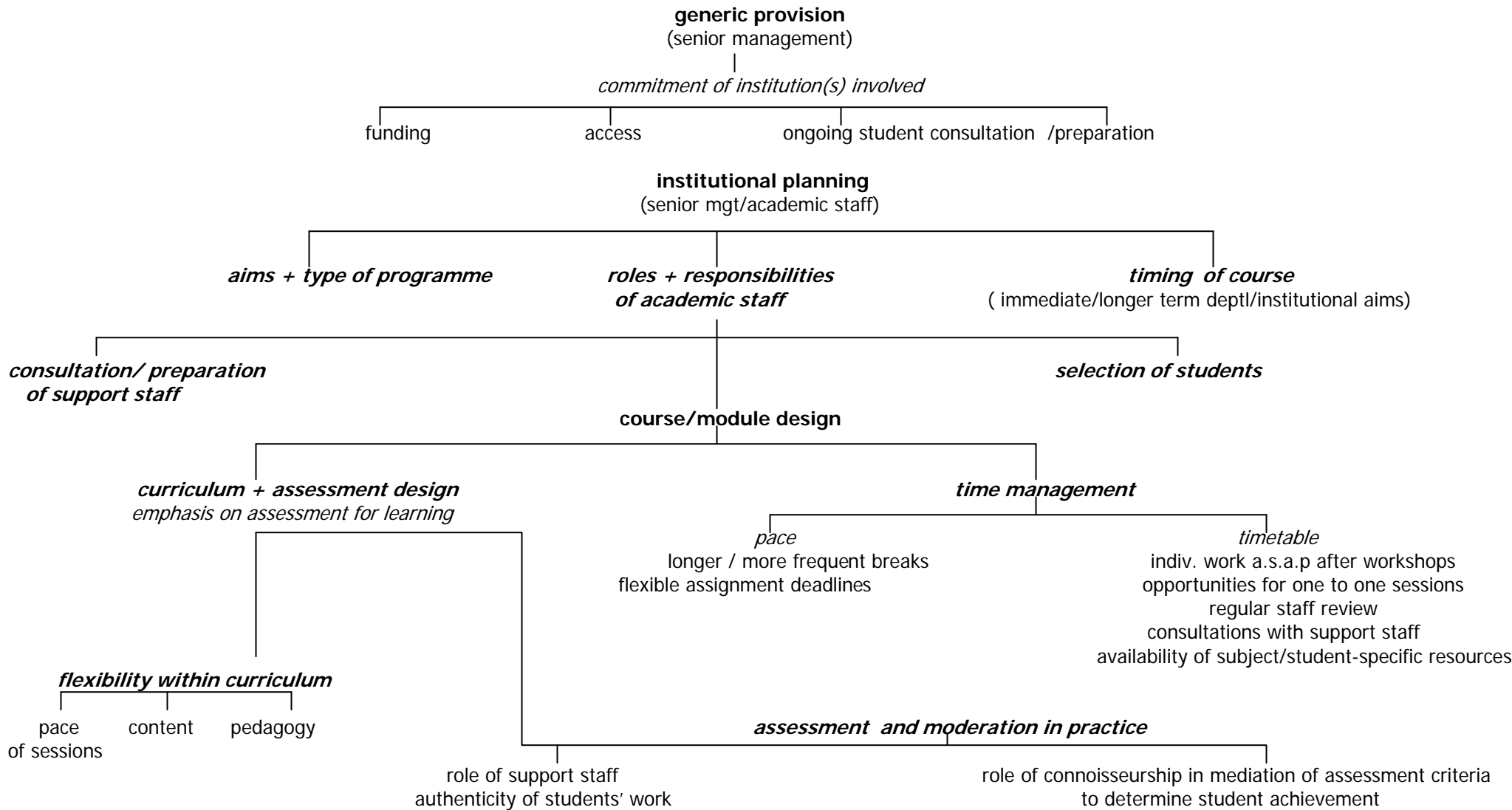
30

Fig. 1 illustrates the contribution of these components, and their relation to one another, in a chronological sequence, a 'genealogy', in order to draw attention to the importance of forward planning and consultation. Such a model presupposes an underlying commitment by HE institutions to overcome the very real difficulties associated with sustainability and the practicalities of access and resources. It also suggests consultation with and preparation of potential HE students with complex disabilities to consider the academic expectations and procedures of higher education.

Before any educational programme for students with disabilities can effectively take place, equal access to social and academic facilities on campus need to be provided. Accordingly, reading the model vertically, generic provision by the HE institution precedes any other planning. The provision of a specific programme involves management and academic staff in discussion of the aims and type of course, the roles and respective responsibilities of academic staff, and the overall timing and time management. Following the model down, the academic staff can then start work on curriculum and assessment design, ideally taking into account the student responses from ongoing consultation already established on a higher level as part of the university's 'generic provision'. At this stage, consultation with support staff also takes place, and preparation, as required, for their role as learning facilitators on an HE level course.

Pace and timing
The genealogy makes clear the paramount importance of timing and time management as it emerged from the research findings; at every stage, it permeates the process of course development. The overall timescale, the course timetable and the pace of individual sessions, all need meticulous consideration in advance. Overall timing will be related to institutional aims, and the availability of appropriate support staff and teaching space over the academic year. With respect to timing within the course itself, academic staff need time for continuing review, and time also needs to be allocated for regular consultation with support staff. Academic standards must be upheld, but at the same time, as this project undeniably proved, time management and course design need to be sympathetic to student needs, and open to alternative approaches to pedagogy and assessment, in order to ensure that students with complex disabilities have equitable opportunities to achieve to their potential.

Researchers on the Scottish HE Council-funded Teachability project (University of Strathclyde 2004) agreed that there may be 'many justifications for altering the timing of assessments for disabled students'. They point out that the scope for such adjustments is related to the purpose of assessment. In some kinds of medical examination, for example, completing a task within a limited time frame may be literally a matter of life and death; by contrast, a reflective essay on medical ethics might be much more amenable to alteration. The amount of extra time needs to reflect the practical difficulties experienced by the student in such a

way that this allows a fair assessment of performance/attainment to be made. Their proposal for using a 'mock assessment' might have been particularly helpful for the students taking part in the project reported here.

The experience of this study suggests that for students with complex disabilities, the timing of university modules needs to be relaxed, in terms of the number and duration of the sessions, and in the time allowed for the completion of assignments. Flexibility would seem to be prerequisite. This finding corresponds with evidence from Graeae, the disabled-led theatre company referred to earlier in this paper. During the first experience of an access course at London Metropolitan University, involving students with disabilities, the students had severely criticised 'a very tight and exhausting schedule'; one of the recommendations had been to extend the course timetable over a full academic year.

Allowing students to present for assessment when they are ready, rather than within the artificial time constraints of university semesters, would also seem an appropriate 'reasonable adjustment' which would not compromise the demonstration of the learning outcomes. Undoubtedly, it might conflict with university regulations and present practical difficulties for group performance, but measures to overcome such obstacles might be necessary in order to offer credibly educational opportunities to students with complex disabilities.

In this case, it was also clearly important to recognise the considerable anxiety caused by expecting these students to meet university demands for independent study and assignment deadlines while following a full timetable of further education. This might be addressed by a more flexible approach to deadlines and the allocation of protected time for supported independent study.

In the context of development and innovation, time for mutual reflection is especially important for staff. All four tutors valued the two post-session discussions and the final meeting to share views on moderation. However, these had been very difficult to arrange, and there had not been time for academic tutors and support staff to meet to share matters of concern. If at all possible, it seems that as suggested in the model, time for ongoing discussion needs to be allocated in advance in order to ensure opportunities for academic and support staff for reflection and review

Professional development for academic staff
It was generally agreed that the course had been a valuable learning experience for staff, both in terms of the planning and day to day management and in the exploration of pedagogy for the personal and creative development of the students. For the college lecturers it was an insight into what was expected of students for assessment in higher education. The university lecturers had been able to see for themselves the impact of complex disabilities on participation in

the creative arts; the course had imposed an imperative to mine the resources of their particular artforms in order to enable the students to make the most of opportunities available. It may be worth pointing out that as professional and artistic development, this experience could have wider implications in terms of benefits to professional practice.

Questions for the future: student support and reasonable adjustments
That the students believed it had been worthwhile was borne out by their overwhelmingly positive response to the demands for hard work and commitment throughout. However, occasionally individuals suffered anxiety above levels that might be deemed acceptable, and this gives pause for thought in planning future modules. For these students in particular, access and levels of personal care need to provide consistency with what the students experience at college in order to foster independence and initiative. At the same time, support workers acting as learning facilitators need to be conversant with HE level expectations, alert to opportunities in curriculum content and activities for fulfilling these requirements, and capable of exercising informed judgment on the extent of their role.

How can a student-centred approach for students with complex disabilities be reconciled with HE expectations of academic independence and initiative? The findings of this study suggest that a whole-hearted commitment from the institution has to come first.   Decisions are required in terms of long-term priorities and an openness to the full implications of offering equal opportunities: access may present serious practical difficulties; for many institutions, accommodating alternative approaches to timing and time management implies a fundamental culture shift. The course design is crucial; alternative methods of assessment need to incorporate reasonable adjustments at the planning stage. At the same time tutors need room for manoeuvre: flexibility for creativity in practice to respond to student needs, and flexibility in marking work for the exercise of professional judgment on the nature of student achievement.

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