ANTICIPATING REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS FOR DISABLED STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION BUILT ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMMES

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The ABECAS (Accessible built environment careers for all students) research project was funded by HEFCE through the National Disability Team (NDT).

The primary research was carried out by Rosie Middlemass working with Built Environment and disability services staff at the University of Bolton.
Aim: “..to remove artificial barriers that prevent students with visual, hearing and mobility impairments from undertaking professional careers in the construction industry”

Definition: artificial barriers – an impediment to progress that has needlessly and unwittingly been imposed by higher education institutions, employers or professional bodies
Outcomes

Tangible – guidance for 4 stakeholder groups
- Professional bodies
- Students
- Employers
- HEIs

Desirable – Increase numbers of students with visual, hearing and mobility impairments undertaking built environment subjects
This paper and the associated Guidance to Higher Education Institutions stem directly from this research work.

Specific aim of this paper is to encourage built environment academics to anticipate reasonable adjustments required to teach disabled students.

The paper also provides some examples of how it can be done.
SENDA compliance is not optional and places a duty to make adjustments on both departments and individuals.

QAA instructed HEIs that “the setting and/or amendment of academic and other programme requirements during approval or validation processes includes well-informed consideration of the requirements of disabled students”
This study focussed on disabled students with visual, hearing and mobility impairments (VHMI).

Any reasonable adjustments made must not disadvantage non-disabled students, and there must be real evidence of though gone into designing adjustments.
Three major points of contention exist:
1. How far should HEI’s go to make reasonable adjustments
2. The extent to which HEI’s need to anticipate disabled people enrolling on courses
3. Whether professional disciplines allow adjustments to what they consider to be core competences required to maintain academic standards.
The National Disability Team state that it is not acceptable to wait for disabled students to enrol on a course and then make ad-hoc arrangements.

The National Bureau for Students with Disabilities encourages disabled students to be realistic in their expectations especially in vocational degrees.
The methodology used in this part of the research was designed to address points 1 and 2 of the major points of contention.

The research selected three current modules from the Construction Management Programme and considered what needed to be adjusted for the groups being considered.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Module</th>
<th>Learning Situation</th>
<th>Student Disability</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Site Surveying</td>
<td>Fieldwork</td>
<td>Partial sight/blindness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Materials Technology</td>
<td>Materials testing laboratory</td>
<td>Profound deafness (BSL readers)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Construction Technology</td>
<td>Site Visit</td>
<td>Wheelchair user</td>
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Four areas were considered for adjustment:

1. Learning outcomes
2. Teaching and learning strategies
3. Assessment
4. Assessment criteria