

Supporting disabled students: A blueprint for multi-intervention transition support

The blueprint provides a set of evidence-informed activities and programmes to enhance disabled students' transition into higher education.

→ Find more information at taso.org.uk/sdsblueprint

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→ HE = higher education

→ HEP = higher education provider

Interventions

Multi-part support programme

- [Assumptions](#): A1.1, A3.5, A2.2, A3.3
- [Change mechanisms](#): CM1
- Short-term outcomes:
 - Increased student knowledge of (1) life in higher education, (2) academic work, (3) support available

- Intermediate outcomes
 - Increase in (1) student self-regulation, (2) problem-solving, (3) engagement with programme content
 - Increase in students' sense of belonging to the HEP
 - Increased student confidence to (1) succeed in HE, (2) declare their disability
- Long-term outcomes
 - Increase in students' (1) satisfaction with HE, (2) wellbeing, (3) self-determination
 - Improvements in students: (1) enrolment in HE (2) skills development (e.g., communication), (3) agency, (4) positive engagement with HE support, (5) retention rates in HE, (6) attainment in HE (7) increased completion rate in HE
- Impact
 - Improved progression for disabled students in HE
- Find out more: [Multi-part support programme](#)

Welcome events

- [Assumptions](#): A1.1, A3.5, A2.2, A3.3
- [Change mechanisms](#): CM1
- Short-term outcomes:
 - Increased student knowledge of (1) life in higher education, (2) academic work, (3) support available
 - Increase in HEPs' positive engagements with current students; Increase in student self-reporting of disability
- Intermediate outcomes
 - Increase in (1) student self-regulation, (2) problem-solving, (3) engagement with programme content
 - Increase in students' sense of belonging to the HEP
 - Increased student confidence to (1) succeed in HE, (2) declare their disability
- Long-term outcomes
 - Increase in students' (1) satisfaction with HE, (2) wellbeing, (3) self-determination
 - Improvements in students: (1) enrolment in HE (2) skills development (e.g., communication), (3) agency, (4) positive engagement with HE support, (5) retention rates in HE, (6) attainment in HE (7) increased completion rate in HE
- Impact
 - Improved progression for disabled students in HE
- Find out more: [Welcome events](#)

Tailored workshops

- [Assumptions](#): A1.1, A1.3, A1.4, A1.5, A2.2, A2.3, A2.4, A2.5, A3.3
- [Change mechanisms](#): CM1, CM2
- Short-term outcomes:
 - Increased student knowledge of (1) life in higher education, (2) academic work, (3) support available

- Intermediate outcomes
 - Increase in (1) student self-regulation, (2) problem-solving, (3) engagement with programme content
 - Increase in students' sense of belonging to the HEP
 - Increased student confidence to (1) succeed in HE, (2) declare their disability
- Long-term outcomes
 - Increase in students' (1) satisfaction with HE, (2) wellbeing, (3) self-determination
 - Improvements in students: (1) enrolment in HE (2) skills development (e.g., communication), (3) agency, (4) positive engagement with HE support, (5) retention rates in HE, (6) attainment in HE (7) increased completion rate in HE
- Impact
 - Improved progression for disabled students in HE
- Find out more: [Tailored workshops](#)

Needs assessment

- [Assumptions](#): A1.1, A1.2, A1.3, A1.4, A1.5, A2.2, A2.5, A3.3
- [Change mechanisms](#): CM3, CM4, CM5
- Short-term outcomes:
 - Increased student knowledge of (1) life in higher education, (2) academic work, (3) support available
 - Increase in student self-reporting of disability
- Intermediate outcomes
 - Increase in (1) student self-regulation, (2) problem-solving, (3) engagement with programme content
 - Increase in students' sense of belonging to the HEP
 - Increased student confidence to (1) succeed in HE, (2) declare their disability
 - Increase in HEP: (1) applications to DSA, (2) student advocacy, (3) signposting to in-house support for students
- Long-term outcomes
 - Increase in students' (1) satisfaction with HE, (2) wellbeing, (3) self-determination
 - Improvements in students: (1) enrolment in HE (2) skills development (e.g., communication), (3) agency, (4) positive engagement with HE support, (5) retention rates in HE, (6) attainment in HE (7) increased completion rate in HE
- Impact
 - Improved progression for disabled students in HE
- Find out more: [Needs assessment](#)

Mentoring/buddying/tutoring

- [Assumptions](#): A1.1, A1.3, A1.4, A1.5, A2.2, A2.3, A2.4, A2.5, A2.7, A3.3
- [Change mechanisms](#): CM3
- Short-term outcomes:

- Increased student knowledge of (1) life in higher education, (2) academic work, (3) support available
- Intermediate outcomes
 - Increase in (1) student self-regulation, (2) problem-solving, (3) engagement with programme content
 - Increase in students' sense of belonging to the HEP
 - Increased student confidence to (1) succeed in HE, (2) declare their disability
- Long-term outcomes
 - Increase in students' (1) satisfaction with HE, (2) wellbeing, (3) self-determination
 - Improvements in students: (1) enrolment in HE (2) skills development (e.g., communication), (3) agency, (4) positive engagement with HE support, (5) retention rates in HE, (6) attainment in HE (7) increased completion rate in HE
- Impact
 - Improved progression for disabled students in HE
- Find out more: [Mentoring/buddying/tutoring](#)

HEP 'taster' days

- [Assumptions](#): A1.1, A1.3, A1.4, A1.5, A2.2, A2.3, A2.4, A2.5, A3.3
- [Change mechanisms](#): CM1, CM2, CM7
- Short-term outcomes:
 - Increased student knowledge of (1) life in higher education, (2) academic work, (3) support available
 - Improved information available to HE applicants
- Intermediate outcomes
 - Increase in (1) student self-regulation, (2) problem-solving, (3) engagement with programme content
 - Increase in students' sense of belonging to the HEP
 - Increased student confidence to (1) succeed in HE, (2) declare their disability
- Long-term outcomes
 - Increase in students' (1) satisfaction with HE, (2) wellbeing, (3) self-determination
 - Improvements in students: (1) enrolment in HE (2) skills development (e.g., communication), (3) agency, (4) positive engagement with HE support, (5) retention rates in HE, (6) attainment in HE (7) increased completion rate in HE
- Impact
 - Improved progression for disabled students in HE
- Find out more: [HEP 'taster' days](#)

Early induction

- [Assumptions](#): A1.1, A1.3, A1.4, A1.5, A2.2, A2.3, A2.4, A2.5, A3.3
- [Change mechanisms](#): CM1, CM2, CM4, CM6
- Short-term outcomes:

- Increased student knowledge of (1) life in higher education, (2) academic work, (3) support available
- Increase in student self-reporting of disability
- Increased parent/supporter knowledge about the support available within HE
- Intermediate outcomes
 - Increase in (1) student self-regulation, (2) problem-solving, (3) engagement with programme content
 - Increase in students' sense of belonging to the HEP
 - Increased student confidence to (1) succeed in HE, (2) declare their disability
 - Increase in HEP: (1) applications to DSA, (2) student advocacy, (3) signposting to in-house support for students
- Long-term outcomes
 - Increase in students' (1) satisfaction with HE, (2) wellbeing, (3) self-determination
 - Improvements in students: (1) enrolment in HE (2) skills development (e.g., communication), (3) agency, (4) positive engagement with HE support, (5) retention rates in HE, (6) attainment in HE (7) increased completion rate in HE
 - Improved parent/ supporter ability to support transition
- Impact
 - Improved progression for disabled students in HE
- Find out more: [Early induction](#)

Staff training

- [Assumptions](#): A1.1, A1.5, A2.2, A2.3, A2.4, A2.5, A2.6. A2.7, A3.3
- [Change mechanisms](#): CM5
- Short-term outcomes:
 - Increased staff knowledge of: (1) disability support in HE (2) disabled student needs
- Intermediate outcomes
 - Increase in HEPs' use of evaluation processes
- Long-term outcomes
 - HEPs: Improved data collection to tackle barriers to transition
- Impact
 - Improved progression for disabled students in HE
 - More disabled students thrive in HE as a result of successful transitions support
- Find out more: [Staff training](#)

Assumptions (marked as 'A' under each intervention)

- A1.1
 - We assume that students have time available and invest it to actively engage with HEPs and to take up the support on offer to them during their transition journey. This is based on Type 1 evidence from HEPs delivering transition support for disabled students.
- A1.2
 - We assume that disabled students share information about their disability/ies as early as possible so that appropriate adjustments can be made to teaching, assessment, and pastoral care. This is based on Type 2 evidence from Baker et al. (2021)
- A1.3
 - We assume that the interventions/programmes generate awareness and confidence among those that have not shared information about their disability to declare or seek targeted support. This is based on Type 1 evidence from HEPs delivering transition support for disabled students.
- A1.4
 - We assume that disabled students welcome the opportunity to learn about disability support from HEPs and related interventions/programmes and engage with them. This is based on Type 2 evidence from Markle, Wessel and Desmond (2017) as well as Type 1 evidence from HEPs delivering transition support for disabled students.
- A1.5
 - We assume that disabled students experience their engagement with staff and other stakeholders as being supportive and trustworthy. This is based on Type 1 evidence from HEPs delivering transition support for disabled students.
- A2.2
 - We assume that education providers are proactive with supporting students with a disability and reflect their commitment through activities such as staff training, student access to disability services / resources. This is based on Type 2 evidence from Baker et al. (2021).
- A2.3
 - We assume that education providers identify appropriate interventions / adjustments aligned with specific disabled student needs. This is based on Type 2 evidence from Baker et al. (2021).
- A2.4
 - We assume that staff and other stakeholders (such as peers involved in interventions/programmes) form supportive and trustworthy relationships with disabled students in all engagements conducted. This is based on Type 2 evidence from Hillier et al. (2019).
- A2.5
 - We assume that faculty members understand the importance of their role in the academic success of students with disabilities and the reasons why transition into HE might be more difficult for students with disability. This is based on Type 2 evidence from Markle, Wessel, and Desmond (2017).

- A2.6
 - We assume that staff will engage with training workshops and resources, and that this training will lead to a change in behaviours or attitudes towards students. This is based on Type 1 evidence from HEPs delivering transition support for disabled students.
- A2.7
 - We assume that parents and supporters are receptive to the idea of transition support and understand the benefits it can accrue for students as they enter HE. This is based on Type 2 evidence from Markle, Wessel, and Desmond (2017).
- A3.3
 - We assume that there are sufficient resources available for implementing a programme of transition support at HEPs. This is based on Type 1 evidence from HEPs delivering transition support for disabled students.

Change mechanisms (marked as 'CM' under each intervention)

- CM1:
 - Early engagement with HEPs → students integrate the lived experience of their disability with the HE journey → improved knowledge and/or increased confidence and trusting relationships with staff and support services
- CM2:
 - Familiarisation with and early awareness of student life → students are better prepared for HE → improved experience of HE
- CM3:
 - Improved support for disabled students that is provided early on → in-depth understanding of disabled students' needs by HEP staff / peers → better provision and increased use of support, confidence among disabled students and impact on progression after HE
- CM4:
 - Support by significant others (e.g., parents / supporters) → increased student confidence (and, therefore, sense of empowerment) in navigating HE → maximisation of student readiness and competencies
- CM5:
 - Tailored staff awareness and training → increased staff confidence in supporting disabled students → improved student access to and use of support services
- CM6:

- Integrated, joined up support provision → awareness, access to and use of support throughout transition (and, therefore, a sense of empowerment) → increased skills and knowledge for success in HE
- CM7:
 - Early access to HE experience → increased disabled student self-determination (and, therefore, sense of empowerment) → improved post-transition outcomes

Inputs: resources required, such as data and time

We have identified five types of important input: information and resources, individual and institutional time, institutional inputs and data. However, the last, data, is foundational to all other inputs.

1.1 Information and resources

- This includes all the resources (including financial, time and personnel) required to deliver the interventions/programmes and underpins and facilitates all other inputs included below. It also includes access and participation plan (APP) spend on student success and/or disabled student funding available at the HEP, the development of all printed and online information/materials required for delivering the selected activities. The materials should be informed by evidence; therefore it is critical for them to be developed by engaging with lived experience experts and using the contextual information and data collected as part of 1.4 below.

1.2 Senior leadership buy-in and support

- Buy-in from senior HE leadership is critical to any intervention's success. Such support is crucial for prioritising the transition of disabled students as part of an HEP's mission and strategic action plans, allocating appropriate resources and time towards interventions and programme. Moreover, senior leadership commitment can be an important factor driving the engagement of staff delivering transitions support.

1.3 Individual and institutional time

- HEP staff who support disabled students with their transition (including the Disability Service team, academic staff, and student support services) require time to facilitate the implementation and evaluation of the intervention / programme. The time of external advisors (such as inclusivity and disability practitioners) is considered essential for providing expertise, leading training and mentoring programmes, and giving feedback on existing materials/processes. Additionally, disabled students' time is an important input that allows them to engage with interventions / programmes such as buddy schemes, peer-to-peer mentoring, and open events. Finally, time and engagement by other stakeholders such as parents and supporters can allow them to

engage with specific interventions / programmes designed to draw upon their support and encouragement

1.4 Institution systems and processes

- This might include tangible inputs and systems such as infrastructure (for example., IT/software), as well as non-tangible inputs such as processes and policies within the HEP (both existing and needed to be developed, if applicable). Systems and processes also link to wider inputs external to the HEP, such as national/local funding and support programmes aiming to provide financial support to disabled students to help with any essential costs arising because of a disability.

1.5 Data

- HEPs should establish data collection practices. The types of data that are important to collect to fully inform intervention and programme delivery, identify gaps, and improve provision include: number of students engaging with each activity, number of activities led, and materials produced, and the types of students involved (e.g., based on disability types or other equality characteristics of disabled students). HEPs are encouraged to use data already held within the institution to identify any gaps in provision. Collecting data on outcomes is also important. The first step should include identifying sources where HEPs may already be collecting outcomes data as part of broader monitoring and evaluation activities.
- Following this, HEPs could consider sources such as: external secondary data (such as HEP-level data published by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), and primary data collected via, e.g., student surveys. Priority should be given to measuring short- and medium-term outcomes over longer-term, and behavioural outcomes over non-behavioural outcomes. Where the latter are measured, validated scales should be used. For additional guidance and examples of the data that can be collected, a post-entry typology of student success activities has been developed by TASO can be accessed [here](#).