

E-Portfolio- Evidence of Learning

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Changemakers: Creativity and Value Creation (ADPA5002)

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Contents Page

Subject:	Page:
Introduction	3
Identifying the Problem	4
Proposing a Solution	5 -7
Feedback and Findings	8- 11
Outcomes Following the Feedback	11
Recommendations	12
Reference List	13-14
Appendices (Copy of Survey)	15

Introduction

“Beware of the assumption that the way you work is the best way simply because it’s the way you’ve done it before”

(Rubin, 2023).

It’s great to adapt to a new way of learning, beneficial if the right support is available for those who need it, increasing their ability to learn and develop their practice, detrimental if not.

Imagine working without access to the appropriate support and how difficult that could be.

Imagine having access to the appropriate support available at your fingertips, enhancing your confidence and development.

This document highlights my proposed strategy for addressing a detrimental underlying problem faced by students who experience hearing impairments / processing disorders, that appears prominent not only in vocational courses but also noted throughout the university and firsthand experiences of having a hearing impairment / processing disorder studying at the university.

This issue was initially explored by gathering data and evidence from vocational students via a questionnaire sent to explore these experiences, opinions and concerns throughout the student and faculty members within the university,

Exploring these findings, led the focus of this document not only to address need of providing necessary equipment to the students, but also addressing the differences in opinion/attitudes expressed by student/university faculty members toward changed. From this gathered evidence it leads to a conclusion and recommendations for future practice.

The Problem

“Under the Equality Act 2010, all disabled people have the right to reasonable adjustments when using public services, and education. These adjustments remove barriers that disabled people would otherwise face in accessing these services”

(Mencap, 2018).

Being a student with hearing difficulties and a processing disorder (dyslexia) it appears that, the university lacks knowledge in supporting students with hearing difficulties on vocational courses. All materials are verbalised, and not presented in other formats or consideration given for different learning styles (VARK) (Michael and Prithishkumar, 2014) or supporting equipment which may contrast with adherence of the Equality Act (2010) as cited by Mencap (2018) above.

The journey through the education system/environments without the necessary support can give rise to feelings overwhelming, alienation and daunting, constantly behind your peers without explanation. In exploring the universities own equality policy, that clearly states that they actively work on removing *‘barriers to learning for those from all backgrounds and circumstances to fulfil their potential’* (University of Wales Trinity Saint David, 2020). This statement may be seen by those living these experiences as a false statement, as the university identifies that there are *‘barriers,’* However, in reality, there seems to be a lack of support, with students in need having to wait 3 months for a support meeting, or no transcribed recordings of lessons/essential information necessary for grading. Clearly there may be lack of insight/lack of awareness into “real life experiences” by the university.

The rehearsal/lecture halls are an example of this, they reverberant audio and sometimes engulfed in noise, resulting in the student disconnecting from the content being taught, this repetitive cycle makes the experience a difficult one to reclaim understanding of the topic as opposed to their peers. 20% of the UK population has hearing difficulties (World Health Organization, 2019) and “around 1 out of 10 people” has a processing disorder (Elias, 2023), key

elements that can affect educational development, delaying the processing of information, engagement of the student striving to a full potential.

Another example of this is on creative courses; where students are assessed on participation and engagement, without their comprehension being identified. How can they be fully supported without this knowledge.

Proposing a Solution

“Learn from yesterday, live for today, hope for tomorrow. The important thing is not to stop questioning”

(Quinn-Patton, 2011, pg.227).

As an Acting student who has these disabilities, I’m interested in championing the improvement of the student awareness of hidden disabilities. As a student with these difficulties, I have noticed the inconsistencies/limited awareness of support to be made available, currently making my student experience daunting, intimidating, and stressful.

The solution I am proposing would be working with university support services to have equipment, resources, and training available for staff readily available at admission.

The equipment and accommodations available could include Microphones - more specifically ‘Wireless Lavalier Microphone System’ that clips on to the teacher's clothes amplifying sound. Readily available from *Amazon* at £59.95 (Movo, 2020).

To put that into prospective, with ‘300 courses to pick from’ (Global Wales, 2022) at the university, and each student paying ‘£9,000 a year’ (University of Wales Trinity Saint David, 2020), to buy a microphone system for each course would cost £17,985; meaning one student’s tuition for two years can cover the costs; and it is a one-time payment. The benefits of this

would not only be that sound is amplified with background noise reduced, which in turn lectures would become more understandable and transferable via the 'speech to text' allowing for more accurate and clear recordings.

The downside would be that staff would need training on this equipment as well as, on occasions, the microphones do not stick to the shirt which may cause a distraction in themselves. Additionally, to aid reducing the burden of cost to the student/ university could purchase 'Livescribe ECHO 2' that are able to record lessons, provided by the DSA who can cover the cost under their scheme, where each eligible student can receive up to '£26,291' (GOV.UK, 2021), ensuring education accessible for everyone; however, it is shocking to know this adjustments are not already in place and readily available throughout the university as funding also covers: *"Specialist equipment, for example a computer if you need one because of your disability...non-medical helpers, for example a British Sign Language (BSL) interpreter or specialist note taker"* (GOV.UK, 2021).

The added benefit of recording the lesson is that it can be used in many areas and played back with subtitles. It can be used with ease when note-taking and processing the information, it can also catch missed communication which can later be realised and reviewed, and should the student be unwell, it can aid regaining knowledge of missed sessions.

One downside however would mean that all students would have to consent to a recording, as this could be a data protection issue and privacy issues raised as a result. A compromise could be recording one-to-one conversations, having the tutor give handouts and explanations of the lessons, or pre-recording lessons on the pens themselves.

Sound absorbing panels for walls within the lecture rooms could reduce the echo and contain the sound, allowing students to concentrate on the lesson in hand. Benefits of having this could help reduce background noise; company professionals also state: *"This can help reduce the stress level associated with noisy environments and improve concentration and productivity"* (Leeding, 2021). This demonstrates that such equipment can be a huge benefit in supporting those with sensory difficulties, by improving most students' mental health can increase productivity and allow for each student to reach their full potential, as equals. One downside is

cost, though the university does have them in one-to-one study rooms. However, having them in the lecture rooms would be more beneficial.

Winllyat (2022) informs that 'Amazon' sells these in packs of 60 for '£44.99'. The university has roughly 93 study/class spaces on campus, which hypothetically, if they were to purchase one pack for each area would cost approximately £4,184.07. A cost recouped from just under half of a single students' yearly tuition, leaving £4,815.93 still going to the university. With the addition of new equipment and lessons adapted could give full regard to those students with hearing difficulties/processing disorders. With staff asking the question: "how I can support you to learn?", there would be a more open communication/engagement between the staff and students, thus improving most students' experience and with equal opportunities to grow and reach their potential. Although currently with the intensity of courses finding the time to include this into every lecture's timetable may be a challenge, as some are part time. To make this a reality it would take two sessions booked in advance, so they can work their schedules around it or having the discussion during the admission process/introductions/freshers' week.

Below I have created a visual aid to express my thoughts on what kind of accommodations the university can make:

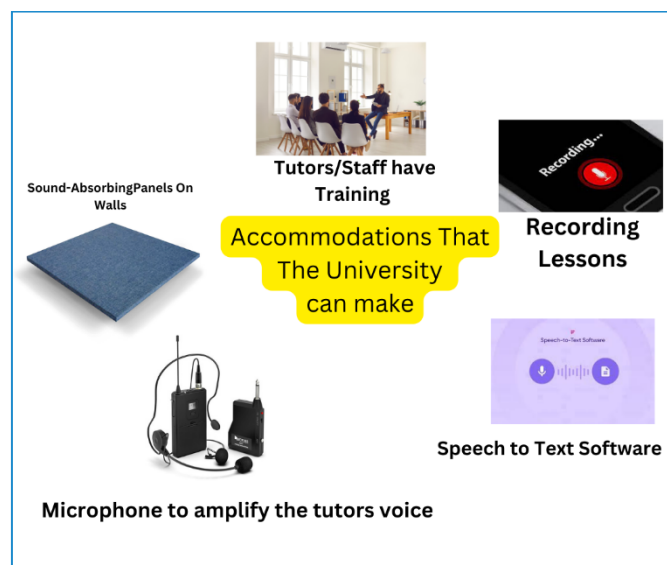


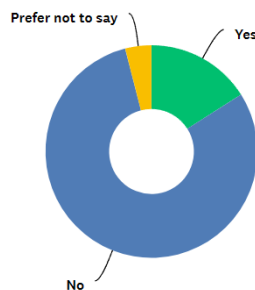
Figure 1: Mind-map of ideas of accommodation that the university can make (using canva.com)

Feedback and Findings

All students enrolled on the second year of BA Acting and Set Design and Production were invited to participate in the survey. The findings of the survey uncovered that all participants who took part in the survey had hearing difficulties and/or processing disorders prior to university, and again all students who participated had Specific Learning Differences (SpLD)/hearing difficulties, and are in a creative vocational course.

Do you receive support for your hearing difficulty and/or processing disorder?

Answered: 25 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Yes	16.00% 4
No	80.00% 20
Prefer not to say	4.00% 1
TOTAL	25

Figure 2: Pie Chart showing how many students receive support from the university

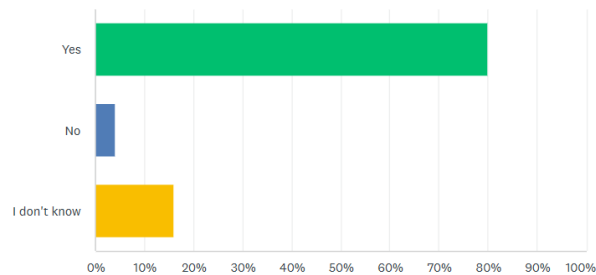
It is evident that 80% believe they do not receive the necessary support from the university, despite every student being 'screened' in their first week of attending, this highlights a fault within the screening tool/process itself.

There is clearly a problem as only 16% of the students saying they are receiving the support they need. Understandably that 4% 'prefer not to say', as there are many stigmas around

hearing difficulties and/or processing disorders, and may be wanting to be kept private, this should be respected.

Do you think the university should provide more support people with hearing difficulty and/or processing disorder?

Answered: 25 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Yes	80.00% 20
No	4.00% 1
I don't know	16.00% 4
Total Respondents: 25	

Figure 3: Graph showing students opinion on university providing more support

Results from the survey interpreted in the graph above, reveal that 80% of students believe there should be more support provided to students with hearing difficulties/processing disorders. While 16% don't have an opinion on the matter, an interpretation of this may be that they may not be aware of the support available to them via DSA/university. Lastly, 4% who answered "don't know" they did agree more should not be done, I speculate that this may be an individual that is already in receipt of adequate support, has additional support externally sourced (family/private/able to afford), or again, keeping private (this is to be respected).

How would you describe your experience with adapting in a rehearsal process or group activities?

Alone, confusing

Isolating

Sometimes it's hard to get my own opinion in because it takes me a while to process what's being asked.

I have a high work ethic and am extremely determined so I have utilised these traits to the rehearsal process and or group activities.

Appalling and unhelpful and overwhelming

Sometimes can be difficult

Not very naturally social, so quite difficult sometimes

It's difficult sometimes because people work at different speeds and in different ways but are all made to do things with people who work differently in extreme time restraint

Figure 4: students feedback on how they have adapted and how they believe this effected their experience.

Figure 4 (above) is an example of 32% (8) questions asked relating to how the students felt in classes and how they have adapted themselves in a rehearsal process and/or group activities within university. The collective consensus is that they have had to adapt with the lack of support, resulting comments include terms of: 'isolating,' 'overwhelming,' 'difficult to process.' With one result positively revealing that a 'high work ethic and extremely determined' is needed, and despite a lack of support and relying on their own skill set, that they are working twice as hard as their peers to reach the "equal " level. Should the university (previously cited) really want to "break barriers", they have to come to the same conclusion and address that there maybe/is a fault within the process itself.

Continuing with the survey's results, this highlighted the high-level need and want for more support for students. I then contacted one of the university's disability advisors to gather the university's perspective in how they support their students (see figure 6).

I asked, "Do You think the university is accessible to people with hearing impairments and or processing disorder and why and how?" they answered; ***"Yes we apply for Disabled Student Allowance and student receives a package of support for them."*** I asked, "How would u help a student on a practical verbal course with thoughts needs?" they answered; ***"Students would receive suitable technology, lectures would arrange handouts in advance."*** I asked, "Do you think something needs to change with the approach of support?" ***"No" They answered.*** I asked "Do you think tutors should have additional training in how to adapt lessons to accommodate and why?" ***"Training is always beneficial, and staff would be very happy to attend up to date training"*** They replied.

Figure 5: Questions and answers on 1-1 conversation with a university disability advisor

Feedback, findings, and outcomes.

I found it interesting whilst believing they are being supportive; they lack true insight into the "true/lived" experiences missing the opportunity to engage fully with their "equal" student members.

It is great that there is DSA financial support and equipment available to those with hearing difficulties and/or processing disorders, though the university is not taking direct responsibility to support their students. By having a blunt "No" when asked, "Do you think something need to change?" may speak volumes, as no approach is perfect, and they are always something to improve. This response may also be highlighting further concerns within the whole process that may be blinding the university in fully accommodating change, when it is evident that students are desperate for individual support, in turn going against their own promise and ethics, initially cited in the introduction of this document which in turn may paint the university in an untrustworthy light.

On a positive side, there are tutors who are open to providing handouts, explaining its contents to students, allowing them to be aware of the content regarding their modules, which also aids with notetaking. Furthermore, the fact that the university is open to training its lecturers is good, this will ensure that their staff are up to date with the knowledge and awareness in how to accommodate to every /most student's needs; while this is great, it appears to contrast with the true experiences of its students.

Recommendations

“Being challenged in life is inevitable, being defeated is optional.”

(Teja, 2019).

We all face challenges throughout our daily lives. It's not easy accommodating everyone. Although with the right communication (looking at the questions of where to get support – what support I need) could ensure most students achieve to the best of their ability. It's evident that there is a lack of communication between students and faculty members. Shown by the complete opposite statistics in this portfolio from students and faculty. It is this communication or lack of insight (university, “we support” (University of Wales Trinity Saint David, 2020) students, “don't feel supported” (survey response to question 6)) that can lead to lack of resources within the university to accommodate those students with hearing difficulties.

A suggestion for beneficial change would be screening for the need for specialist equipment prior to admission (application stage), this would allow time for the university and students to have meaningful conversations about their need and what is available prior to admission with all referrals (DSA) in process prior to admission. This may reduce the anxiety for students in the knowing that support has already been in place from admission.

Moving forward, a meeting will be arranged the head of Student Services, where the recommendations of this document can be voiced by both parties to ensure that lines of communication can remain open in these regards. Being a student with limited capital, I would be one of these who would require heavy input from support services and would have benefited with having the much-needed support in place prior to my arrival.

There appears to be no reason that these considerations couldn't firstly be trailed with obvious benefits to the university such as: more admissions from those with diverse ability; thus, creating an open campus, one of acceptance. By giving full regard to the needs of their students, such as placing noise reduction panels in the creative/rehearsal room, would shine a light on those who thought studying Acting was out of their reach. Despite there being a high

demand for such actors in this area and example of this would be on TV shows like *Echo* (Freeland, 2024), films like *Coda* (Heder, 2021), etc.

“Education is the passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to those who prepare for it today.”

(Adulting Excellence, 2019).

How can we prepare for the future of ‘equal’ independent learners when we have not got the right tools/approach today? As a student with these difficulties, I empathise with students who do not have the necessary support in place. It is important that the university takes steps in accommodating those with these needs that are realistic and reasonable. Thus, benefiting all parties. By admitting there may be a flaw in the process of screening those in need and being willing to change, can not only see the university in a positive light, but also enhance the student experience.

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Appendices

Appendix 1- Survey

Working with the university to make the rehearsal process and classes more accessible for people with hearing difficulties and/or processing disorder.

1. Do you have a hearing difficulty and/or processing disorder? 

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Prefer not to answer

2. Do you receive support for your hearing difficulty and/or processing disorder? 

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Prefer not to say

3. If yes and you are comfortable, please describe the sort you receive? 

4. Do you think the university should provide more support people with hearing difficulty and/or processing disorder? 

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I don't know

5. Are you doing an acting or a creative degree? 

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

6. How would you describe your experience with adapting in a rehearsal process or group activities? 

7. Do you think the rehearsal process or group activities are accessible for people with hearing difficulty and/or processing disorder? 

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I don't know

8. What support do you receive outside of university that could be brought to the rehearsal space, to make them more accessible for you? 