

**EQUITY FOR OUR DISABLED STUDENTS:  
HOW CAN WE CLOSE  
ATTAINMENT (AND CONTINUATION) GAPS?**

# INTRODUCTION: APP

The Access Participation Plan (APP) analyses recruitment, continuation, attainment and post-grad outcome data, comparing demographic groups such as:

- Students from privileged compared to deprived postcode areas
- White students compared to Asian, black, mixed and other races (ABMO)
- **Disabled compared to non-disabled students**

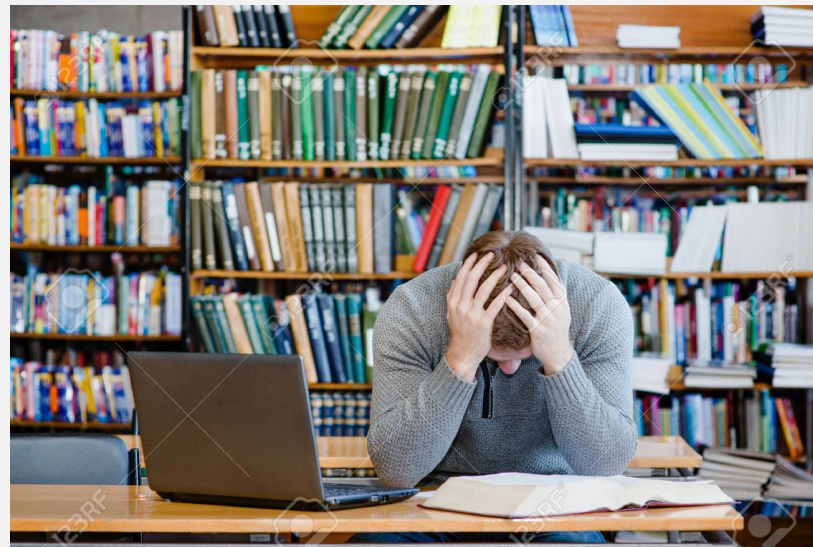
[Our APP currently covers 2021/22 – 2025/26.](#)

# GAPS

A 'gap' is a significant and consistent difference between outcomes for demographic groups.

Behind every 'gap' is a person who struggled and either withdrew, failed, didn't achieve their full potential, or didn't apply in the first place.

The goal of the APP is to ensure 'equality of opportunity' for all.





This presentation focuses on **disability**.

Just a quick acknowledgment that although we are using the term 'disability', not everyone who is covered by the Disability Act and the APP considers themselves 'disabled'. Some do, some don't.

## WHERE WERE WE ACCORDING TO THE APP?

We were pretty good at continuation already...

Table 1.4.2.1 TECP continuation rates by disability and subject type

MEASURETYPE	Measure	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
All Undergraduates	No Known Disability (%)	75	78	82	83	84
All Undergraduates	Disabled (%)	78	81	87	81	79
All Undergraduates	Gap (pp)	+3	+3	+5	-2	-5

Although when you drill down, we were losing students in one particular category:

The disability types associated with different types shows a drop-in performance for sensory, medical and physical from 90% down to 65% between 2014/15 and 2018/19 (Table 1.4.2.2).

Table 1.4.2.2 TECP All undergraduates, continuation by disability type

Disability	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Cognitive and Learning (%)	83	86	85	88	81
Mental Health (%)	DP	80	N	N	80
Sensory Medical and Physical (%)	N	70	90	75	65
No Known Disability Type (%)	75	78	82	83	84

(APP 2020 ERC Small denominator)

# ATTAINMENT

## Attainment

Overall performance of disabled students has worsened since 2015/16 when disabled students performed as well as non-disabled students (Table 1.4.2.3). In 2016/17 a 14 percentage point gap opened up, was reduced slightly in 2017/18 and then increased back to 22 percentage points in 2018/19. Locally held data shows this gap reduced to 5 percentage points in 2019/20 cohort.

Table 1.4.2.3 TECP attainment by Disability

	Measure	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
INDICATOR	No Known Disability (%)	47	52	63	65	71
INDICATOR	Disabled (%)	54	52	49	52	49

(APP 2020 ERC Small denominator)

TEC Partnership is committed to reducing and eradicating the gap; the number of students achieving good or better degrees required to do this is relatively few. TEC Partnership is committed to monitoring all disability types to ensure attainment gaps do not occur. In addition it will set targets to reduce the attainment gap between students with a declared Cognitive and Learning disability and those with no known disability.

# WHERE ARE WE NOW?

Data from Feb 2023 shows:

## Continuation

2021/22 4pp gap

2022/23 2pp gap (as of Feb)

## Attainment

2020/21 14pp gap

2021/22 5pp gap

**So, we (and our students) are doing pretty well with continuation.**

**However, there is still a gap for attainment ('good' degrees).**

## WHAT WE'RE ALREADY DOING

We already have some excellent support and systems in place:

- Funded support (Disabled Students Allowance)
- Inclusion Team, Disability Officers, Student Support Officers
- Success Coaches, Academic Coaches, Library Staff
- Programme Leaders and Module Tutors
- APP-funded projects and the APP Committee
- Anything that you're doing that I haven't thought of! 😊



WHAT MORE CAN WE DO?

**21 quick fixes for PL's  
and tutors  
to help close the  
attainment gap  
between disabled and  
non-disabled students**

(of course, you may already be doing some of these, and I'd also like to hear more ideas at the end if you have them)

**QUICK  
FIX I  
FIND OUT  
WHO IS  
DISABLED**

Check whether each and every student has a disability, medical condition, etc.

- Check application/enrolment forms
- Ask about it during the interview and talk about available support
- Ask about it in year 1 tutorials

Disabilities can easily be missed if a student ticks a box on their application form but never mentions it again.

**QUICK  
FIX 2  
GET  
SUPPORT  
IN PLACE  
ASAP**

Once you've made an applicant an offer, put them in touch with the Disability Office.

Get in there ASAP, particularly if they will require in-person support from day 1.

# QUICK FIX 3 ENCOURAGE STUDENTS TO ACCESS SUPPORT

Many students initially turn down or don't seek support.

What might the reasons be? Stigma, guilt, pride, anxiety, not getting round to it, or wanting to see what they can achieve without extra help.

If they really don't want or need support that's absolutely fine, but let's contribute to a culture where there is no stigma or guilt, and tutors show that they believe in levelling the playing field by encouraging students to make use of support.

# QUICK FIX 4 CHECK ON THE PROGRESS OF SUPPORT APPLICATIONS

Tutorials, especially in year 1, are a good opportunity to ask students if they have set up or are using their funded support.

Many students sort this out themselves, but there are some barriers to doing so for students who are, eg. blind, autistic, have ADHD or dyslexia. As it involves reading forms, making phone calls or sending emails, meeting a stranger.

The disability team will provide extra help where needed.

You can also gain the student's permission to contact their mentor for them, in cases where there seems to be an ongoing barrier to getting started.

# QUICK FIX 5 NORMALISE 1- WEEK EXTENSIONS FOR CERTAIN DISABILITIES

Certain disabilities – e.g. being blind, having dyslexia – make every assignment take longer than it would for a non-disabled peer.

Students are allowed to apply for extensions, but why not create a culture where this is seen as an automatic right like extra exam time?

Formative assessment could be on the day of the other students' deadlines.

**This could help with the attainment of good degrees.**

**(Not that many of these students aren't already achieving good degrees!)**

QUICK  
FIX 6  
THINK  
LIKE  
STUDY  
SUPPORT

It's easy to assume that a student is fully accommodated because they have their funded support outside of the classroom.

However, mentors and support staff have limited time with students and are unlikely to know their specialist subject. Software and equipment are also limited.

15 minutes of the module tutor going over an assignment 1:1 with a student during a lesson, helping them find books in the library or find some appropriate chapters or quotes for an essay could make all the difference.

# QUICK FIX 7 ACCOMMODATE WITHOUT DIAGNOSIS

We once had a student who had a panic attack when someone else sat in their usual chair. We just let them have the seat, because although the reason was unknown, they were communicating a need. Years later, they were diagnosed as autistic.

If it's not hurting anyone, we might as well accommodate! The waiting list for autism and ADHD diagnoses can be literally years, so otherwise they'll have graduated (or withdrawn) by the time they become eligible for funded support.

Note: if someone has self-diagnosed, they can still tick the box on their enrolment form, and then they'll still contribute to the APP data, which would be a bonus!



# QUICK FIX 8 ARE THEY COMFORTABLE?

If someone is in pain, it's hard to concentrate and sit down to work.

Could they bring a cushion in to lessons? Do they need to know you're fine with them getting up and moving around, stretching, having more regular breaks? Are they eligible for a special chair?

Someone's casual comment about 'back pain' could be worth asking more about. Is it something serious enough to include as a disability or attract funded support? The Disability team can help with queries.

# QUICK FIX 9 EMBED DISABILITY INTO LESSONS

Talking about and normalising conversations about all disabilities creates a culture where students can feel accepted and be more open about their own struggles, which is more likely to lead to them using accommodations and being successful.

We can also embed information about disability in the workplace when we're covering employability topics, to help with progression.

**‘QUICK’  
FIXES 10-20  
UNIVERSAL  
DESIGN FOR  
LEARNING**

Last year, my presentation was on Universal Design for Learning.

The concept is that we create environments and processes that accommodate autism and other disabilities, yet that are also beneficial to all.

These may not be as ‘quick’ as the other suggestions, it depends what is already in place in your area...

Quick Fix	Example disabilities accommodated	Examples of who else is accommodated
PowerPoints on Canvas	Autistic, dyslexic, ADHD, deaf/HoH, any conditions that mean missing lessons, having brain fog or processing delays	Y – students who have been absent due to work or childcare
Clear, brief instructions, written and verbal, eg. following up verbal formative with the offer of a few bullet points in an email	As above	Y – auditory/visual learners
Facilitate social connections (eg. ice breakers designed to help students communicate and befriend each other)	Autistic, deaf, blind, social anxiety, depression, communication-based disabilities	Y – shy, socially-motivated attenders, weird(!)
Mediate communication mishaps and tension	Autism, social anxiety	Y – socially inept
Staggered deadlines	Autism, ADHD	Y – anyone who is busy or disorganised!
Sensory environments / options such as using Open Access or noise-cancelling headphones	Autism, ADHD, sensory processing	Y – anyone who finds background music/noise distracting

Quick Fix	Example disabilities accommodated	Examples of who else is accommodated
Demo things that seem obvious, like going to the library	Autism, GAD	Y – inexperienced, struggles with IT, etc.
Allow (some) flexible attendance, esp. for trusted students at L6	GAD, mental health, autism	Y - childcare, illness, injury, work commitments, travel issues, etc.
Allow flexible communication such as messaging on Teams in a busy classroom instead of calling out	Autism, social anxiety, mental health	Y – shy
Communicate changes in advance where possible	Autism	Y – plan around work/childcare
Design flexible assessment methods Eg. option of essay or presentation/video	Dyslexia, autism, GAD	Y – individual strengths/preferences

**QUICK FIX 2 |  
MAKE SURE  
DISABILITIES  
ARE ON THE  
SYSTEM**

If a student declares a disability verbally or in an assignment, add it to the system so that our data is correct. If we've done everything right and they've succeeded, we'll want the data to prove it, and even if not then that's something we need to know.

**This can be done as a change request on ProSolution:**

Change request type: Student Detail Info Change

Section: User Defined Health

YOUR IDEAS /  
SHARING BEST PRACTICE

Anything to add?

# CONCLUSION

We have the power to make the world  
a little bit fairer.

The data is a way of gamifying this goal.

Let's smash our APP targets and close the gaps.

