

Research Summary

**Review of the literature on
accessible curricula, qualifications
and assessment: DRC Summary**

The Disability Rights Commission

The Disability Rights Commission (DRC) is an independent body, established by Act of Parliament to eliminate the discrimination faced by disabled people and promote equality of opportunity. When disabled people participate – as citizens, customers and employees – everyone benefits. So we have set ourselves the goal of ‘a society where all disabled people can participate fully as equal citizens’.

We work with disabled people and their organisations, the business community, Government and public sector agencies to achieve practical solutions that are effective for employers, service providers and disabled people alike.

There are about 10 million disabled people in Britain. This includes people with epilepsy, cancer, schizophrenia, Down’s syndrome and many other types of impairment.

Under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, legal rights and obligations affecting disabled people’s access to services, education and employment are already in force. Others became law in 2004.

Many disabled people are still not aware that they have these rights. And employers, education providers and service providers are often unsure how to implement ‘best practice’ to make it easier for disabled people to use their services, access education or gain employment.

The DRC has offices in England, Scotland and Wales. For further details of how we can help you, please contact our Helpline – contact details are featured on the back cover of this publication.

Background

This review of the literature was undertaken in 2004/05 by the Institute of Education for the Disability Rights Commission (DRC) in order to review and gather evidence on the impact of systems, policies and practices of the curriculum, its assessment and examinations on disabled learners. The aim of the review was to determine how effective the current curriculum and examination system is at developing, identifying and consolidating the competencies, skills and knowledge of disabled learners; to research the effectiveness of other curriculum and examination systems; and to identify the key contributing factors of effective systems, including examples of policy and practice internationally. This summary outlines the key findings from the literature review.

Key findings

- There is insufficient research evidence into the effectiveness of assessment processes for disabled learners in England, especially in relation to access to qualifications. Current arrangements are based on a deficit model of disability and there appears insufficient evidence of the impact they have on the reliability and validity of assessment outcomes.
- Practice in setting IEP targets and assessing progress towards these targets appears patchy in all schools, though stronger in special than in mainstream schools. Many teachers do not know how to assess the progress and achievement of disabled learners in their classes.
- Disabled pupils are frequently excluded from certain subjects, whilst low expectations and assumptions mean they are channelled into vocational routes without being given genuine choice.
- Effective differentiation and intervention, and encouraging self-advocacy are key hallmarks of effective delivery of the curriculum for disabled pupils.
- Disabled pupils face a lottery of support and curriculum resources. Good deployment of Teaching Assistants can be the critical factor in inclusive learning, but can equally distance pupils from teaching and learning.
- There is a low awareness of making reasonable adjustments amongst staff and governors. As a consequence, the work of SENCOs is frequently undervalued.
- There is little evidence that the current standards agenda in schools leads to improvements for children with SEN.

Main issues

- The qualifications and assessment system is ineffective in protecting disabled learners from discrimination. This system will need to be fundamentally redesigned by QCA, ACCAC, SQA and the awarding bodies to effectively include disabled people.
- The DfES, the Scottish Executive and the Welsh Assembly should establish an effective national benchmarking system to identify progress and attainment levels of disabled learners.
- QCA, ACCAC and SQA should develop a 3-19 curriculum and qualifications framework, designed on the basis of creating a positive and inclusive environment rather than make the assumption that disabled young people require alternative routes.
- Effective support and resources are vital to effective transition. All agencies involved in transition should work in partnership to take forward the recommendations on transition of the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit report on *Life Chances of Disabled People*.
- The DfES and the Welsh Assembly need to develop a robust system of data collection of disabled pupils alongside the existing SEN categories, as has been done by the Scottish Executive.
- Underachievement and poor transition of disabled young people must be seen in the context of poverty and exclusion, especially in relation to young people with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties.
- The Teacher Training Agency and the General Teaching Council (for England, Scotland and Wales) should promote disability equality and effective practice for inclusion in teacher training and continuing professional development based on the 'social model' of disability.
- The DfES should revisit the standards agenda to address the relative performance of pupils with SEN.

Further information

The full report will be available on the DRC website:
<http://www.drc.org.uk/publicationsandreports/research.asp>

Further information on education policy, legislation and disability rights is available at:
<http://www.drc.org.uk/education/>

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www.drc-gb.org

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