

TOWARDS FLEXIBILITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Title and Presenter:

Inclusion of *all* students at the university level

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Sub Theme & Paper Type:

Flexible Delivery – Presentation

Abstract:

Nowadays student diversity at the university level is evident more than ever before. The widening participation agenda, as well as changes in the legislation regarding the access of students with disabilities in higher education, has created a new synthesis of student population. However, regardless of the fact that entering universities for a particular group of students is a totally new experience, it does not necessarily mean that it is also an inclusive experience.

This paper reports on a small-scale research study undertaken with undergraduate students in order to understand particular groups of students' experiences at the university level, focusing both at the academic as well as the social level. The participants of the study, who were 10 students studying at Levels 4 and 5 of an undergraduate degree, belonged in one or more of the following groups: being an international student, being a mature student, belonging to a different ethnic background than the majority of the students, and having a disability. The focus on these four groups is derived from a broad view of inclusion which focuses on any group of students that might experience marginalisation, rather than focusing only on students with disabilities. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with individual students.

In the presentation, the themes that emerged from those individuals will be discussed, in order to explore ways that can be used to make learning at the university level inclusive for the benefit of all learners. In this way the aim is to provide all students with a positive experience at the university, as well as have a direct impact on their learning and performance. Particular emphasis will be given to the role of social interactions with others as a barrier that some students experienced. The presentation will conclude with the thought that that even though legislation requires that reasonable adjustments are made for those students with disabilities, for example, or support is provided for mature students who are encouraged to enroll on courses, there are other subtle issues that mainly stem from people's attitudes that need to be further explored in order to include all students effectively.