Executive Summary

Non-Medical Helper (NMH) Support refers to the one-to-one support provided to students with disabilities. The aim of the current study was to investigate how NMH support impacts on inclusive learning and the student experience in terms of transition, retention, engagement, progression, attainment, aspiration, empowerment and employability. These factors were measured via quantitative and qualitative methodology. The participant groups involved were students, Support Providers, School Disability Advisers and Disability Services Staff.

Key Findings

Significant associations revealed that support usage was linked to disability type. Students with dyslexia were less likely to utilise high levels of Tutor support in comparison to those with other disabilities. Conversely, students with Mental Health Conditions were more likely to use high levels of Tutor support than those with other disabilities.

The qualitative analysis uncovered five key themes – Person Support, Student Acceptance, Communication, Procedures and Systems, Mainstreaming Support. Person Support demonstrated that support worked well when a consistent and sensitive approach was in operation between students and Support Providers. Student Acceptance highlighted the importance of students' positioning on the process of acceptance and their subsequent utilisation of NMH support. Communication was key to a positive support experience, however often many intermediaries involved in the support process resulted in ambiguous communications. Procedures and Systems revealed that many aspects are working well within the current procedures however, it was noted that complexities within systems can be detrimental to NMH support experience. Finally, Mainstreaming Support refers to the process of making NMH support completely integrated into the normality of University life. The consensus between participant groups was that NMH Support needs to become more mainstreamed within the University. All of the aforementioned findings led to the following suggested recommendations.

Suggested Recommendations

Potential improvements are presented within three categories – NMH Support, Systematic and Procedural, and Mainstreaming.

NMH Support suggestions include the exploration of collaborative working options between the Careers Service and Disability Services in order to support the transition of students with disabilities from University into the workplace. Another suggestion was the possible extension of the ASD Tutor role into the realm of "employability". It was proposed that tailored support packages are

extended to all types of Tutor support. In addition, where possible, Note Takers with the appropriate specialised disciplines, should be assigned to STEM subject students.

Systematic and Procedural suggestions include making Support Providers aware of their assigned student's disability. A Review System, would involve contacting students half way through the first semester and this would determine how well students are progressing with their NMH support, thus promoting the optimal service. It was proposed that Support Providers engage in a thorough recruitment and vetting process, involving the implementation of a new assessment procedure for new Support Providers that requires the completion of mandatory practical tests. In addition, the implementation of an electronic Work Record sign-off system would mean that Work Records are easily confirmed remotely, eliminating the need to meet face-to-face and non-communication issues. The potential of a support weaning-off system has been postulated so that as the student progresses through their studies, their NMH support is scaled down. Due to the nature of some disabilities, the system would need to be selectively implemented. Additionally, the opportunity for students in receipt of NMH Support to communicate with other students in the same position was recommended.

Mainstreaming Support recommendations involve the promotion of acceptance in order to diminish the stigma attached to NMH Support. Moreover, the provision of services for Support Providers such as access to Wi-Fi, Queen's Online and Queen's email addresses would demonstrate the importance the University places on NMH Support. Additionally, one suggestion was that academic staff should be given access to information regarding whether or not their students are using their NMH support and this would allow informed decisions to be made with regards to coursework extensions.

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I would like to express my gratitude to the students, Support Providers, School Disability Advisers and Disability Officers who participated in the focus group discussions. I would also like to thank the members of these groups who were unable to attend the discussions but contacted me with their feedback. Sincere thanks are extended to the graduates who took the time to fill out the Graduate Survey. Furthermore, thanks must be extended to Kyron from Alumni and Development who made the distribution of the surveys to the graduates possible. My thanks and appreciation are offered to the School of Education for agreeing to accept this project for Ethical consideration and a particular word of thanks to Katerina Dounavi for her assistance in the Ethics process. I am indebted to Lesley Storey and Deaglan Page from the School of Psychology for their methodological advice. Last but not least, I would like to extend a special thanks to the staff from Disability Services and the Register of Support Providers for their help, assistance and cooperation with the project. Without all of the aforementioned individuals completion of this project would not have been possible.

Title

An evaluation of the impact of Non-Medical Helper Support on students with disabilities at Queen's University Belfast.

Introduction

Background

Non-Medical Helper (NMH) Support refers to the one-to-one support provided to students with disabilities at Higher Education Institutions within the UK. As a result of the legislation outlined below, Queen's University Belfast (QUB) must ensure that students with disabilities have access to support services that put them on an even par with their non-disabled peers. QUB enhanced their provision for students with disabilities in 2008 through the creation of Queen's Register of Support Providers which allowed NMH support to be arranged within the University. As by the end of 2013/14, Queen's Register of Support Providers had been in operation for six full academic years, it was considered an appropriate time to carry out an evaluation of the service's effectiveness.

This report will outline the findings of the study evaluating the impact that NMH support has had on QUB students over the past six years from the conception of Queen's Register of Support Providers. The project is funded by the Department for Employment and Learning, from administration fees collected for the management of NMH support from student DSA awards.

The Introduction will cover the following:

1. Legislation
2. QUB Response
3. NMH Support Demand
4. The Russell Group
5. Literature Review
6. Present Study

Legislation

The formation of the social model of disability (Oliver, 1990) has been influential in recent disability legislation. Oliver's model argues that a disability is not inherent to an individual but rather, it is societal barriers that cause an individual's condition to become disabling (Oliver & Barnes, 2012). The first response to the social model of disability was the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA; 1995). The definition of disability according to the DDA is as follows:

> "A person has a disability for the purposes of this Act if he has a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities".

This definition incorporates a wide variety of impairment types including physical disabilities, sensory disabilities and neurological/medical conditions. The DDA led to a focus on the rights of people with disabilities in three key areas – employment, housing, goods and services. The act did not specifically mention education, so although institutions had to ensure that areas used by the public such as libraries and gyms were disability friendly, there was no such accessibility requirement for educational practices. The DDA has since been extended and now incorporates discrimination in other areas including education and this is mirrored by the Disability Discrimination (NI) Order (2006).

The introduction of the Special Educational Needs and Disability (Northern Ireland) Order (SENDO; 2005) was in response to the suggestion that the DDA was not specific enough to cover all disability-related requirements within an educational environment. SENDO makes it a legal requirement for students with disabilities to have access to services that provide them with the same opportunities as their non-disabled peers to help them achieve their full potential. The Order outlines that students should not receive less favourable treatment as the result of their disabilities and that the necessary "reasonable adjustments" should be implemented at practice, procedural and policy levels. Further to this, on 1st September 2006, amendments to SENDO made it more applicable to students in Further and Higher Education. Now those with disabilities cannot be subject to higher competence standards than non-disabled students nor should students with disabilities have qualifications conferred on them in any way that is different to their non-disabled peers.

SENDO's definition of disability remained the same as that within the DDA and this helped encourage universities to become more inclusive environments where needs are now anticipated as opposed to adjustments being made as an afterthought. Moreover, any queries regarding whether or not Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) should be considered a disability were resolved by the Autism

Act (NI) 2011. This Act clarified that the significant, long term impact that the disorder has on social interactions is disabling, as ASD inhibits the formation of social relationships.

QUB Response

Prior to 2001, students with disabilities were responsible for sourcing their own Support Providers (SPs). In 2001, QUB elected to take part in a collaborative project with the University of Ulster (UU) and Belfast Institute of Further and Higher Education (BIFHE), so that students in receipt of DSA requiring one-to-one support were able to access a range of NMH support more easily and directly. The project was funded by the Higher Education Funding Council/Department of Education and Learning Strand 3. Initially, UU accepted sole responsibility for the administration of the project, including the recruitment of suitably qualified individuals to perform the various SP roles and the matching of students with appropriate SPs.

As the number of students entitled to NMH Support steadily increased, the decision was taken by the UU in 2008 that each institution would take responsibility for their own support administration. This led to the establishment of Queen's Register of Support Providers in September 2008. Initially, Queen's Register of Support Providers had access only to SPs from the original recruitment process at UU. However, Queen's Register soon initiated its own recruitment process and currently, it has around 240 SPs on its database. These individuals are self-employed and are, in the main, paid directly by the student's Education and Library Board (ELB) for students from Northern Ireland. Other funding sources for non-local Queen's students include SFE (Student Finance England), ESF (European Social Fund), SAAS (Student Award Agency Scotland) and QUB (e.g. for international students).

As a HE institution, QUB has taken further steps to ensure that students with disabilities are specifically catered for. For example, in line with SENDO requirements, QUB has an institution-wide Disability Policy. Disability Advisers (DAs), the individuals who cater for the needs of students with disabilities at School level, are encouraged to develop School-specific disability policies because of the varying demands of QUB courses. The QUB policy is based on the aforementioned social model of disability (Oliver, 1990) and ensures that students with disabilities are provided with the necessary opportunities to achieve their potential academically. The policy incorporates the following core facets:

1. Safe physical access, including access to information.
2. Promotion of positive attitudes to disability.

3. Adjustment of any practices considered discriminatory.
4. Taking steps to ensure that the numbers of students with disabilities at QUB is reflective of the proportion of those with disabilities in the general population.
5. Accommodation of individuals regardless of disability type.
6. Collaboration with disability groups and other local educational institutions.

The QUB Disability Policy outlines the process that occurs when a student discloses a disability. If the student decides to disclose their disability to Disability Services, an initial meeting is arranged with a Disability Officer (DO). The DO will determine the nature of the student's disability and if the student is eligible, they will be advised to apply for Disabled Student's Allowance (DSA). DSA funding is available to students for specialist one-to-one support with SPs, for any equipment required to complete their course, for consumable and/or for travel costs incurred because of their disability. Where a student is not eligible for DSA (for example, international students), their support needs may be funded by QUB. When the funding source has been identified, a student will have a Needs Assessment to determine what support will be most suited to their requirements and in many cases, this will include recommendations for NMH support.

Following funding confirmation and a referral to the Register from the student's DO, the Register allocates SP(s) and both parties are informed via email of the "match(es)". The types of support provided are intended to 'level the playing field' for students with disabilities. Below is a brief outline of the types of support provided, divided into two categories: Tutor Support and Other Support.

<u>Tutor Support</u>

There are five main types of tutor support – Study Skills, Dyslexia, ASD, Academic Mental Health (AMH) and Mathematics and Statistics. Although Foreign Language and Information Technology tutoring support are also available, these will not be discussed in any great detail due to low demand. Support Tutors do not provide subject-specific tuition. Rather, the Tutor works with the student on a one-to-one basis to identify particular skills gaps that are a result of the student's disability. Initially, the Tutor will meet with the student to engage in a discussion regarding their difficulties and identify what they would like to gain from the support sessions. From this, a Learning Plan is constructed. The Learning Plan outlines the areas that will be covered during the sessions which frequently take place on a weekly basis. In some cases, the student may prefer to meet less often. With the exception of the

Mathematics and Statistics Tutor, the aforementioned roles emphasise study skills development and incorporate elements such time management, organisation, essay writing and research skills.

The difference between the roles is that while a Study Skills Tutor will work on generic skills with students who have varying disabilities, the other forms of Tutor support are tailored to the needs of students with particular disabilities. For example, a Dyslexia Tutor will be able to help with the development of literacy skills which tend to be a major area of difficulty for students with dyslexia. Similarly, ASD Tutors tailor the study skills support they deliver to the particular difficulties of students with ASD. This includes focussing on areas such as social interaction at university, communication skills development, group working, motivation and time management. AMH Tutors do not provide counselling support to students. Rather, they deliver study skills tuition in a way that is sensitive to the student's disability. For instance, students with mental health issues often need to concentrate on techniques such as stress management and organisation skills to help them deal more effectively with the academic demands of third level education. The Mathematics and Statistics Tutor support is slightly different from the previous four roles because of the emphasis on maths. This form of support is assigned to individuals who, because of their disability (normally dyslexia) have difficulty with mathematical concepts. Such tuition is only available where mathematics and/or statistics is an essential part of the degree programme but not the primary component.

Other Support

In addition to the Tutoring roles outlined previously, there is a range of other support available. The most high demand role is for Note Takers. Note Takers are required to take 'accurate, comprehensive and unbiased' class notes for students with physical/sensory disabilities or specific learning difficulties. The purpose of the support is to allow the student to listen as opposed to having their attention diverted from the lecture content by the act of note taking, something that can be stressful, strenuous and ultimately ineffectual for individuals with certain conditions. As the student must be present in the lecture, a key stipulation is that Note Takers cannot take notes in a student's absence except in certain cases where this has been agreed in advance because of the student's particular medical condition. If a student does not turn up to a class, the SP will normally wait twenty minutes and then leave, without passing on any notes.

Students with literacy difficulties may have access to a Proof Reader to help them review assignments before submission. The student is required to send the text for proof reading to the SP well in advance of the assignment deadline. The Proof Reader will arrange to meet with the student to discuss their suggested changes in relation to spelling, grammar, punctuation and structure. It

should be noted that this role is different to Dyslexia Tutoring in that Dyslexia Tutors may only teach the development of proof reading skills.

Some students with mobility, visual or learning difficulties are entitled to a Library Assistant. This individual will help the student retrieve books from the QUB libraries and may also be required to ensure that literature is available in an accessible format e.g. enlarging literature for a visually impaired student by photocopying or using the Zoomex Scanner.

A student with mobility issues or a condition such as ASD, where new environments may be daunting and confusing, can have access to a Campus Assistant. This individual will help with carrying books/bags, with guiding the student around the campus and with general orienteering.

The final types of support are specifically related to examinations. Some students have concentration or time management issues linked to ASD or mental health conditions. Consequently, such individuals may be entitled to an Exam Prompter, someone who will keep them on track and help ensure that they complete the exam within the allocated time. A student who has a difficulty writing because of dexterity problems or dyslexia for example, may have access to an Exam Scribe. In this situation, the student dictates the answer to the exam questions and the SP transcribes the student's exact words. Other students may be entitled to Reader support. A Reader simply reads out the exam questions and/or the student's responses as many times as the student requires and the student writes their own script.

Regardless of the type of support an SP offers, it is imperative that the service provided is of the highest standard. Therefore, upon recruitment SPs are encouraged to partake in various training courses funded by the Queen's Register of Support Providers. SPs are also subject to a Code of Conduct and students must adhere to a Student Contract (see appendices E and F). The Code of Conduct for Support Providers stresses the importance of not providing support beyond the support role boundaries. The Student Contract highlights that students must take responsibility for their support requirements, have realistic expectations of their SPs and remember that support is not subject-specific. For example, if a student has a query in relation to their support, it is their responsibility to contact their DO. To promote independent learning, the SP should not attempt to do this on a student's behalf. Similarly, SPs should not intervene in the relationship between students and their School/academic staff.

To receive payment, SPs are obliged to complete a timesheet or "Work Record" outlining the duration of each support session and the topics covered (see appendix G). Students must ensure that they make themselves available to their SP to sign off the Work Record. If a student misses or cancels

a session with less than twenty-four hours' notice, the SP will be paid for the first hour providing they complete and get the student to countersign a Missed Cancelled Sessions proforma (see appendix H). Students are aware that funding for support may be discontinued/suspended if they continually miss or cancel sessions at short notice. If a student or SP has a complaint at any stage they are entitled to raise such issues via the Complaints Procedure. In addition, both parties have the opportunity feed back about their experiences via annual online questionnaires at the end of each academic year.

NMH Demand

Since the establishment of an independent NMH Register at QUB, the demand for NMH support has risen annually. At the end of its first year, the number of student support needs were 424 for a total of 290 students. By comparison, in May 2014, a total of 1173 support needs (+177%) were recorded for 732 students (+152%). The most widely recommended form of support from the outset has been for Dyslexia Tutor support. This continues to be the trend, with more students being diagnosed with dyslexia at primary/secondary school and with mature students tending to be diagnosed when they reach university. Overall, the demand for the support has increased by 201% from 2008/09 to 2013/14. Most probably because of the reduction in stigma attached to mental illness, there has been a 379% rise in demand for AMH Tutors from 2008/09 and 2013/14. Additionally, owing to an upsurge in the number of diagnoses of ASD, the need for ASD Tutors has increased by 1160% between 2008/09 and 2013/14. Other roles that have witnessed escalations in demand are Proof Readers (+215%) and Readers (+320%), both of which may be linked to the greater numbers of students presenting with dyslexia. The recommendations for Study Skills Tutors and Maths and Statistics Tutors have also been steadily increasing since May 2012. These figures will be presented in tabular format in the Results section, where an explanation will be developed for the variations in student engagement with the support provided.

The Russell Group

The Russell Group consists of 24 universities located across the UK which are considered to be the most prestigious in terms of research output. As QUB is a member of this group, it seemed apt to include a brief section on how disability support is being sanctioned by other institutions in this cluster. From viewing material freely available online, the overall picture is that most of the Russell Group's universities have very similar support structures in that the same type of support is available to students, with slight variations only in the names of the support roles. One of the main differences

however is that many of the institutions, including the University of Liverpool and University of York, operate systems whereby support is outsourced. This means that when the student's needs assessment recommends NMH support, the institutions in question refer the student to an external company that arranges the allocation of appropriately qualified SPs. The University of York outsources to a company known as Neuro Partners. SPs with Neuro Partners undergo a rigorous training programme under the supervision of Assistant Psychologists. Support Co-ordinators or Assistant Psychologists facilitate an introductory meeting between the student and the SP and monthly progress reports are shared with the university's Disability Services. Although Imperial College London presently outsources support, the university is currently in the process of moving to in-house provision.

The University of Southampton assists students with disabilities through the 'Enabling Services' Department. Support Tutors are referred to as "Mentors" and although they are still funded through DSA, these individuals have a much more involved role than SPs at QUB. Similar to the Tutor support provided at QUB, most students meet their Mentor on a weekly basis. Academic staff will not be aware that a student has a Mentor unless the student informs them. In contrast to SPs at QUB, Mentors are allowed to communicate with academic staff in relation to issues with their students. They may give advice on the exam support for example and are even allowed to make suggestions about additional support that students might benefit from. Several institutions such as King's College London and Durham University have noted that they provide group study skills opportunities as well as one-to-one support.

In the University of Glasgow, SPs tend to be recruited from the institution's postgraduate and postdoctoral student body which means that although SPs are suitably qualified, they may not necessarily have prior experience of working with people who have disabilities. Durham University has a section on their website where students can easily give feedback on their support at any time. In addition to this, King's College London use positive and negative feedback about their support or indeed, support received at any other institutions, to allow the university to maintain and develop quality student support. The University of Leeds guarantees optimal Note Taker support by operating a system of Note Taker supervision. This institution is also committed to ensuring that students with disabilities are provided with opportunities to hear about disability-friendly employers and has recently hosted a talk from one such employer French cosmetics giant, L'Oreal.

In contrast to QUB, many institutions required students to sign off their Work Records electronically. The University of Cambridge for example, operates a procedure whereby the student receives an email following their support session and then, by using a link and entering an

authorisation code he/she confirms that the SP has completed the session. This seems to be a fast and efficient way of signing off Work Records. It is convenient for the student, avoids any stigma caused through having to meet a Note Taker in front of peers and reduces the possibility of delayed payments or non-payment for Support Providers.

Other interesting initiatives include the University of Exeter having open days for all those students with disabilities who select them as an option on UCAS. This open day outlines the type of support available to students with disabilities and aids with the transition from school to university. Within the University of Liverpool, there is an interesting initiative called the Disabled Students' Network. This involves a group of student volunteers with disabilities meeting with the Disability Support team throughout the academic year to address issues related to their support and to discuss possible improvements that might be beneficial. This ongoing evaluation means that the best service is made available to students and it also helps those with disabilities to meet with other students who can empathise with them.

The University of Edinburgh must be commended for having a fully mainstreamed support system. This institution goes beyond simply having a University Disability Policy. Rather, it has a policy that applies to all students – disabled and non-disabled. Disability adjustments are mainstreamed in such a way that they are now seen as a normal part of the university experience, making the institution fully inclusive. As the University of Bristol states, DSA is a 'vital lifeline' for students with disabilities as evidenced by the academic achievements of students in receipt of DSA matching those of their non-disabled peers.

Literature Review

As no institution within the UK appears to have conducted a similar study to this one relevant literature will act as beneficial reference points. Although the primary focus of this literature section extends beyond the Russell Group, because of the sensitive nature of disability-related research, many authors have anonymised the institution names so may be that some of the findings are indeed from Russell Group institutions.

The importance of NMH support was highlighted by a study of Open University students which showed that those with disabilities in receipt of DSA had an increased likelihood of progressing to the next year of study (Richardson, 2010). In addition, Madriaga, Hanson, Kay and Walker (2011) found that students with disabilities who did not take NMH support had significantly lower attainment levels than their non-disabled peers. The students with disabilities who were receiving and using support

performed at the same level as non-disabled students, thus demonstrating the integral role that NMH support plays in attainment. The best outcomes from NMH support were apparent when the student engaged in collaborative decision making with their SP. For example, the most positive feedback regarding Dyslexia Tutor support came from students actively involved in designing their support programme alongside the Tutor (Kirwan & Leather, 2011). The idea that students gain more from their support when they take a proactive role was echoed by Goode (2007) who found that students who took the initiative in sourcing their support had good outcomes in terms of progression and retention from the outset.

Despite the above positives, Goode (2007) noted that some students felt burdened by the extra responsibility of trying to organise their support during time they would otherwise have used to concentrate on their studies. Similarly, many students at English universities did not like having to meet their SPs to sign Work Records, nor did they feel comfortable challenging SPs about any problems with the support (Hopkins, 2011). This raises the issue of the "employer-employee" relationship that exists and the difficulties that many students face in developing an effective working relationship. As these are issues that non-disabled students do not encounter, such complex systems may further burden as opposed to help and support students with disabilities (Hopkins, 2011; Goode, 2007).

However, these systematic difficulties are outweighed by the crucial role NMH support plays for students with certain disabilities. Individuals with ASD for example, tend to avoid social interaction, preferring to confine their focus to the academic side of student life. This can result in the student isolating him/herself and this in turn may lead to the development of mental health difficulties. Research has shown that despite having a difficulty forming social relationships, social interactions are hugely beneficial to those with ASD in reducing the chances of isolation and mental health problems (Jones, Zahl & Huws, 2001). Although this illustrates the importance of ASD Tutor support, it demonstrates that ASD Tutors must operate within certain confines if the support is to be successful (MacLeod & Green, 2009). The support relationship must be specifically tailored to the individual and the support package must have a degree of flexibility because what works for one student with ASD may not work for another (MacLeod & Green).

The Present Study

As noted previously, the Queen's Register of Support Providers has been managing NMH support for QUB students for the past six years so this study will endeavour to evaluate the service over that period. The aim of the project therefore is to investigate how non-medical helper (NMH) support

impacts on inclusive learning and the student experience in terms of transition, retention, engagement, progression, attainment, aspiration, empowerment and employability. The following factors will be measured quantitatively in terms of the students' final degree classification and qualitatively via discussions with the students.

The key predictions that were investigated are as follows:

1. NMH support utilisation will lead to better student experiences and academic outcomes, as evaluated by the impact on the eight key factors - transition, retention, engagement, progression, attainment, aspiration, empowerment and employability.
2. NMH support utilisation will be influenced by factors such as disability type, age and gender of the student.

Method

Design and Participants

The approach taken was a "mixed methods" one, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative measures. The design of the study was "between groups" in that the same participants did not take part in every element of the study but rather, only participated in the elements for which they fulfilled the essential criteria. Ethical approval for this study was obtained from QUB School of Education Ethics Committee (see appendix A).

Quantitative Design and Participants

The quantitative section of the study relied on secondary data i.e. records that were kept by the Queen's Register of Support Providers and data that is available to QUB staff via the Queen's Student Information System (QSIS). The following section outlines how the secondary data was divided into variables.

The independent variables (IVs) for the ANOVA analysis were "Type of Support" and "Level of Support Usage". "Type of Support" had four levels – AMH Tutor, ASD Tutor, Dyslexia Tutor and Study Skills Tutor. These types of support were chosen as they are the primary forms of NMH Support that promote skills development. "Level of Support Usage" had three levels – none (used no support), medium (used 1-50% of support entitlements) and high (51-100% of support entitlements). The dependent variable (DV) was "Final Degree Mark". The 1071 cases analysed in this part of the study had all met the following criteria:

1. The students received Tutor support between September 2008 and May 2014,
2. They had all been studying for an undergraduate degree *and*
3. They had graduated by summer 2014.

The five chi square analyses used the same set of participants as the ANOVA meaning that each analysis had 1071 participants. All the chi square analyses measured the same categorical DV "Level of Support Usage". The categorical IVs for each analysis will now be outlined. The first chi square analysis used the IV "Gender", which had two levels - male and female. The second chi square analysis tested the IV "Age of Participant", with two levels, 18-24 years and 25+. The third analysis incorporated the IV "Type of Support 1" and had two levels - dyslexia versus any other form of support. The penultimate analysis utilised the IV "Type of Support 2" and the two levels were ASD versus any

other form of support. The final analysis involved the IV "Type of Support 3", which again had two levels - AMH versus any other form of support.

Qualitative Design and Participants

Although the variables of interest from the initial research question - transition, retention, engagement, progression, attainment, aspiration, empowerment and employability – were investigated by the quantitative research, it was decided to conduct focus groups in the attempt to provide more thorough and valid support for these key variables.

A focus group is when a group of individuals come together to discuss a topic in the presence of a facilitator. Such research methods are particularly interesting as they allow the researcher to see the impact of social interaction on the variables (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Furthermore, focus groups allow for data to be analysed via thematic analysis, a process that facilitates the location and interpretation of relationships within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The premises of thematic analysis means that the key variables can become the deductive themes which are then searched for in the transcribed data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A deductive approach was therefore taken initially. However, as the study proceeded, inductive themes became apparent but as these were contingent upon the deductive themes, the final approach taken was a mixed deductive-inductive model, thereby demonstrating that the analysis was conducted from a realist epistemological position. From a realist perspective, one can argue that while the qualitative findings are supportive of the quantitative data, they also add to researcher understanding by uncovering those underlying mechanisms and meanings that help to construct such data (Mason, 1996). In accordance with the outlined epistemological position, themes were semantic in nature, meaning that they were based upon what was actually said within the groups and that the data was not interpreted beyond this level.

With regards to personal reflexivity, it is important to be aware of the fact that the individual who designed the research project also acted as the focus group facilitator and analysed the data. A certain distance from the data was obtained by using audio typists to transcribe the focus group recordings but the researcher still remained close to the data as thematic analysis required repeated readings of the transcripts. Moreover, the researcher worked within the Disability Services office and has throughout her studies had an interest in disability related issues. Hence, the impact of the aforementioned factors on the final outcomes must be evaluated.

Twelve focus groups in total were conducted within four target populations – current students registered with Disability Services, SPs, DAs and Disability Services Staff. Each population received an email targeted at their specific group and were asked to respond if they were interested in participating. A total of 27 current students took part across five focus groups. 28 SPs shared their experiences across four focus groups. Two DA focus groups were conducted incorporating a total of eight individuals. The final focus group consisted of four staff from Disability Services, all of whom were DOs. Participation was totally voluntary and all were invited to enjoy a complimentary lunch or morning snack.

It was anticipated that the focus groups would not largely converge upon the variable of employability nor did the data already available from the Queen's Register of Support Providers. Hence a survey (using Survey Monkey) was constructed to determine the impact that NMH support received at University had on transition to the work place. The targeted individuals met the same criteria as those required for inclusion within the statistical analyses. As the target survey audience had already graduated, a lot of these individuals no longer accessed their QUB email so it was necessary to get in contact with them via a different means. The Development and Alumni Relations Office had access to email addresses for 532 of the graduates and they kindly agreed to email the survey link to these individuals, requesting voluntary responses. The survey, which included some numerical responses, was mainly qualitative in nature and had exactly 100 participants.

Apparatus and Measures

A computer was required to retrieve the secondary data accessible from the Disability Services database and QSIS. SurveyMonkey was utilised to construct the graduate survey, a copy of which is included in Appendix I. A schedule was necessary to keep the facilitator on track in the focus groups (see Appendix D). In addition, separate information and consent forms (see Appendices B and C) were required for the different participant groups. It was necessary to have a quiet and accessible room to carry out the discussions. The focus groups were recorded via Dictaphone and Catering at QUB supplied snacks for the participants. Finally, audio typists were required to transcribe the focus group data.

Procedure

Firstly, the researcher accessed the required secondary data and analysed it through the use of appropriate quantitative analytic procedures. The next step was to contact the participants eligible for the focus groups. A list of emails of all the students currently entitled to NMH support was available from the Queen's Register of Support Providers section of the Disability Services database. These students were sent an email asking if they would like to participate in a focus group. The participants who responded were allocated to the focus group that was best suited to their availability. Likewise, targeted emails were sent to SPs, DAs and Disability Services staff and similarly they were allocated to occupation-specific focus groups in line with their schedules. Unfortunately, because of their limited availability, some interested individuals could not make any of the focus group meetings.

After confirming the focus group to attend, participants were informed that they could arrive up to 30 minutes prior to the start of the group discussions to avail of lunch, familiarise themselves with the surroundings and meet with other participants. On arrival, participants were given the information sheets which the facilitator later read aloud to ensure that the information was accessible to all. The participants were advised that the facilitator would take a back seat and let the group discuss the topic of NMH support amongst themselves. If the participants were happy with the procedure outlined, they signed the consent form or they could choose to leave. The facilitator checked again that the participants were happy with being recorded and then started the recording. For the purpose of the recording, the rationale of the study was briefly outlined, participants were reminded about the necessity for confidentiality and were asked again to confirm that they were still happy to participate. After introductions were made, the facilitator started the focus group with a broad question: 'How do you feel about Disability Services?' This question was altered accordingly depending on participant group. If the discussion did not proceed in the direction the facilitator envisaged, there was a list of prompts that she could use to direct the conversation in the appropriate manner. The facilitator only intervened if the participants were going off topic or to encourage quieter individuals to contribute. After an hour of discussion, participants were thanked for taking part and were reminded that the contact details of the researcher were available on the information sheet should they have any questions following the close of the group. The recordings were sent to audio typists and when the groups were transcribed, the researcher analysed the data using thematic analysis.

The last part of the project involved constructing the graduate survey and sending it out to the targeted graduates. As mentioned previously, this was facilitated by the Development and Alumni Office who sent the survey out to the alumni within the target population, along with periodic

reminders to ensure an optimal response rate. After the survey closed, the responses were transferred to an Excel document. The qualitative responses were then used to corroborate the findings of the analysed focus groups.

Quantitative Section

The following section outlines the figures that were obtained from the records kept by Queen's Register of Support Providers. The section is divided into three parts –

1. Descriptive Graphs and Tables
2. ANOVA Results
3. Chi Square Analyses

Descriptive Graphs and Tables

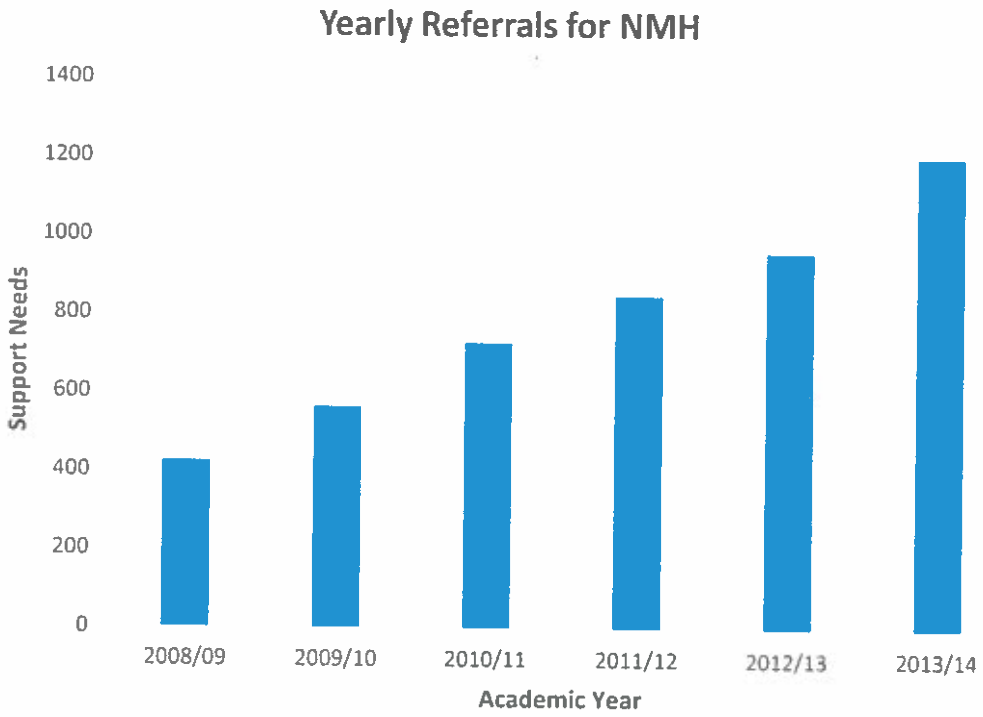


Figure 1: A graph showing NMH Support Needs

Figure 1 clearly displays the increasing demand for NMH Support. It illustrates that support needs over the six years have increased threefold from the outset of Queen's Register of Support Providers in 2008/09 to 2013/14. Table 1 displays how the increasing support needs have impacted upon the different types of support provided. It can be seen that ASD Tutor Support has had the largest percentage increase over the six year period. However, the raw figures indicate that the most in-demand form of support has been Dyslexia Tutoring.

Table 1: Increasing Needs by Support Type

Support Type	Year		Percentage Increase (%)
	2008/09	2013/14	
ASD Tutor	5	63	1160
AMH Tutor	29	139	379
Reader	10	42	320
Note Taker	74	251	239
Proof Reader	13	41	215
Dyslexia Tutor	123	370	201
Library Assistant	15	43	187
Campus Assistant	15	40	167
Study Skills Tutor	47	71	51
Maths & Stats Tutor	37	54	46
Exam Scribe	37	50	35

As Figure 1 and Table 1 highlight the ever increasing need for NMH support, it was anticipated that students receiving support were producing work to the same standards as their non-disabled peers. Figure 2 below demonstrates how the students entitled to NMH support compare to non-disabled students in terms of final degree classification.

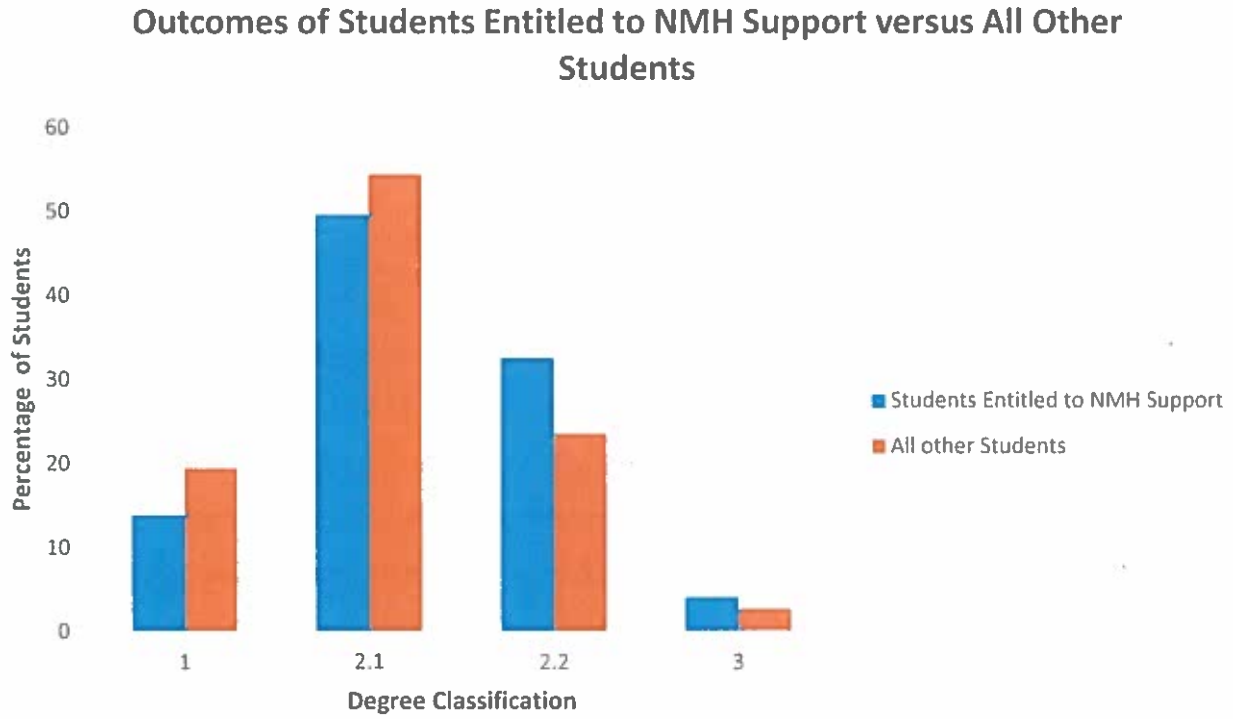


Figure 2: Outcomes of Students Entitled to NMH Support versus All Other Students

Figure 2 illustrates the degree classifications of all QUB students who obtained an undergraduate degree between summer 2009 and summer 2014. The graduates were divided into two groups. Group 1 consisted of Students Entitled to NMH Support and group 2 represented All Other Students. The two groups are displayed on the graph as percentages. From Figure 2, it can be seen that the degree classifications of the students forms a normal bell curve. The expectation was that there would be little difference between Students Entitled to NMH Support and All Other Students as NMH Support primarily aims to "level the playing field". However, the percentage of All Other Students gaining 1sts and 2.1s was slightly higher than those entitled to NMH Support. As the reason for this was unclear, statistical analysis was carried out to determine whether or not there was any difference in the students' final degree results and the type of support they were entitled to.

ANOVA Results

A two-way ANOVA was conducted. The data included in the analysis met with the following criteria -

1. Students who received tutor support between September 2008 and May 2014
2. Students who graduated by summer 2014
3. Students who were studying for an undergraduate degree.

It should be noted that if students received support in the aforementioned years but had not graduated by summer 2014, they could not be included in the ANOVA as the analysis required the students' final marks.

A 4 X 3 "between groups" ANOVA was conducted. The first independent variable (IV), "Type of Support" had four levels: AMH Tutor, ASD Tutor, Dyslexia Tutor and Study Skills Tutor. The focus was on these four types of support as they are the primary forms of NMH support that promote skill development and independent learning. The second IV was "Level of Support Usage". This variable referred to the percentage of support entitlements that students used and it had three levels – None, Medium and High. As the label suggests, students within the group entitled "None" used no support, students in the "Medium" group used between 1% and 50% of their support entitlements and students in the "High" usage groups used between 51% and 100% of their support allocated. The dependent variable (DV) was "Final Degree Mark". Table 2 below provides a summary of the students' support usage.

Table 2: Number of Students included in ANOVA Analysis

Type of Support	Number of Students			
	None	Medium	High	Total
ASD	10	21	26	57
AMHT	20	66	97	183
Dyslexia	128	303	222	653
Study Skills	31	76	71	178
Total	189	466	416	1071

Table 2 above demonstrates that the highest number of students were entitled to Dyslexia Support and the lowest number were entitled to ASD Support. This is in line with the representation of such disabilities within the general population. Table 2 shows that most students used either a medium or high level of support, with only a very low number using no support at all.

When the ANOVA was carried out, it was found that there was no significant main effect of "Type of Support" (F (3, 1059) = 2.49, p = .059). However, as the p-value is approaching significance, this will be discussed later in relation to Figure 3 - A plot displaying the outcomes of type of support usage on final degree classification.

Although there was no significant effect of "Level of Support Usage" (F (2, 1059) = .017, p = .983), there was a significant interaction of "Type of Support" x "Level of Support Usage" (F (6, 1059) = 3.395, p = .003).

This interaction was examined further using Tukey HSD post hoc tests. These tests showed that there was a significant difference between students with an ASD Tutor and those with a Dyslexia Tutor (p = .032). There was also a significant difference in the performance of the students with an ASD Tutor and the performance of those with a Study Skills Tutor (p = .007). Such results can be explained by the fact that regardless of level of support usage, the ASD group obtained higher final marks than the students entitled to Dyslexia or Study Skills Tutor Support. Although there was no significant difference between those with ASD Tutors and those with Mental Health Tutors, it was approaching significance (p = .057). An explanation for the aforementioned non-significant result may be that students using a medium amount of Academic Mental Health Tutoring outperform those using a medium amount of ASD Tutoring. This result may be due to the fact that those with mental health problems are addressing their issues with a medium amount of support whereas those with ASD tend

to use their support in a more regular and structured manner. These results are further illustrated in Figure 3 below.

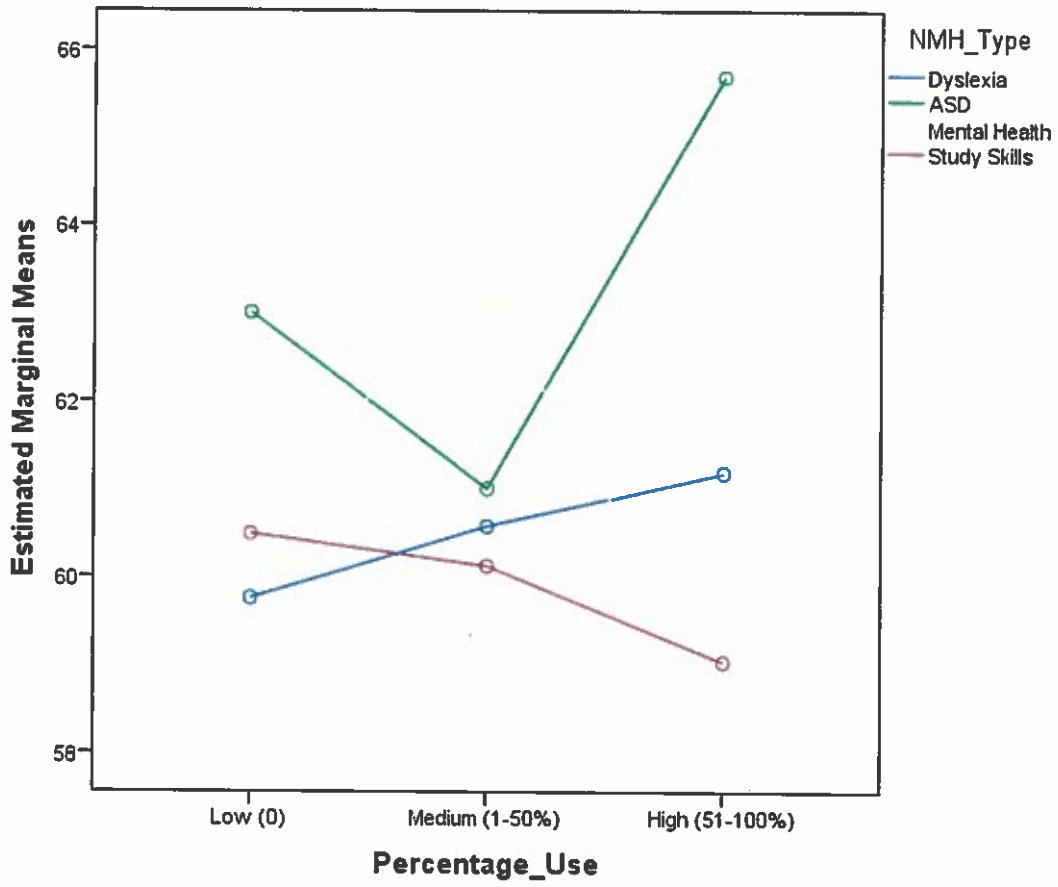


Figure 3: A plot displaying the outcomes of type of support usage on final degree classification

Figure 3 above provides an interesting window on the data. The students who were using an ASD Tutor scored the lowest when they used a medium amount of support. Whilst this may seem surprising, there are several possible explanations for this. Of a total of 57 cases of ASD tutoring examined, only 10 used no support, perhaps because these students already had well developed coping strategies and did not need the support. From Figure 3, it can be seen that the 26 students who made high use of ASD support did better than the other two groups of students with ASD, perhaps because these individuals fully engaged with the service. The 21 students who made medium use of ASD support may have felt inclined to use the support because of their poorly developed social, communication and study skills whereas those who did not use the support may already have developed these skills. Those medium level users may not therefore have engaged with the service in the same regular, structured way as those who made high usage of the support. The high usage group

would mainly have attended on a weekly basis and may therefore have better developed their academic skills as a result of this methodical and systematic approach.

Although it is not significant, students with ASD support tended to outperform students using all other types of support. The most discrepant difference was between students receiving ASD Tutor support and students receiving Study Skills Tutor support. An interesting finding was that the more support that was used by the Study Skills group, the lower their final mark. Those using no Study Skills support tended to achieve 2.1s whereas those using a high proportion of support achieved 2.2s. This may be because the students receiving Study Skills Tutor support are a much more diverse group, with disabilities ranging from physical/sensory impairments to mental ill health and dyspraxia. It would therefore be very difficult to adopt a "one-style-fits all" approach to tutoring and this lack of focus may present Tutors with more of a challenge. Furthermore, this group included a large proportion of individuals with dyslexia, it is likely that these students impacted negatively on the outcome as they were not using support specifically tailored to their impairment. Students often opt for Study Skills support as this reduces the stigma of having a "dyslexia" label but they should be made aware of how the benefits of disability-specific support outweigh this.

Figure 3 represents a very interesting picture of students accessing AMH Tutors. Although the results were not significant, they suggest that students who use no AMH Tutor support perform less well academically in comparison to those who used a medium amount of support. An explanation for this might be that those who used no support were not confronting their issues whereas students who used a medium amount of support were using it to allow them to better focus on their studies. The most interesting finding was that the students who use the highest amount of AMH Tutor support tended to have the lowest marks of all students receiving Tutor support. This is likely to reflect the fact that students using the most support are those with the most severe mental health problems. So, despite using a high level of support because of their issues, the severe nature of their mental ill health means that the students' disability will still have a negative impact on their academic performance.

With regard to Dyslexia Tutoring, once again there was no statistically significant difference observed between level of support usage and final degree mark. However, despite the lack of statistical significance, one would still argue that the steady increase in marks from low usage, to medium usage, then to high usage is very important. Individuals who made low use of the support tended to get final scores of below 60, which means they most likely achieved 2.2 degrees. In contrast, students using a medium level of support tended to attain scores of above 60, resulting in 2.1 degree classifications, whilst those who used a high percentage of support tended to get slightly higher 2.1s than moderate level users.

Chi Square Analyses

Gender and Age

It was predicted that gender would impact upon level of support usage. From Table 3, it is immediately apparent that overall, more females were recommended for NMH support than males. This can be explained by the fact that more females were registered as having disabilities.

Table 3: The impact of Gender on Support Usage

Level of Usage	Male	Female	Total
None	61	130	191
Medium	149	313	462
High	148	270	418
Total	358	713	1071

A chi square analysis was conducted to determine if there was an association between gender and level of support usage but no significant association was found.

In a similar way, it was predicted that there would be a difference in level of support usage and the age of students. Table 3 demonstrates that although many more students are aged 18-24 years than 25+, neither student group was likely to fall into the low usage category.

Table 4: The impact of Age on Support Usage

Level of Usage	18-24	25+	Total
None	148	43	191
Medium	352	110	462
High	311	107	418
Total	811	260	1071

The chi square analysis confirmed that there was no significant association between age and level of support usage.

Type of Support

It was decided that because Dyslexia Tutoring was the most common type of support administered in the sample group (61% of cases), a chi square analysis should be conducted to determine if there was an association between the "Type of Support" and "Level of Support Usage". Dichotomous nominal variable number one was "Type of Support 1" – dyslexia support v other support. Variable number two was "Level of Support Usage" and had three levels – None, Medium and High.

A significant association was apparent: $_x^2$ (2, n=1071) = 18.99; p<.001

In order to explain this significant association, it is necessary to take a closer look at the observed and expected values. The association might be because a higher number of students than expected were using no Dyslexia Tutor support i.e. 128 students in comparison to an expected value of 116.5. Again, a higher number of students than expected were using a medium level of Dyslexia Tutor support (304 versus 281.7). Conversely, a lower number of students than expected were using a high level of dyslexia support (221 versus 254.9).

However, when the figures for the students receiving other types of support were examined, a different pattern became apparent. Lower than expected numbers were using no support, higher than expected numbers were using medium and high levels of support. The question here is why were students with dyslexia not using the support to the level expected? Perhaps the reason for this was that students with dyslexia are a diverse group. Those with mild dyslexia may not feel the need for Tutor support and perhaps just register with Disability Services to access reasonable adjustments such as extra time in examinations or flexibility with deadlines. The other group contained students with mental health problems and ASD, students who were more likely to need high levels of support so this may account for the discrepancy in the findings.

As students within the ASD group may have been impacting on the association between the Dyslexia group and the other group, it was decided to carry out a chi square analysis of the ASD group versus all other students in the sample. However, there was no significant association between "Level of Support Usage" and "Type of Support 2". On the other hand, when a chi square analysis was conducted for the mental health group versus the other group, it was revealed that there was a significant association between "Level of Support Usage" and "Type of Support 3".

$_x^2$ (2, n=1071) = 22.71; p<.001

The number of students entitled to AMH Tutors who used no support was lower than expected (20 versus 32.5). Students with mental health issues who used a medium level of Tutor support was also lower than expected (63 versus 78.6) and yet, the number who used a high level of support was higher than anticipated (100 versus 71.9). In contrast, students entitled to other types of support demonstrated the opposite pattern – a higher number than expected used no support, a higher number than expected used a medium level of support and a lower number than expected used a high level of support. This shows that AMH Tutoring was having a very beneficial effect and this is backed up by the qualitative findings in the following section.

In conclusion, the findings suggest that the need for support is related to the nature of the disability. Although a lot of individuals in the other groups are likely to reject support for various reasons (such as having well developed coping strategies and possible stigmatisation), by declaring a mental health difficulty, those with this disability have definitely accepted that they need some form of help.

Qualitative Analysis

The process of thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), takes place in stages. The analysis commenced by using a deductive approach but moved to a mixed deductive-inductive approach. The original deductive themes, outlined in Figure 4, are followed by the key themes that were then formulated and these are presented in Figure 5. Thereafter, how each participant group maps onto each key theme is presented in diagrammatic format (Figures 6-9). Initially the diagrams are very detailed but as the analysis progressed, new figures focussed on the areas of crucial importance to the key themes (Figures 11-14). Figure 15 illustrates the contingency of the deductive themes on the key themes.

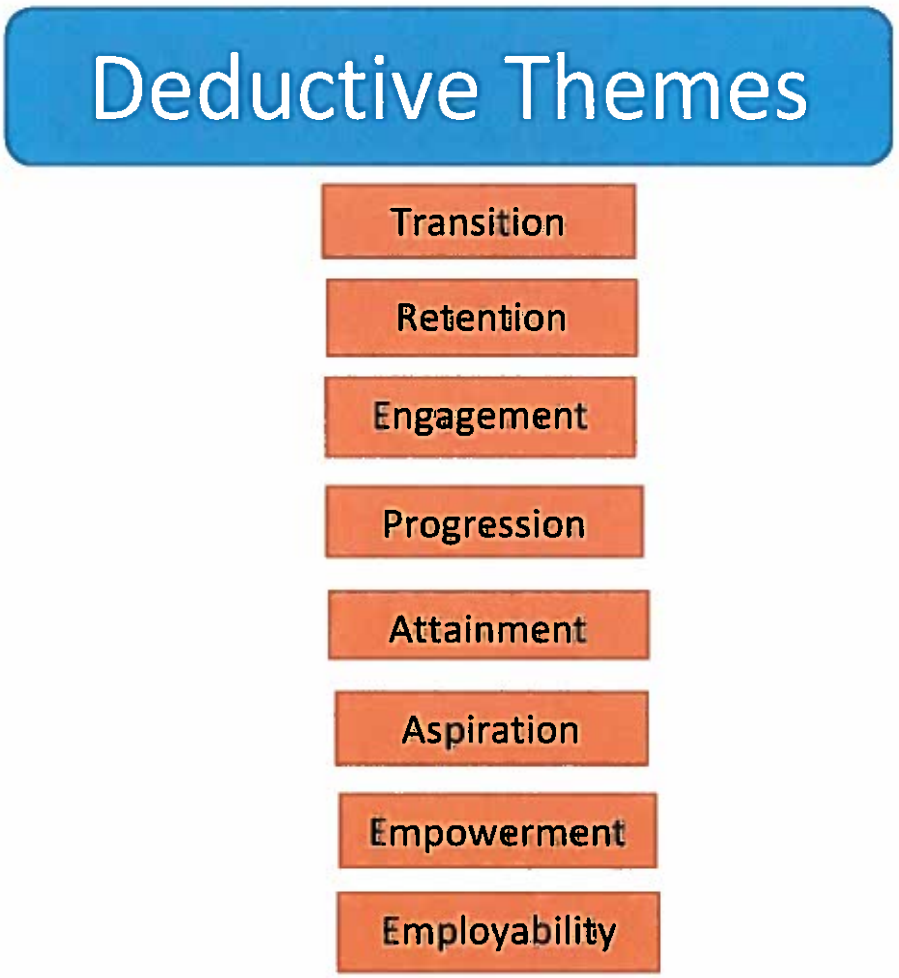


Figure 4: Deductive themes

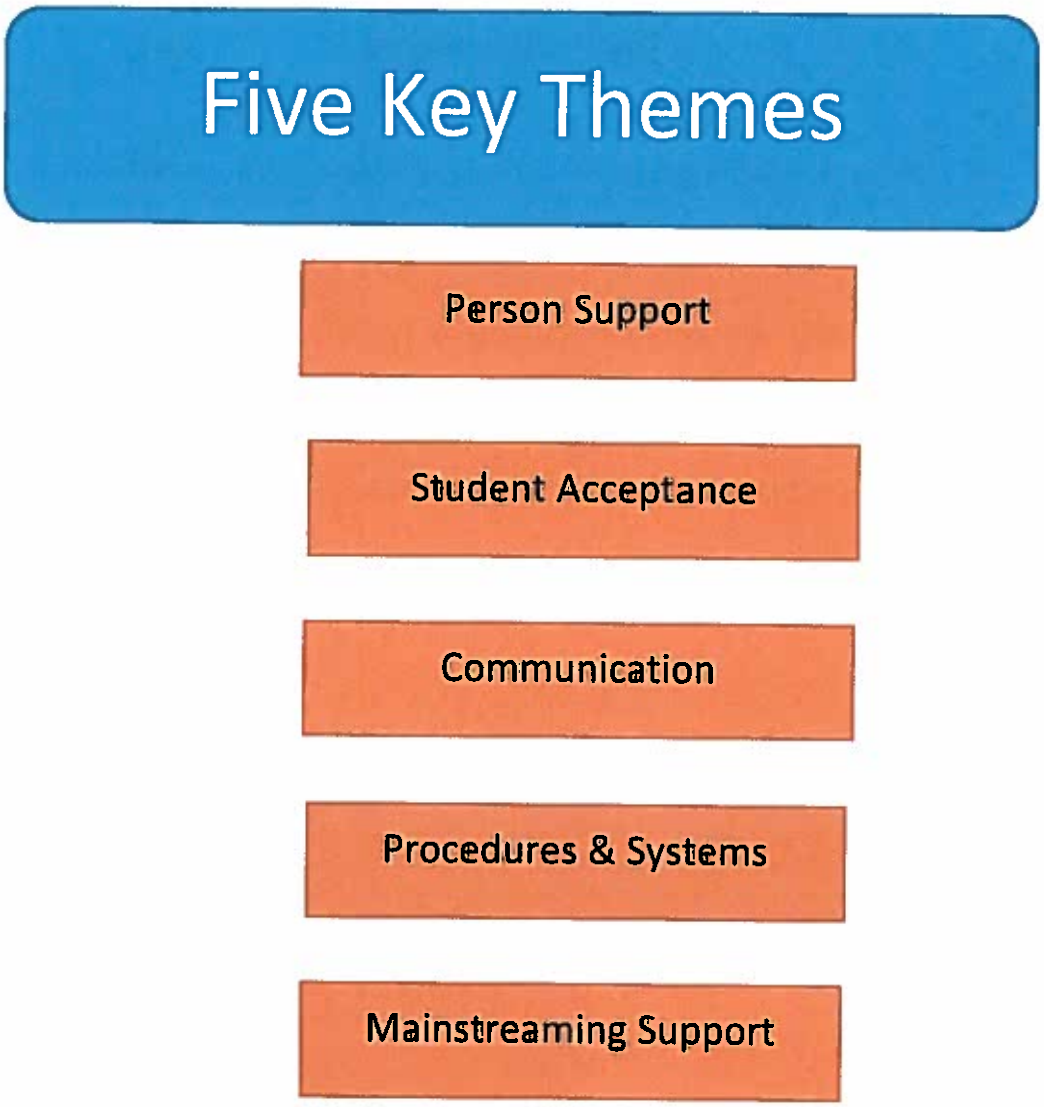


Figure 5: Key themes

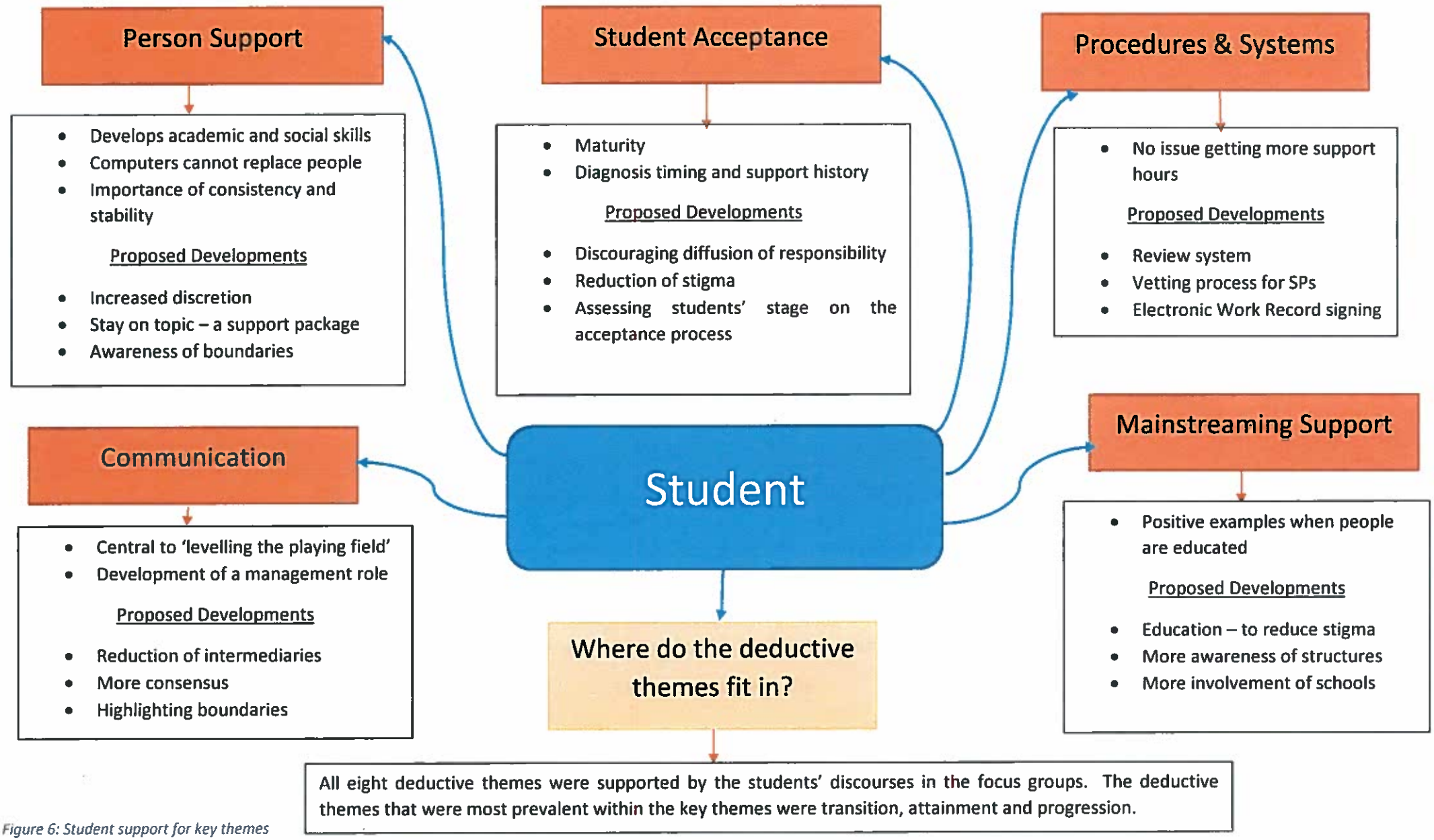


Figure 6: Student support for key themes

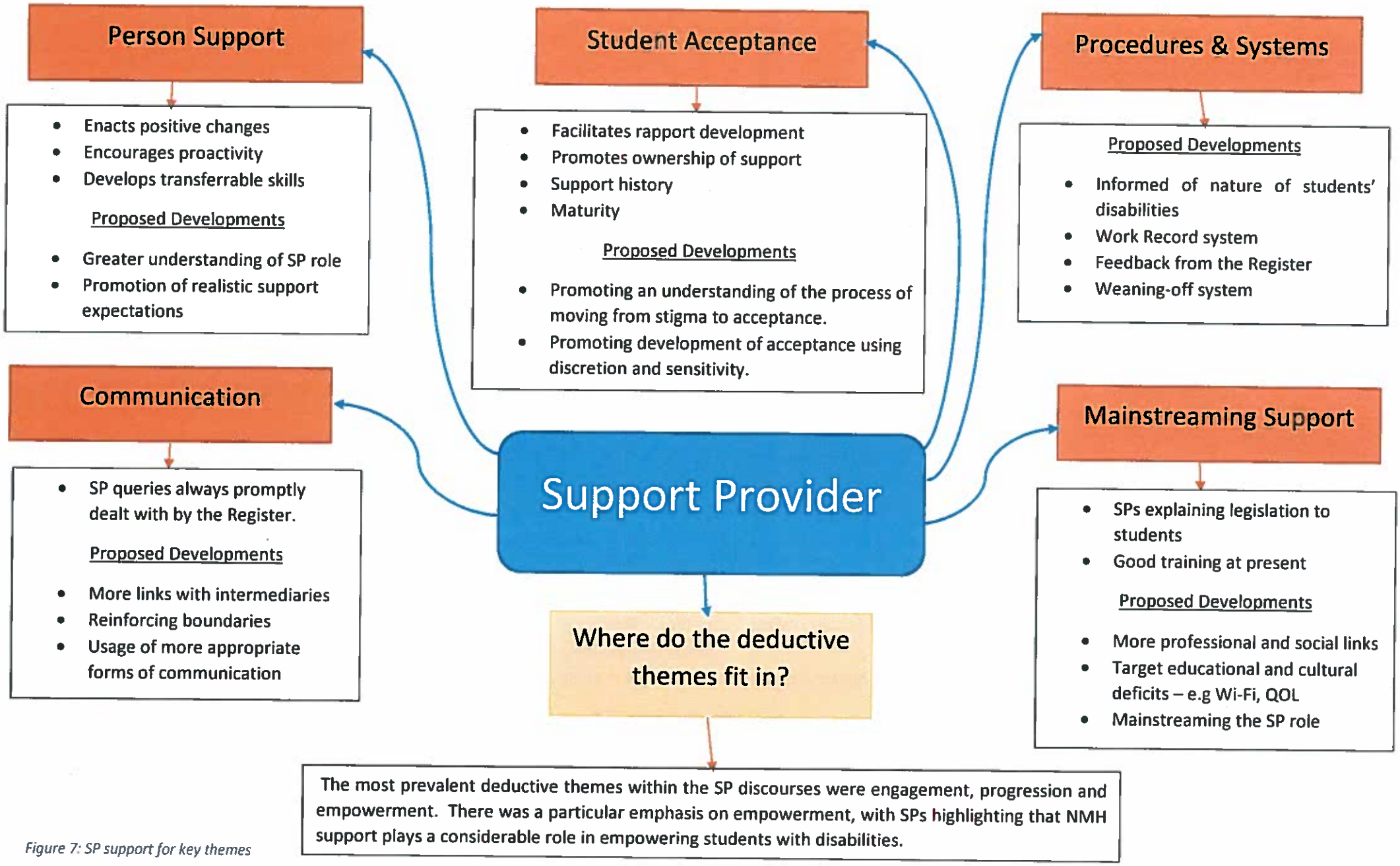


Figure 7: SP support for key themes

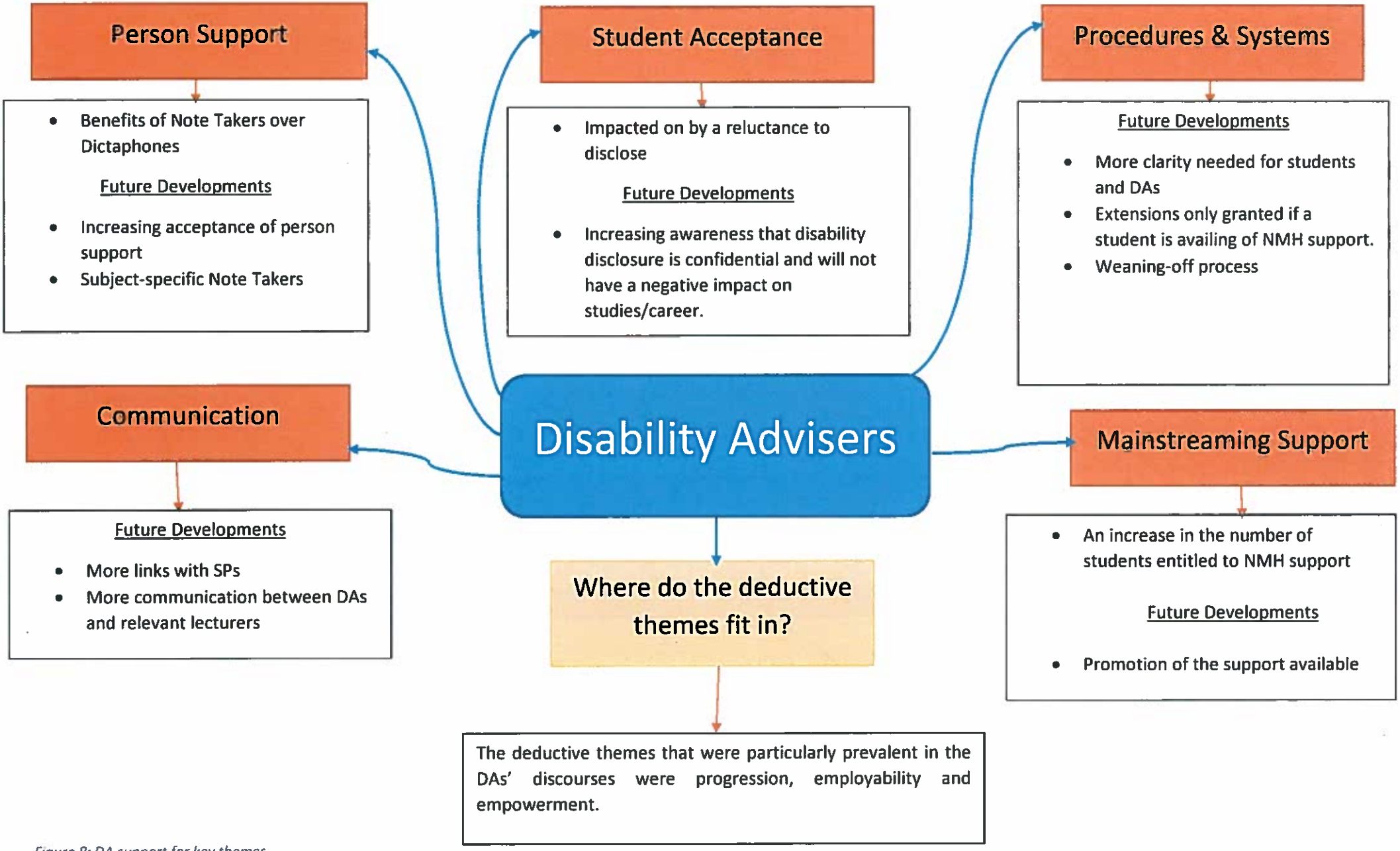


Figure 8: DA support for key themes

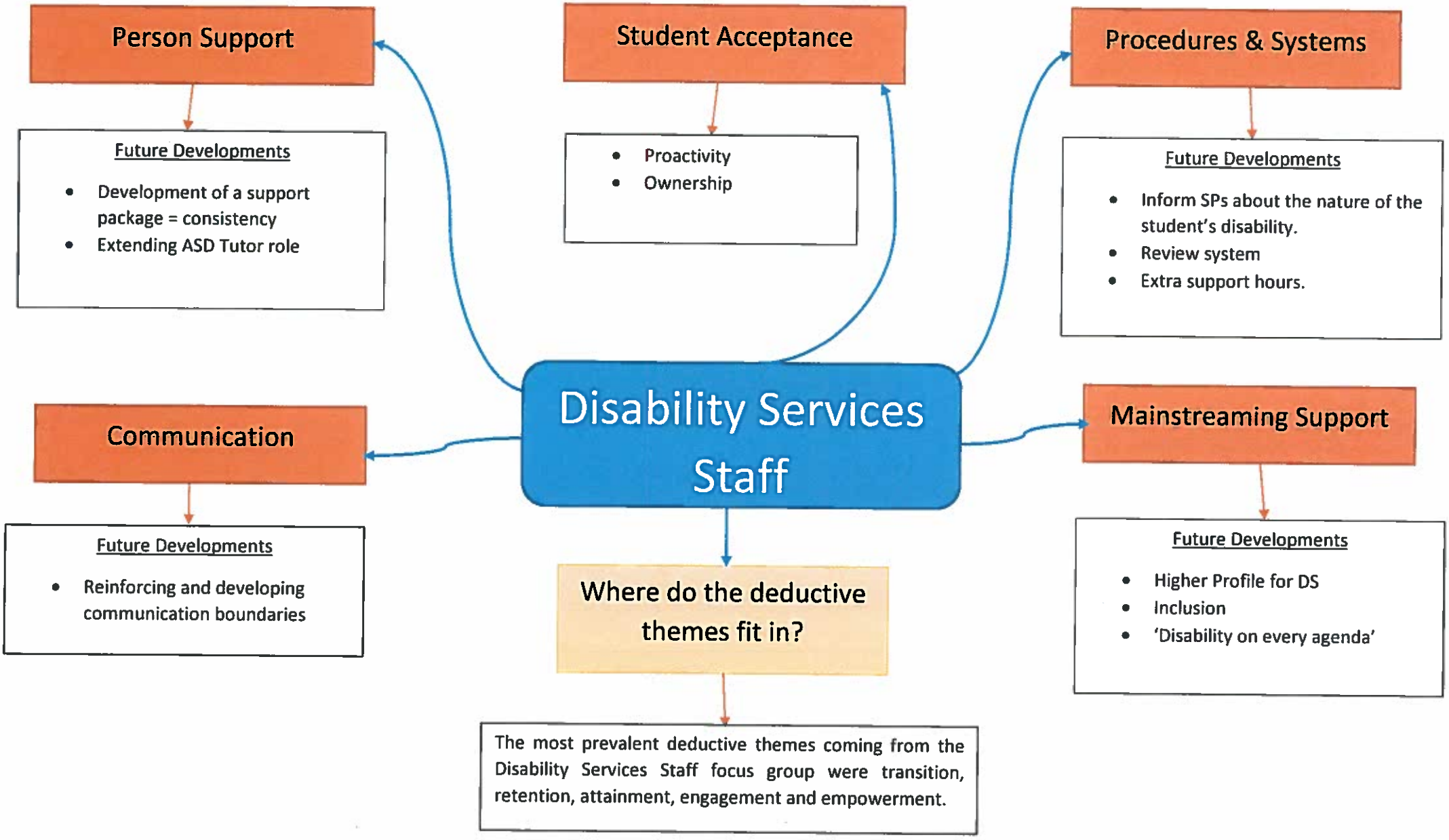


Figure 9: DS staff support for key themes

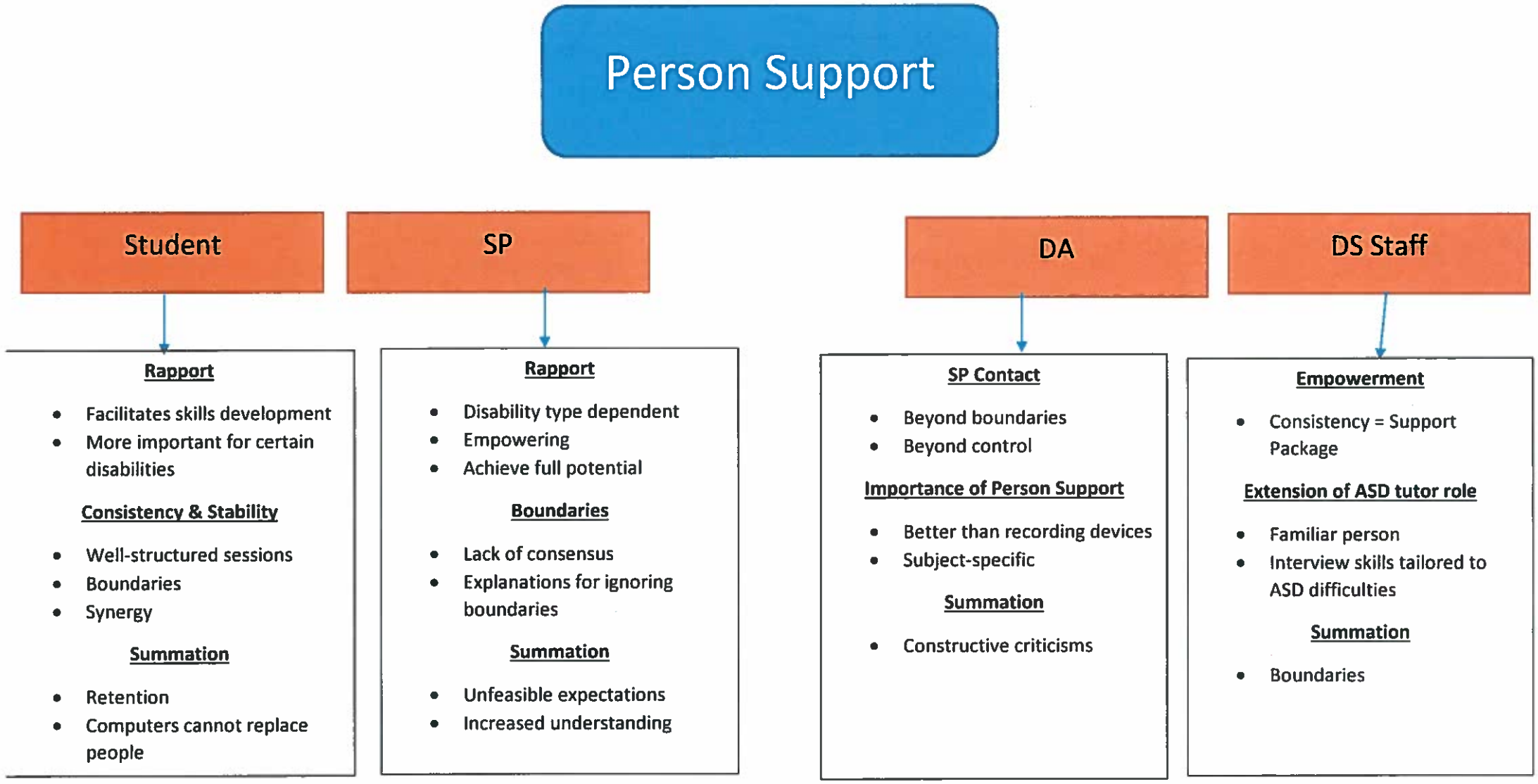
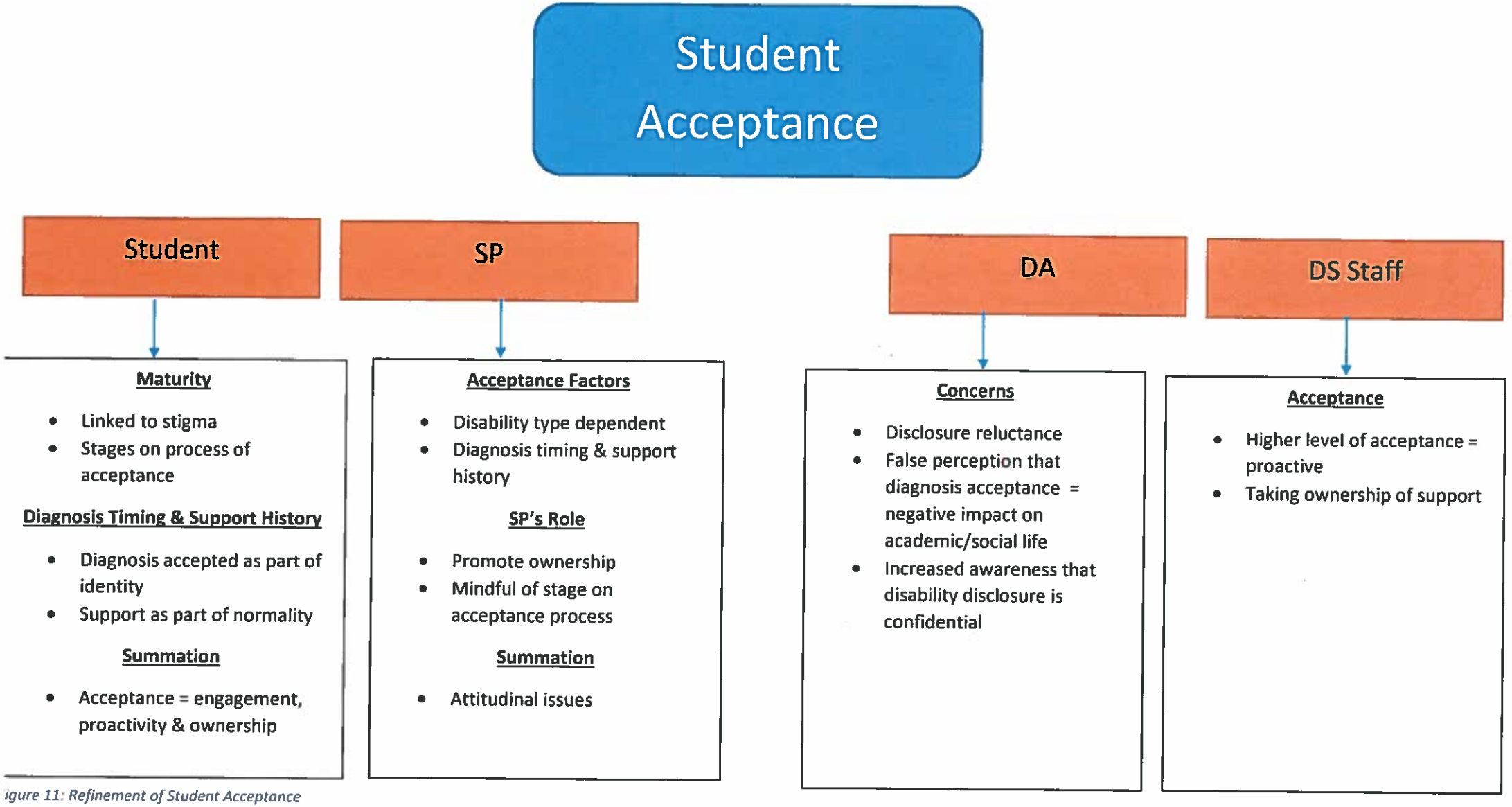


Figure 10: Refinement of Person Support



igure 11: Refinement of Student Acceptance

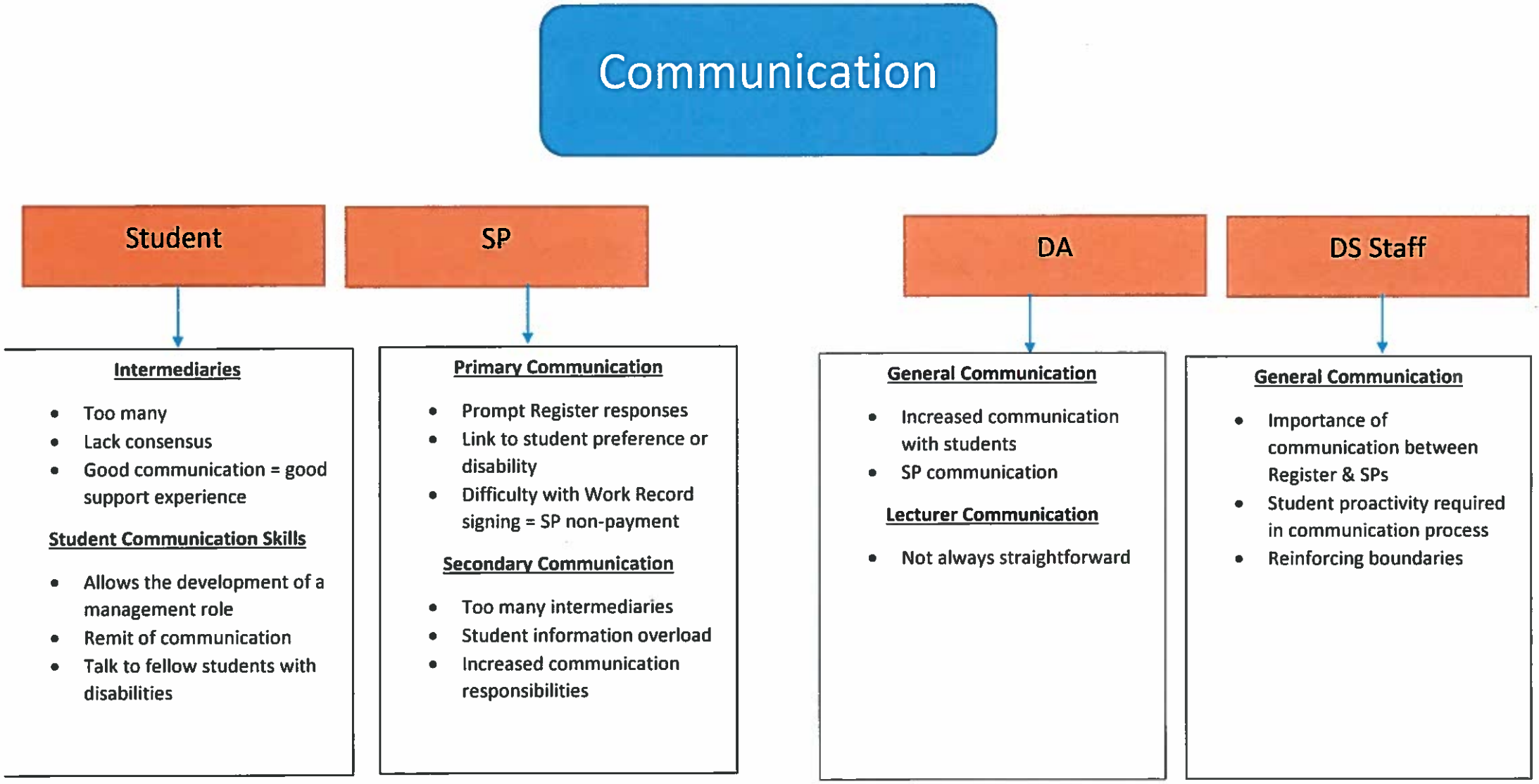


Figure 12: Refinement of Communication

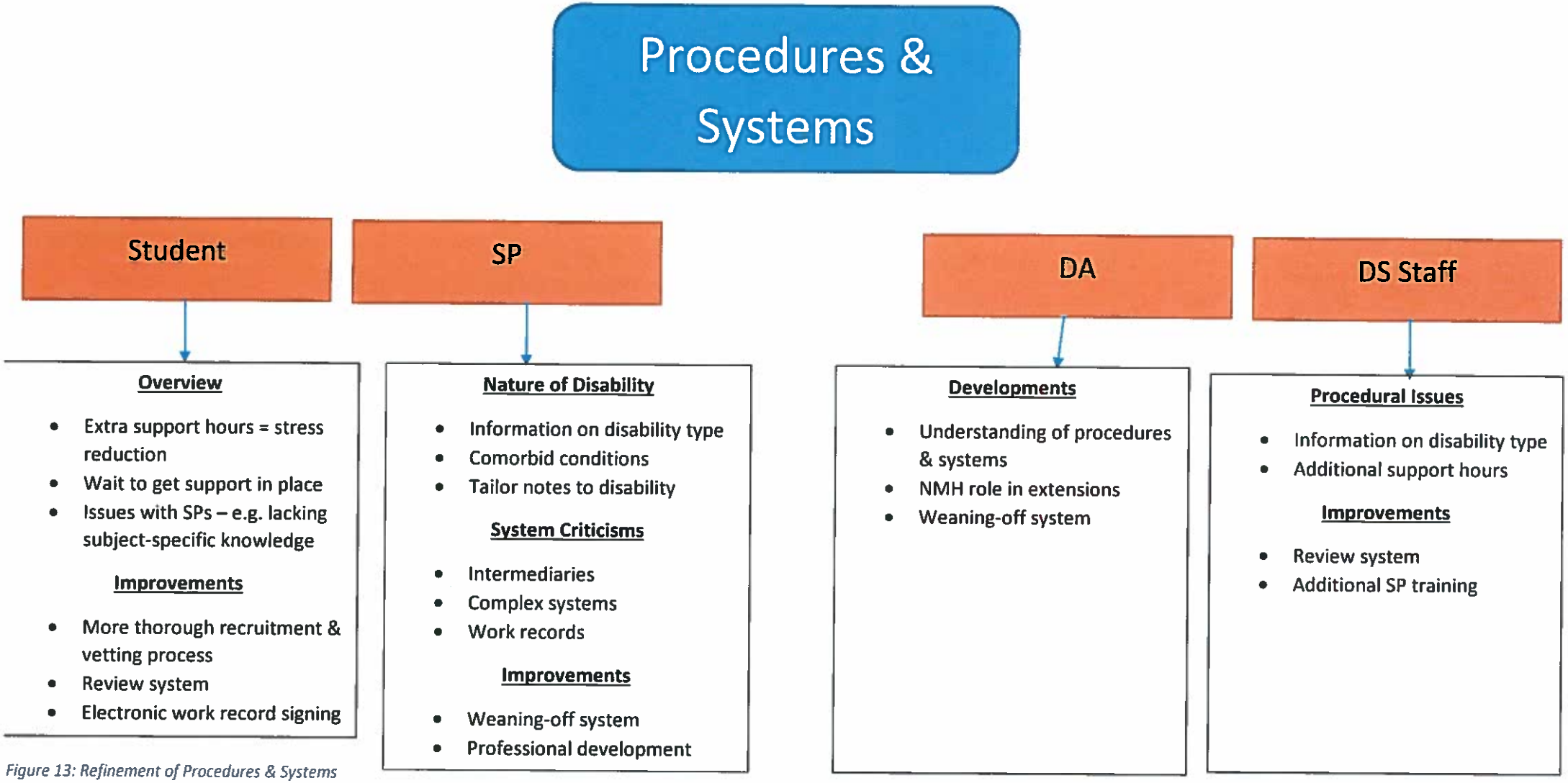


Figure 13: Refinement of Procedures & Systems

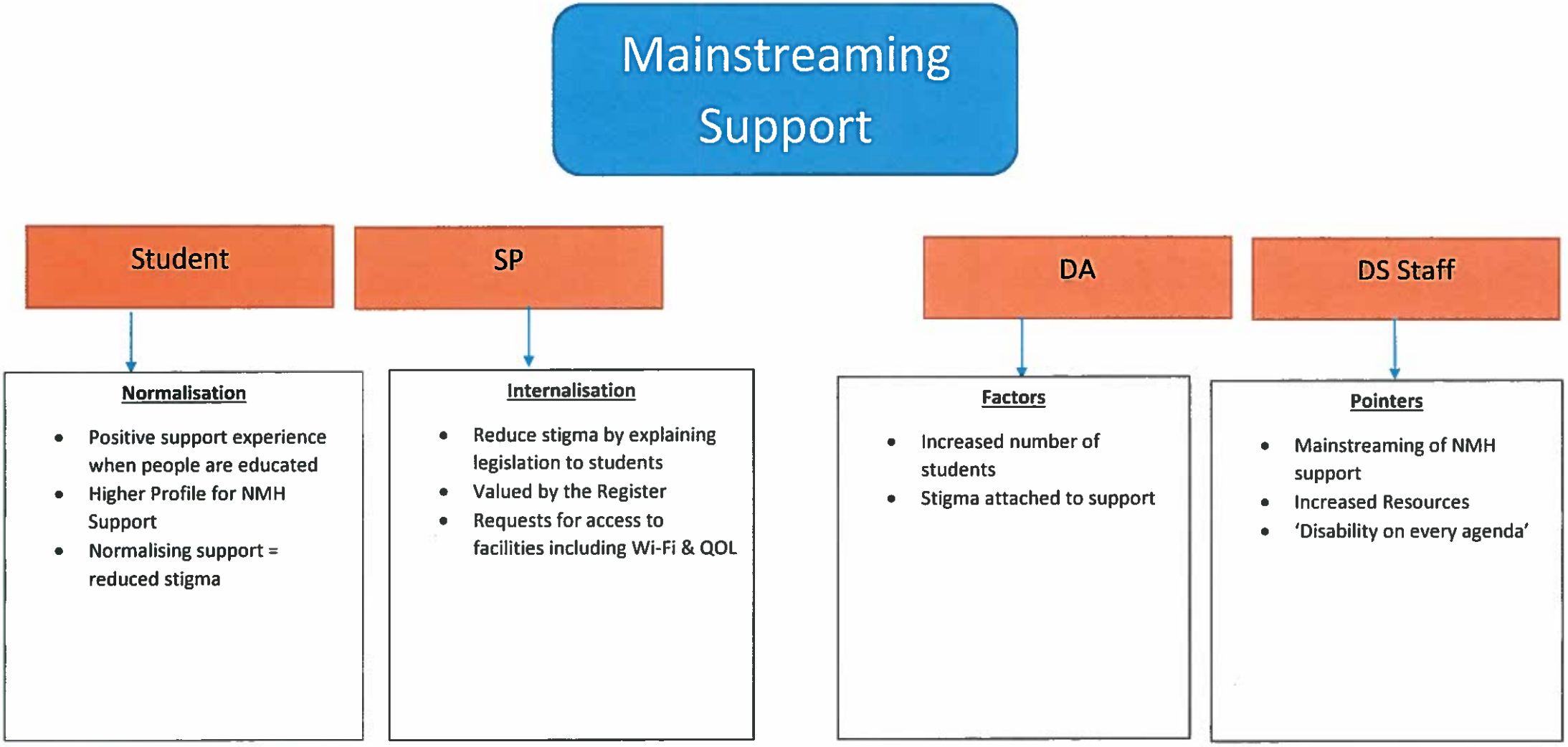


Figure 14: Refinement of Mainstreaming Support

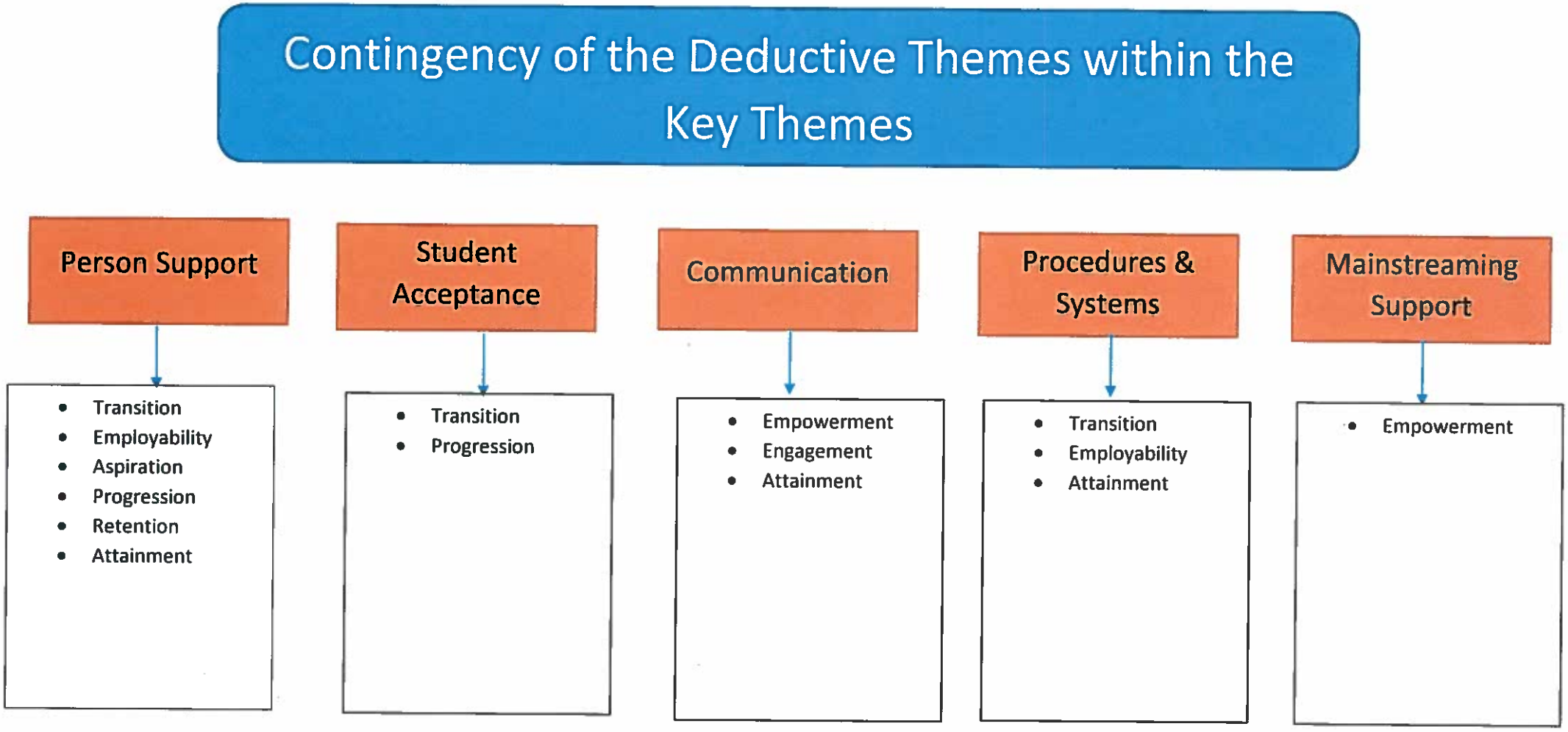


Figure 15: Illustration of the contingency of the deductive themes within the key themes

Qualitative Interpretation

Deductive themes

Initially, the aim of the qualitative research was to use thematic analysis to locate eight deductive themes within the focus groups, as illustrated in Figure 4. After analysis, it became apparent that although these deductive themes were important, there were five inductive themes that acted as better descriptors of the data set (see Figure 5). The key themes were not intended to replace the deductive themes. Rather, they are contingent upon the deductive themes, as outlined in Figure 15. For this reason, the deductive themes will only be outlined briefly to avoid repetition in the main section of the report.

The deductive theme of "transition" was most prevalent in the student focus groups but also appeared within all other focus group categories. From the students' viewpoint, the smoothness of transition was impacted upon by the timing of support implementation, which in turn was influenced by the timing of the diagnosis. Students noted that when they met with Disability Services and were assessed prior to commencing University, NMH support was in place for their arrival at Queen's and as a result, transitions were smooth. The Disability Services Staff focus group converged with students on this point. However, those students who did not receive a diagnosis until after the start of their course often had a long wait before a support package was implemented. Figure 15 demonstrates that transition was one of the contingent factors within Person Support and Student Acceptance so the aforementioned issues will be discussed in greater detail within the key themes. In addition, from the SP discourses, it became apparent that there was a convergence between the theme of transition and the theme of employability. This is because transition does not simply refer to the move from school to university but also incorporates the transfer from university to the world of work. This is an area that SPs felt could be developed in the future and this will be further discussed within the key theme of Procedures and Systems.

This leads on to the deductive theme of "employability" which was touched upon by all focus group categories. There was an overall feeling from students that the skills developed during support sessions would be beneficial firstly, in the attempt to secure employment and secondly, within the work environment. This will be highlighted within the graduate survey results. SPs echoed the students' ideas about the beneficial nature of the development of transferrable skills for employability. In addition, SPs recommended that a "weaning-off" programme, whereby support is reduced as the student progresses through the years, would better prepare students for employment. This will be further discussed within the key theme of Procedures and Systems. Closely related to

employability, Disability Services Staff suggested that a possibility was the expansion of the ASD Tutor role to help support individuals with this social disability to acquire the skills necessary for effective interview performance. This will be further examined within Person Support.

In line with the theme of employability, it is evident that transferrable skills impact upon the theme of "aspiration". Such skills can inspire students to think beyond university and do things that they would not have contemplated previously. For example, one student decided to progress to a PhD, something that she would not have considered before working with her support Tutor. The significance of this will be addressed in the theme of Person Support. Furthermore, the theme of "empowerment" converges with aspiration in terms of transferrable skills, by incorporating the development of higher levels of confidence and self-esteem. Such skill development demonstrates the positive effects of ASD and Mental Health Tutoring. However, when analysing the data it became apparent that there was also a negative side to the theme of empowerment. Disability Services staff discussed the issue of students having an overdependence on support, which could actually have a disempowering effect. Further to this, SPs' calls for more communication with intermediaries on the behalf of students, as discussed in the key theme of communication, may also be disempowering. This may be explained in terms of Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development whereby learning is facilitated by the correct amount of support whereas excessive support is not beneficial to the student in any way (Vygotsky, 1978).

When students are empowered by their NMH support, a demonstrable progression is apparent. One student described not being able to progress to the next year of his course because of twice failing a particular module. However, when he was provided with a Mathematics and Statistics Tutor, he passed the module and moved to the next year. In fact, one SP argued that the progression of the student is the most important factor when providing Tutor support and this highlights how the current flexible Learning Plan approach is beneficial. These points illustrate that the deductive theme of progression is an important factor within the key theme of Person Support. It was noted that on occasions, the lack of availability of suitably qualified SPs hindered students' progression, something that was supported by DAs in relation to subject-specific Note Takers. The DA focus groups also highlighted that often, students' progress is impeded by failure to take up NMH support because of the stigma that students perceive is attached to such support. This links to the key theme of Student Acceptance and will be further discussed in that section.

The theme of "retention" precedes progression in the student life cycle. Several students highlighted that without NMH support, they would have dropped out of University. This was further supported by the Disability Services Staff focus group who recounted instances of students informing

them that without their SPs, they would not have stayed at University. This illustrates that retention is a contingent component of the key theme of Person Support which will be discussed in the following section. However, NMH support only has an impact on retention rates when students actually engage with support. The theme of "engagement" was very evident in the SP focus groups. They noted that how well a student responded to support was often linked to his/her level of engagement. Students who had a high level of engagement with their NMH Support tended to communicate well with their SPs, whereas a low level of engagement was linked to poor communication. This was echoed by the Disability Services Staff focus group. Hence, it is apparent that engagement was one of the contingent factors within the key theme of communication.

As the main aim of NMH support is to 'level the playing field' for students with disabilities, "attainment" is a theme that cannot be ignored. From the student discourses, it was clear that attainment can be influenced both positively and negatively by NMH support. Students discussed the idea that NMH support helped them to produce work that met university level standards. SPs also explained how they raise attainment levels by filling in any skills gaps and levelling the playing field. However, students have noted that sometimes NMH support can impact negatively on attainment, for example, if matched with an unsuitable SP or communication with the SP is poor. In addition, delays in putting support in place also impacts upon attainment. This demonstrates the influence that the deductive theme of attainment has on the key themes of Person Support, Communication and Procedures and Systems.

This section highlights the importance of the deductive themes and also demonstrates how they are integral to the five key themes (refer to Figure 15). As a result, the next section will outline the five key themes and the support for their construction will be demonstrated through quotations derived from the focus groups.

Key themes

The key themes outlined in Figure 5 will be discussed below, alongside supporting evidence. The implications that these findings have for the future of NMH provision will also be considered. The theme that appears to be of critical importance – Person Support – will be addressed first.

Person Support

The level of importance attached to the inductive theme of Person Support is not surprising since NMH support, as outlined in the introduction, refers to the person support that many students are entitled to through their DSA. Figure 10 highlights that all four groups of participants referred to the person support offered. Views on person support ranged from positive to negative. Quotations will be outlined below from each of the groups and these will be discussed.

Student

Rapport

The importance of person support was widely echoed throughout the student focus groups. The general consensus was that SPs helped to 'level the playing field' by facilitating the acquisition of generic skills that helped individuals to complete their academic work to the level required for a university student. In many cases, it was noted that such skill acquisition was contingent upon developing a good rapport with the SP. Rapport development was most important with certain disabilities such as ASD and mental health conditions where it was key to whether students had a positive or negative experience of their person support. When a rapport was developed between SPs and students with ASD or mental health conditions, there were self-reports of increased confidence and a resulting enablement to successfully complete presentations and group work tasks. Issues around rapport are exemplified by the following quotations:

> *'Being able to talk to someone on a regular basis is especially helpful as someone with autism and being able to regularly meet with a sympathetic Provider is invaluable in building social confidence and skills.'* (Student FG1)

> *'I found the Mental Health Tutor ... really invaluable because it has been such a great support because you have someone who helps you meet your deadline and keep everything up to date and just reassuring you of wee things and keeping on top of things... Then as I said the life coaching skills as well and different wee exercises going through breathing, dealing with anxiety, dealing with stress and the difference that that has made to my confidence as well. I feel the Mental Health Tutoring has*

been amazing. I can't sing praises enough about my Tutor. She has been very, very supportive.' (Student FG2)

Consistency and Stability

Beyond rapport, other factors that impinged upon students' experiences of person support were consistency and stability. Positive experiences of person support were recounted when students worked with a SP in structured sessions delivered in a consistent and stable manner. When this was not the case, students were unhappy with the support they received. In such instances, it was apparent that some SPs were unaware of the boundaries of support and, on occasions, students lacked understanding of the boundaries that the SP should not breach. A key finding was addressed by one student who had both positive and negative experiences of person support. This student noted that when there is a 'synergy', the support goes well. Such a synergy incorporates a consistent, stable and sensitive approach where a rapport has been developed and where both parties are aware of and accept the boundaries. These factors are illustrated by the following quotations:

'My Study Skills Tutor has been excellent. I was talking to her recently about how much I have improved from first year because it has just given me those organisational tools and things like that, which I have really needed in order to get on with things. I can organise my time and get assessments in and make sure I have requested extra time and things like that, so I think she is really good.' (Student FG2)

'Well my Asperger's Tutor, in first year, I had two different ones and I was quite upset about that when I heard the woman I had in first year wasn't continuing on because that was such a big change there and I had really hoped for the consistency through my time at University.' (Student FG3)

'I think that is more of a problem with the person, to be quite honest, rather than the support being provided. I think the main thing's synergy, ... whenever you have it all coming together and working and it is making up the gap'. (Student FG3)

Summation

Although, the students' experiences have raised some issues that need to be addressed within the remit of person support, the general consensus is that person support can mean the difference between achieving a degree or dropping out. As such, it is an essential service in terms of the deductive theme of "retention". Students noted that they were very grateful for the technological

support that had been awarded through DSA but it was widely accepted that computer programmes were not a replacement for the 'understanding and empathetic' approach of a human being. Improvements could be made via the development of the aforementioned 'synergy' approach. The following quotations sum up the findings of this section:

> *'I would say transferring to group skills has been really helpful with my Tutor as well because with Architecture, we have a lot of group work and a lot of assignments to keep on top off at once and just getting some advice on how to do that ... has been quite useful. One thing I would say is that I found that I can just go and chat about anything as well which is good... I don't know if that is just my rapport with my Tutor, but it has ended up dominating our sessions instead of actually staying on top of the task.'* (Student FG2)

> *'The person, you can talk to them about how you are feeling and...they are able to understand and comprehend. With my software ...the programme is beneficial but if someone was there it would be so much easier for me to discuss it with them...* (because the programme) *doesn't say why it doesn't make sense ... so I think it is so much more beneficial with a person.'* (Student FG1)

Support Provider

Rapport

As expected, the theme of person support was highlighted by those who provide the support. Within the remit of this theme, the SPs converged on some of the topics covered by the students, rapport development being one of these. SPs agreed that the development of a rapport was in some cases an effortful process, very much dependent on disability and personality type. However, when it was successful, seeing the positive changes that such a rapport can bring to the student made it worthwhile. Sensitivity was viewed as an important factor in the successful development of an effective working relationship. When a rapport was developed, students were more open to the learning process involved in the Tutor sessions. This in turn led to positive changes in the students' academic work and, dependent on their on their disability, occasionally they also developed socially. These changes in the student encouraged proactivity, meaning that previously timid students were more likely to question support when they felt it was inadequate and as such, they were able to acquire a support package more suited to their individual needs. Some SPs described supporting the students along this journey as very rewarding, witnessing them acquire the necessary transferrable skills and developing their full potential. This is illustrated by the following quotations:

'With the final year, you know, if you think back to them when they were in their first year and then you see the student that is in front of you, I mean, you have been involved in their learning all along...they have more of an idea now how to structure something and...they have a new confidence or something about them. I have two students this year and when I look back, I think they are wonderful because you can see the fantastic improvement in them.' (SP FG4)

'To be more assertive and say this is what I have and this is what I need. I don't know if you can provide them will all the skills they will need but just providing them with the willingness to ask.' (SP FG3)

'It is about building that rapport at the start of the year and drawing lines of what/where the student's and Support Provider's expectations are and define that clearly and set up regular meeting times and things like that I think are very important.' (SP FG3)

Boundaries

The above depicts a very positive picture for the theme of person support. However, converging with the student discourses, SPs have raised the issue of "boundaries".

As with the student groups, there was no consensus between the SPs regarding the understanding of boundaries. Some SPs were very well informed of the boundaries but these individuals tended to suggest that some students lacked an understanding of boundaries and would often request them to go beyond their roles, for example, asking a Note Taker to Proof Read. This raises the idea of unfeasible expectations, something that is seen throughout the SP discourses. Certain students have unfeasible expectations of the SP yet on the other hand, SPs admitted they went beyond the boundaries for their students. There were a variety of explanations given for such behaviour including feeling sorry for the student, feeling that the student was not capable and it was the SP's duty to act on their behalf, feeling pressured by the student or simply lacking awareness that their behaviour was beyond the boundaries. The quotations below provide support for the aforementioned factors:

'In terms of the Note Taker, I know it is just a matter of me going in and taking a good set of notes that is handed over to the student and there is not necessarily much interaction with the student at all. In all the years I have been doing it some of the students will communicate with me but many of them don't in actual fact. As long as they get a set of notes handed over to them at the end of the lecture or the following day that is my job done in that particular role, so there is very little interaction with the student as such. In the actual Tutoring, again my role is very clearly defined as Maths support although the issue there probably is their expectation of the support and the type of support. Whether they want me to teach them the module for instance, that...is not my role.' (SP FG3)

'I had one student and if they didn't turn up for the lecture I couldn't take their notes but they would say to me "Go on, you can turn up and take the notes and do it anyway" and obviously because I am not allowed to, I couldn't, but I think students should be reminded of the integrity that they are students.' (SP FG2)

'I have built up friendships with some of the students and I find that it is hard for me not to... I have read stuff and I could tell them what to do, little pointers, but I haven't and I feel sort of hand-cuffed. I would like that to be changed but I see where the problem arises.' (SP FG4)

Summation

Overall, the SPs were very positive about person support. However, as with the student groups some issues were raised. The intensity of the feeling from SPs that they are subject to unfeasible expectations needs to be addressed. Part of the way to address this is to develop a greater understanding of the SP role both for students and SPs as illustrated by the following quotation:

'I made a lot of mistakes at the start, I really did and I had to draw back. I was trying to be too friendly with the students because I am back at university doing a PhD and now I realise completely why you have to have those formal boundaries and they are absolutely necessary. I did make mistakes in the past but if those things had been told to me in or if someone had of shared their experiences of note-taking because I really didn't know what I was letting myself in for. I enjoy it but it was just at the start it was very stressful.' (SP FG1)

Disability Advisers

The DAs, as outlined previously, are the contact for Disability Services within the Schools. These individuals receive the support memos about each student with a disability in their School and they are required to pass on that information to the individuals within the school who have an academic relationship with the student.

Support Provider Contact

DAs provide an interesting influence on the theme of person support because they actually have minimal contact with the SPs. As DAs are in most cases academics, the main contact they have would be with Note Takers and this contact is not meant to extend beyond the Note Taker introducing him/herself to the lecturer at the start of the class. DAs discussed that some Note Takers do go beyond this remit and this is when the issue of boundaries under the theme of Person Support is raised once

again. Some DAs were unhappy when Note Takers exceeded these boundaries but otherwise, they had no issue with the presence of the Support Provider in their lectures. One DA noted that some colleagues viewed the presence of Note Takers in lectures with suspicion. There were several DAs who actually welcomed contact with SPs beyond the boundaries and suggested that more contact would be beneficial. The quotations below demonstrate the opinions of the DAs:

> *'There is one Note Taker that I am aware of and we have quite a good communication, so he will e-mail for notes and stuff and if there are issues he will come and say, you know, "Are you aware of this through Disability Services, this particular student?", and he has been great from that point of view.'* (DA FG1)

> *'What some people don't like is, they expect the Note Taker to approach them at the start of the class and say, my name is....whatever, I am a Note Taker, you know, and that is fine. Sometimes it is a bit odd when you go into class and someone is there all of a sudden at the start of the year for example and I took a colleague into class to introduce her last year and she said to me, who's that? It was a gentleman with a laptop and you know, I said "Oh he must be a Note Taker", but you know as she said he could have been anybody, from the press, or anything else!'* (DA FG2)

Importance of Person Support

One DA also noted the importance of person support over technological forms of support. The DA was specifically talking about a science/maths based subject where recording the lecture via Dictaphone would not be suffice to convey the true meaning of the lecture. The DA argued that if an individual needs lecture support, it is imperative that they have a Note Taker rather than some other form of support. This highlights the DA's acceptance of the importance of person support. Furthermore, several DAs noted the importance of subject-specific Note Takers for disciplines where a specific background knowledge is required to take meaningful and accurate notes. A Note Taker who does not have an appropriate subject background may actually hinder the students' academic progress rather than levelling the playing field. The following quotation highlights this issue:

> *'Even at the level of Note Takers in Maths and Physics, you need a Note Taker who is actually reasonably fluent in Greek letters at least!'* (DA FG1)

Summation

The above section highlights that DAs view person support as highly important and the constructive criticisms offered will help improve NMH support. They also raised the boundary issue which all the previous groups have covered so this is something that needs to be addressed.

Disability Services Staff

Importance of NMH

Disability Services staff greatly contributed to the theme of person support by suggesting that NMH support is a great source of empowerment for students with disabilities. Like the other groups, DS staff have encountered instances where both students and SPs have breached the boundaries of the professional student/SP relationship. The DS staff also overlapped with the views of the students when it came to consistency with NMH support. There was a consensus that person support needs to be consistent to have a beneficial effect and this is why they postulated developing a "support package" that support Tutors must follow. The following quotations affirm their views:

> *'I have had students who said to me but for their Support Providers they would have left their course.'* (DS Staff)

> *'It comes down to boundaries and ensuring that all stakeholders in the provision of support know where their role begins and ends, and when they should refer students on and signpost ... I think that there is a risk there, dependency relationships can develop and because they want to help, you know, they assume a responsibility which doesn't rightfully belong with them, it belongs with the student.'* (DS Staff)

> *'I mean if a student does not find the support helpful, maybe go for one or two sessions to find it helpful, maybe we need to do more about as to why they don't find it helpful. Is it a skills issue with the Support Provider, or a discrepancy between Support Providers and what they are actually doing? Is there a package that we could develop, you know,* (that) *they implement with the student, so that we know there is more consistency, obviously you want room for the individual needs, but that acts as a guide or a tool.'* (DS Staff)

Possible Solutions

One suggestion was that Careers and Disability Services could explore collaborative working options in order to support the transition of students with disabilities from University into the workplace. Another suggestion was the possible extension of the ASD Tutor role. Although the person support offered by ASD Tutors at present is excellent because of the nature of ASD, it would be highly beneficial if a student was able to work with them on interview preparation topics such as social etiquette in interviews and dressing appropriately. This idea is supported by the following suggestion:

> *'The Asperger's mentoring role could be, you know, at its widest kind of conception could include presentation and interview skills because that is part of the course. The placement is part of that course, you know, and I have certainly seen that before where the Support Provider has the time and capacity to provide that student with additional assistance for placement, for example, because students with Asperger's*

quite often would not be successful in obtaining a placement and maybe a School Placement Co-ordinator does not have the time to give the student one-to-one help. The support services don't have the time, but the Support Provider does.' (DS Staff)

Student Acceptance

The next theme that will be discussed is "Student Acceptance". The impact of NMH support seems to be very dependent on whether the student has an acceptance of both their diagnosis and the support they need.

Student

The general consensus amongst students was that those who have accepted their disability as part of their identity were more likely to accept support. They were also more likely to have a positive experience of the support provided. The main factors that impacted on acceptance level were maturity, diagnosis timing and support history. These factors acted as a precursor to students' judgements on NMH Support and will be discussed below.

Maturity

The focus groups led to the suggestion that students' level of acceptance is closely linked to maturity. More mature students had a tendency to feel less stigmatised by their diagnoses and as a result, they were more likely to accept the NMH support offered. Less mature students tended to lack acceptance of their disabilities and were therefore less likely to accept NMH support. Such students tended to perceive NMH support as stigmatising. As a result, it is postulated that there is a process of acceptance and that each student is at a different stage on this process. It is important that the NMH support takes account of this process and that students are encouraged to accept their disabilities and ultimately, the support they will require to succeed academically. This in turn should reduce the perceived level of stigma attached to NMH Support. The following quotations exemplify the aforementioned points:

> *'I don't think I see it as a stigma...but I sometimes feel like it is a stigma because...I think some people are like, well you are capable of doing x, y and z so how could you possibly have a disability because it doesn't fit within the framework.'* (Student FG2)

> *'I think for me it was good to have a Note Taker sit away from you so you can engage with your class mates and you don't have someone sitting there awkwardly beside you whenever you are just trying to chat or whatever during the breaks and getting to know people. I think that is probably a big helpful thing. Discretion is helpful...not having to answer so many questions about why there is somebody sitting beside you there... By the time I got into third year it wasn't really an issue or anything, which was grand, but at the beginning, when you are coming here and you don't know anybody, I think that it can be a help but I think there's many more benefits than that.'* (Student FG3)

Diagnosis Timing and Support History

The timing of diagnosis was a very important factor in relation to a student's acceptance of their disability and their subsequent acceptance of support. Students who were diagnosed at a young age have had ample time to internalise their diagnosis and thereby tended to be more accepting. Students who have developed a condition or only had a diagnosis from adolescence onwards tended to lack acceptance of their disability as the new label impinged negatively on the identity that they had already formed. Such students were much more likely to request discretion from their Note Takers and were unlikely to want to meet with their SPs where they would be highly visible, like after lectures for example.

Similarly, students who have a history of support provision seem to have that requirement internalised as part of their identity. They therefore demonstrate a greater acceptance of NMH support at university because receiving support throughout their education has been the norm. For students who have previously kept their disabilities hidden and have not been openly supported, support acceptance is less likely. Such individuals tend to see support as stigmatising and do not want their peers to regard them as different in any way. The following quotations demonstrate the importance of the above factors:

> *'I know I was diagnosed in my early years at primary school so I have had a long history of support provision to a point where it is almost tailored to my specific needs...to the point of* (where) *dropping out...would no longer be of consequence of having a disability.'* (Student FG1)

> *'I was assessed at school and then assessed when I applied for uni, so I did know it existed because I had been told through UCAS to apply to the disability support... They then passed me onto Queen's who then got in touch with me. So my transition from school to university worked quite well in terms of knowing it existed but I can see how...if...I hadn't been assessed at school, I wouldn't have known to come and find out about it at uni.'* (Student FG2)

Summation

The factors outlined above show the importance of "Student Acceptance" on NMH support experience. Accepting students are more likely to engage with the support and as a result, have a positive experience of NMH support. Furthermore, students who have an acceptance of their disability/diagnosis are likely to proactively source information about the support available, claim ownership of their support package and ultimately, have a better outcome from their NMH support.

Support Provider

Factors in Acceptance

The theme of student acceptance was highlighted by SPs and on many related issues, there was convergence between the SP and the student focus groups. SPs highlighted that timing of diagnosis and history of support provision were important factors in student acceptance. SPs noted that acceptance can also be linked to disability type because students with certain disabilities may be less likely to develop acceptance. For example, some students with ASD will not accept that they have a disability and thereby disengage with support. In such cases, it can be very difficult to develop the rapport that many SPs feel is essential for students to benefit from NMH support. The following quotations illustrate the aforementioned factors:

> *'Yes I would think some of them are quite overwhelmed and they are quite young ... and then they have this Support Provider and maybe they don't meet you and stuff but I can kind of understand that too.'* (SP FG2)

> *'I find if they have had support at school, you know, the way some students may have had a classroom assistant, extra time, special unit or whatever, and so they are used to that kind of environment and are...glad it is continuing and it is not such a big jump.'* (SP FG3)

> *'I have one student who has Asperger's and he doesn't exhibit most of the symptoms that students with Asperger's have and it has been really easy getting along with him and it has been a really good relationship. I was assigned another student and as soon as I saw this other student I knew he had Asperger's and was exhibiting Asperger-like behaviour but he informed me that he didn't need me. So I feel the one student who needed me dismissed me and the one who perhaps doesn't really need me, I have been getting on really well with and I have a got a good relationship with him and I am being supportive with him.'* (SP FG1)

Support Provider's Role in Acceptance

SPs have noted that student acceptance is on a continuum. Those students who have a high level of acceptance tend, as expected, to be proactive in engaging with their SP. Such students take ownership of their support which means they are in control of their support package and will be comfortable with suggesting support changes to ensure that they get the optimal outcomes from their support. However, for students on the other end of the continuum who lack acceptance, ownership of the support package appears not to exist. Such students may have a particular difficulty in contacting their DO to discuss their support and to request changes to their support requirements. SPs who have an understanding of the process of acceptance can actively encourage acceptance in their students by using discreet and sensitive methods. As such, it is essential that the SP adapts their approach in

accordance with the students' stage on the process of acceptance. Strategies such as allowing the student to feel in control by asking them to elaborate on their condition/ support needs (see below) can help develop rapport, support ownership and ultimately, acceptance. The following quotations exemplify these findings:

> *'To be more assertive and say this is what I have and this is what I need. I don't know if you can provide them with all the skills they will need but just providing them with the willingness to ask.'* (SP FG3)

> *'So what I do now is I write, and in my first email to the student I say "It is totally up to you but if you feel I should know anything about your condition that might help me in providing the service, do let me know, by either email or at our first meeting". I sort of word it that way in the first email and then it is totally up to them because that is the whole purpose and they are in control.'* (SP FG1)

Summation

The above SPs have highlighted the factors that impact on student acceptance. The emphasis has largely been on the process of acceptance. One important factor in the process is the attitudes of those who surround the students. For example, students may be less accepting of their support because of the attitudes of their parents. This attitudinal issue is not within the remit of the SPs' provision and the following quotation demonstrates this point:

> *'I think a lot depends on the experience in school. I know if my students have had a very good, positive experience in school, they are very open about their dyslexia...and it is all chatted about and you can see they are more comfortable.'* (SP FG4)

Disability Advisers

In the DA focus groups, it was noted that student acceptance is influenced by a reluctance to disclose a disability. Students seem to have a false perception that accepting their diagnosis and the NMH support offered will have a negative impact on them academically and socially. In order to promote student acceptance, there needs to be an increased awareness that disability disclosure is confidential and will not have a negative impact on academic studies, careers etc. These points are illustrated by the following pertinent quotations:

'For certain neurological conditions I know students who have been embarrassed and they were refusing to be carried (and in) *some other cases, they were not taking the help they were eligible to receive because of their condition.'* (DA FG1)

'I think it should become clear to all students that all information that is there with the Disability Officers is confidential. This is what I have found with some students who are very hesitant to disclose what issues they have because they were not sure how it was going to impact upon other things, like career or even how they are going to graduate, so I think that should be clear that everything is confidential.' (DA FG1)

Disability Services Staff

The focus group with Disability Services staff implied that students with higher levels of acceptance are more likely to be proactive and as a result are more likely to take ownership of their support as illustrated by the following pertinent quotations:

> *'I would always say to my students whenever I meet them, your Needs Assessor will be doing the assessment. Whenever we find support for you, if you are not happy with the Tutor, don't be too polite to say to me. Let me know and I will discreetly get you a different Tutor, and sometimes they will, it doesn't happen that often, but sometimes they will actually come and say "Actually, they are a nice person but they are not really covering what I want them to cover" and we just get them somebody else. Sometimes, they would say "Actually, the Tutor said to me, you know they didn't seem to know what to cover with me" and if the student doesn't know and the Tutor doesn't know, then it is not really helpful for the student.'* (DS Staff FG)
>
> *'Sometimes the students accept the support that is recommended and it is recommended for good enough reasons, but sometimes the students find that they don't need it and then they just drop off and don't use it. Other students find it stigmatising, so, you know, there are a range of issues there in relation to why students don't use the support.'* (DS Staff FG)

Communication

The next theme that will be discussed is "Communication" as outlined in Figure 12. Communication was raised by all participant groups and was a major factor in how successful NMH support was perceived to be in terms of attainment, engagement and empowerment.

Student

Communication was prevalent across the student focus groups. Good communication was one of the key factors in the success of support 'levelling the playing field'. The theme of communication is presented at two levels within the student discourses - communication with intermediaries and student communication skills.

Communication with Intermediaries

For their support to be successfully implemented, students felt that they were compelled to communicate with many intermediaries. These communicants include SPs, Disability Service staff, Register staff and, on some occasions, DAs and staff within the academic Schools. When students were able to communicate well with the required intermediaries, lower levels of stress meant that such students were more likely to have a positive support experience. In instances when communication with intermediaries was difficult or strained, students sometimes suggested that their support needs were not being catered for. It was felt that there was no consensus in the approaches of different intermediaries. One student also highlighted that communication was very difficult when support had to be implemented in an institution affiliated with QUB. Some students felt that fewer intermediaries would reduce stress and help them to have a more positive experience of NMH support. The following quotations exemplify these issues:

> *'When I initially met with my Tutor...obviously they knew I was registered with Disability Services and needed a Mental Health Tutor but I didn't even open up and I didn't even talk about my disability or how it was affecting my day to day until after a couple of sessions...but as I say it was great because you just did things at your own pace which was nice and then you got to identify the goals that you needed to work on, academically and outside which increased your confidence as well.'* (Student FG2)
>
> *'The lecturer wouldn't give me slides in advance and Queen's were like "We can't do anything". You know I need a Note Taker. "Well we don't have anyone there, we don't pay mileage"' (Student FG5)*
>
> *'I think they tend within the Disability Services to kind of focus more of the things they can give you rather than the people you work with, and that is where the focus needs to go on, with the budget and stuff like that, more people and better*

communication, whether that has to be meetings, and just abolish these e-mails which are clearly not being read, because, I mean as person with a disability at Queen's, I mean I have to deal with a lot of people ... Even if you could just reduce down and just have a couple of key workers, then it would save the hassle of communication. The communication would be stronger and a lot more frequent, rather than having so much bureaucracy filtering down and chasing left and right because that is stressful.' (Student FG5)

Student Communication Skills

The personal communication of students is also an important factor. When students have good communication skills, they are empowered to develop a management role with regard to their support. Effective communication allows students to develop a support package that is most suited to their individual needs. Students who adopt a management role tend to become more engaged in their support and thereby gain a lot more from the support. When talking within a focus group, one student suggested that if they had more communication with other students with disabilities, this would be highly beneficial in designing the optimum support package as is indicated by the following quotation:

'Yes, speak to more guys like yourselves and just be like "This is the problem I am having" and learn from each other's experiences because I have very little contact with other people.' (Student FG3)

However, communication by students must also address the negative side of communication, i.e. communication beyond the support boundaries. The student discourses revealed that students are not always aware of the remit which communication should not go beyond. These points are illustrated below -

'That is one of the problems I have, just taking a wee step back, whenever you are getting your Scribes and stuff...I really feel like the middle man trying to connect them to the lecturers and stuff and it is like "Could they not just go to the lecturer and get the notes off the lecturer and save me all this hassle trying to email through a triangle trying to get them the stuff?".' (Student FG3)

Support Provider

The theme of communication that emerged in the SP focus groups will be discussed under subheadings that demonstrate how communication influences the NMH support from the SP's point of view.

Primary Communication

SPs' primary communicants are the Register staff and students. On the whole, with regard to the Register staff, SPs were very happy with the prompt responses received to any queries. However, they did note that they would like more communication with the DOs.

> *'Every time I have had a problem and you ask by email, they do come back and sometimes it's in minutes. I don't think I have ever had a problem that wasn't resolved.'* (SP FG2)

Communication is a key factor in a student's NMH experience. SPs remarked that when communication with students is good, a rapport is developed and this allows for a more positive support experience. However, sometimes communication with students can be difficult and this in turn makes the support experience more difficult. As mentioned previously, occasionally the student's disability influences communication. A student with ASD or an anxiety disorder for example, may find it very difficult to communicate with a new person. SPs have suggested that the main mode of communication should be tailored towards the students' disability. For example, someone with anxiety may be more comfortable communicating via email whereas someone with dyslexia may find a telephone call less stressful than having to read an email.

> *'I think if you do have a good relationship with your student, if you do develop a rapport with them, you can say to them "I am sending you these notes, let me know if they are ok, if the font is ok", and you are hoping that most of them are going to say to you, "No these notes don't suit me" or "I don't like the layout" or whatever so you are student-led in that kind of way but it depends if you have that relationship with your student I suppose as well.'* (SP FG1)

> *'My student has Asperger's and part of the disability, until you establish set routines things will be amiss. And I find it frustrating when I hear the Board say after two meeting we will* (suspend support because the absences are a result of) *...the condition.'* (SP FG4)

> *'That is why we would need to know if someone is autistic or dyslexic because the autistic people might prefer email.'* (SP FG1)

In some cases, communication difficulties can be linked to student financial difficulties, so SPs have suggested various methods of free communication that are available. However, it is inevitable that some students will persistently lack acceptance so realistically, it is impossible to completely eliminate issues stemming from communication difficulties. This means that unfortunately there will be students who will avoid contact with their Note Taker and as a result, it can be very difficult to get Work Records signed, leading to delays in payment or SP non-payment. Such poor student communication leads to SPs being subject to unfeasible expectations.

> *'Students never have money on their phone so I use WhatsApp or use Viber to make a free 'phone call. So I try to say to the student "If you have no money on your 'phone, what have you on your 'phone so we can keep in contact and it is not going to cost you any money?".'* (SP FG4)

> *'If you are sending emails "Can you let me know ... are you going to be at your lecture or your tutorial?", you don't hear back from them. You go over to the tutorial and you go in because the student might be ten minutes late and you go in and that student may not turn up and I have stayed for lectures and you don't get paid for that. So you are going along because you haven't been told that they aren't going to attend.'* (SP FG1)

Secondary Communication

SPs also shared their opinions on the communication of the other parties involved in the support process. Corresponding with student feedback, SPs suggested that students have to deal with too many intermediaries to access their support package. Students are being contacted by their DO, Register Staff, clerical staff and their SPs. This can lead to confusion and stress for some students. Moreover, SPs feel that students are given too much information at their initial assessment and that this communication "overload" leads to a lot of confusion regarding their NMH support. Some SPs argued that the solution to such issues might be to give SPs more communication responsibilities including liaising on their student's behalf with DOs and staff within academic Schools. However, contact at this level would go beyond the current support boundaries and may suppress rather than develop independent learning. The only occasion when such communication was not considered beyond the remit was when a student was at imminent risk. These points are exemplified by the following quotations:

> *'There is a lot of information being thrown at them. There is a Study Skills Coach, Dyslexia Coach, Proof Reader, also mentors and all sorts being thrown at them so it is hard maybe for them to say yes.'* (SP FG4)

> *'I do feel for a Support Provider. There could be improvements in terms of linkage between a lecturer and a student and a Disability Officer because I don't ever speak*

to Disability Officers so there is no communication to explain where the problem areas are for the student.' (SP FG4)

'Especially when there is a crisis. Like, I have been at a stage where a mental health student has called me wanting to end their life. What do you do then? Obviously direct them to the relevant people but you need to make Disability Services aware of that.' (SP FG3)

Disability Advisers

The theme of communication was also apparent in the DA focus groups. As mentioned previously, DAs do not have a lot of communication with SPs. One DA argued that liaising with Note Takers was beneficial, especially where a student is absent because of their disability. However, it was noted that such communication is not always possible due to the busy schedules of academic staff. Besides, the majority of communication with DAs should be by the student and not the SP. DAs suggested that some students may lack awareness of the types of support available and that DAs could play a role in referring the student back to Disability Services for further support. Some DAs felt that regular communication with students with disabilities, even via email, was important and would help keep the Schools informed about how particular students are progressing with their support so that potential issues could be dealt with at the earliest possible stage. The following quotations outline the above ideas:

'They are meant to take notes for people who are not attending for example, and that can provide another link. They may be aware of stuff that is going on and then you have confidentiality to come in there as well, but at least they can give you a 'heads up'. But that is really a contact with the lecturers, rather than the Disability Adviser, because your Disability Adviser is not in every lecture, so then that relies on if there is good communication. Normally the Note Taker will see the lecturer not the Disability Adviser, so that then relies on the lecturer having good communication with the Disability Adviser.' (DA FG1)

'The problem I have had is when those reasonable adjustments haven't actually been everything that that student has required and then it is a case of the student coming to either the Disability Services or myself, or another Disability Adviser and saying "It is not quite working out for me, okay?", and...they can be quite hesitant to come and say "Right I have additional problems", or they come along and it is too late.' (DA FG1)

Disability Services Staff

Disability Services staff have noted the importance of communication between the Register and SPs. They also highlighted the importance of student proactivity in the communication process. Students are expected to maintain the line of communication with SPs and should also keep Disability Services informed about any changes or new support requirements. Within the theme of communication, the overarching issue that arose from DS staff was boundaries. Some parties including students and SPs, were communicating or would like to communicate beyond the normal support boundaries. For instance, some SPs believed that it would be beneficial for the students for SPs to have contact with DOs and DAs. The following quotations highlight these points and suggest that there are only very limited occasions when communication beyond the normal remits is acceptable.

> *'The general feeling that I get from a lot of academics is that they are under pressure and I think Support Providers wandering into that territory at the end of the day when they are not meant to provide academic-related support, it is generic support they are providing and mentoring, that is their role and I think we have had instances of Note Takers asking lecturers for notes, and it does tend not to go down that well. The relationship is between the student and academics. I don't think that the Support Providers should be having a relationship with academics unless the student is at risk and they have got a common theme of keeping an eye on the student in an extreme case, but normally I would have thought I would not be in favour of that.'* (DS Staff)

> *'If a student's support isn't right, maybe they do need a Note Taker, and maybe they do need a laptop, but the student needs to be advised by the Support Provider to go back to their Disability Officer and engage in a conversation with them about that, so for me, it is about drawing out the boundary.'* (DS Staff)

Procedures and Systems

The next theme that was apparent from the focus groups was "Procedures and Systems". This theme was addressed by all of the focus groups as illustrated by Figure 13.

Student

Overview

Within the remit of this theme, a resounding positive was that students never had an issue getting additional support hours. Always having access to a support Tutor greatly reduced stress and demonstrates that the current procedures and systems are working well. Indeed, one student acknowledged that the current systems and procedures are a good "baseline" but in some respects, there is room for improvement.

It was noted that the time delay for getting support put in place was, on occasions, very lengthy, largely due to the time taken by the funding bodies to process DSA applications. Moreover, when support was put in place, some students were unhappy with their SP for various reasons ranging from SPs going off topic to SPs lacking subject-specific knowledge. To produce adequate notes, Note Takers in some subjects need to have a subject-specific knowledge so that they understand the topic and take informed notes. Yet, this is not always the case. The following quotations illustrate the aforementioned points:

> *'Whenever I did need more hours that wasn't an issue...the Disability Officer was able to contact the board and get me more hours and so it was fine.'* (Student FG1)

> *'I didn't get my support until the second semester either and it was difficult. I was very tired.'* (Student FG3)

> *'I then had three different Note Takers and was trying to run around and understand what was falling apart because none of them had the background to be able to adequately take the notes.'* (Student FG3)

Improvements

Some students suggested that potential SPs need to be subjected to a more thorough recruitment and vetting process. After recruitment, SPs should be made clear on what their role entails and their responsibilities. It was further postulated that an ongoing review system could be put in place to allow students to give feedback on their SPs so that any issues that arise could be dealt with as early as possible. In addition, a review system would allow a student to

discreetly alert the Register to a SP who is not working at the required standard. Such discretion is really important as many students are nervous about reporting their SP as they do not want to offend them.

> *'Whenever I started getting support through Disability Services there was no review of the Providers, the actual Tutors, and even when I was in second or third year and I think that at the end of the term or the end of the year it was too late, the end of the academic year is too late, because with the actual Disability* (Support) *or the Dyslexia Tutor they were really useless and I actually reported that, but you can't report that until the end of the academic year, unless you are proactive, and you shouldn't have to be proactive, there should be some sort of evidence after two months or three months you will know whether the support is suitable'* (Student FG4)

> *'You get half an hour extra for typing them up and he put in that he was doing the half hour to type up and he wasn't typing up my notes. I said to the services and they said to him you can't really do this, but it sometimes didn't help and what can you do?'* (Student FG3)

This leads on to another issue, the contact between students and Note Takers. Many students who have Note Takers would prefer that their peers were unaware of this arrangement but having to meet the SP to sign their Work Record at the end of the class impacts on student anonymity. The overall consensus was that students would prefer a move towards an electronic Work Record signing-off process:

> *'There is a sheet to be signed at the end of each week and the first few Note Takers that I did have were very discreet and emailed to say did your friends or peers know you have a Note Taker but then I have others who literally wait for you at the end of class and follow you and sit beside you and that is not good because my friends didn't know I had a Note Taker and it is really embarrassing. So there should be clear guidelines that they should really find out first if you want it broadcast that you have the support and maybe those sheets could be emailed or something rather than having to wait at the end of classes to sign records.'* (Student FG2)

Support Provider

Nature of Disability

The theme of Procedures and Systems was prevalent throughout the SP discourses. The issue that SPs felt most strongly about was the fact that they are not informed about the nature of their students' disabilities. SPs receive a match-up letter with the student's name, course and contact details but this

memo does not give any disability-related information. Only in instances where SPs are performing a specific role such as ASD Tutor or Dyslexia Tutor are they aware of the nature of the student's disability. Even then, SPs are unaware of any other comorbid disabilities which may impact on the support they are to provide. Additionally, it was mentioned that some Note Takers have completed a note taking course provided by the Register. Although this course provides advice on how to tailor notes to the student's disability it is impossible to do so if one is unaware of the students' disability, and the student has not shared this information. Also, in order to write up the notes, Note Takers normally require more than the allocated half an hour of paid write up time. This in turn raises the issue of pay, which has not been increased since before the start of the Register in 2008. These points are exemplified below:

> *'At UU you are told the nature of the disability of the student that you have to support and here you are not. I understand there is a confidentially aspect of that but it actually helps if you have to meet that student for the first time, which can be quite difficult. I have had lots of problems. In one instance I remember the student had very poor eyesight so that was part of the reason he couldn't see me and I couldn't recognise him. I would tell him what I was wearing and where I would be but it still didn't work. I think that was due to the fact that his eyesight was so poor. If I had known that I would have made it easier for him.'* (SP FG2)

> *'If you are assigned as an Asperger's Tutor but the student also has dyslexia or ADHD which is very common, you would never know that. You just assume he has just got Asperger's but if you are aware that they have also other issues you will be able to take it into account with the support that you are giving. It would never occur to the student to tell you that they also have ADHD or dyslexia.'* (SP FG3)

> *'I know it all doesn't come down to money but at the end of the day, if you are attending the lecture or tutorial and it does take you an hour or hour and a half to type it up economically it is not very viable. It is not a great rate of pay because it is going to work out at about £6 an hour or something like that.'* (SP FG1)

<u>System Criticisms</u>

SPs have noted that the current system is complex. Students have to deal with too many intermediaries to get their support implemented and as highlighted previously, this may be particularly difficult for students with ASD or mental health conditions. Students are overloaded with information at their initial assessment and sometimes see their SP as a figure of authority. Students' confusion with the current system, or simply their desire to remain anonymous, means that they can be reluctant to meet regularly with their SPs to sign Work Records. This leads to the delay of payments or sometimes non-payment for SPs and therefore, one suggestion was the implementation of online Work Record approval and sign-off system. This is exemplified by the following quotations:

'I don't know what the students are told by their Disability Officer. I don't know what information they are given about our roles but the majority of the students that I have spoken to they don't really seem to know what it is. You know, they are kind of saying "Is this guy a lecturer or is this guy a teacher, is this guy a Note Taker?" and even when you explain what your role is they are still very confused. I have found that they don't actually know what it is you are.' (SP FG1)

'Well I don't know about the rest of you but there have been occasions where I haven't been paid because I didn't get the signatures and that was it.' (SP FG1)

'I am involved with another institution as well and all their Work Records are online signing. You know, you can email it to the student and the student signs it off and they email it back and it is all electronic and I think that would be a good idea for Queen's.' (SP FG3)

Improvements

One SP commented that some students become over-dependent on support. Several suggestions were postulated to overcome this dependence, one of which was the implementation of a weaning-off system, whereby support is gradually decreased over the years to help students become more independent for their next move into employment. Another SP suggested the implementation of a feedback system, whereby SPs were given positive feedback and constructive criticisms to support their professional development.

'I think there is an issue here for weaning-off. You know, we give them a lot of support but when they leave here, they are on their own again whenever they enter the workforce. I think it is something that should be built into your final year of working with someone and that is how to make the transition.' (SP FG3)

'There is a Co-ordinator and if at any time there is a problem, the Co-ordinator will get in touch with you. That same Co-ordinator will have the feedback of the positive feedback and when you have ninety five percent positive feedback from the students, what I want to know is, why am I not getting one percent positive feedback from Disability Services?' (SP FG 3)

Disability Advisers

The DAs stated that many students lack an understanding of the procedures and systems and have recommended that perhaps these need to be presented with more clarity. DAs were in favour of the NMH support weaning-off system suggestion. One DA postulated that it would be beneficial to their role if they were given details of whether students were making use of their NMH support

entitlements. Therefore one suggestion was the implementation of a system whereby students were only granted extra time for assignments when there was evidence to demonstrate that they had been using their support Tutor. The following quotations support the aforementioned points:

> *'When a student really does need specific advice on a specific issue, they actually don't know where to begin. So it is a bit paradoxical that while aiming to provide the fullest possible advice, that system seems to have evolved to the point where there are too many "channels" as it were. And another way in which the same complexity comes across is Disability Services, of course, who are doing a fantastic job but are very heavily over-worked. They do their best to help every student individually but they are heavily over-worked, so the existing mechanisms providing this sort of support probably need to be simplified.'* (DA FG1)

> *'How are we going to provide them with transferrable skills...if they are dependent...unless we are ... scale reducing the support as we progress ...it depends on their health and situation, it depends on the progress...'* (DA FG2)

> *'That's something...the institution I was working with before, for instance, if an essay had received support from Disability Services you would have a sticker on it, so you would know whether they had availed of the support or not, whereas here you can't know. You know they are entitled to it but you don't know if they have availed.'* (DA FG2)

Disability Services Staff

Procedural Issues

Disability Services staff had mixed opinions regarding disclosure of students' disabilities to SPs and the increase of support hours. With regard to disability disclosure, some individuals thought it would be beneficial to the SPs if they knew the disabilities of the students they are assigned. Conversely, other staff members believed that it was the student's choice to reveal as much or as little information as they wanted the SP to know. In terms of support hours, some staff believed that students should be given as many additional hours as they request. The feeling was that the student needs more support as they are finding it helpful and that this proactivity should be encouraged. On the other hand, others believed that too much NMH support can make the student become over-dependent. The following extracts are illustrative of these points:

> *'I think if it is something like visual or hearing impairment, or you know, or even physical disability where access is an issue and they have to meet somewhere which is accessible, maybe that sort of aspect of it, but I think in the majority of cases, I would say that they don't need much detail. It should be down to the student to say to the Support Provider "This is my disability and this is how it affects me" because*

the problem is the risk is if we put in too much information and the student comes back and says "I didn't want the Support Provider to know all that", because it gives him the chance to start with somebody with a clean slate. They don't know their background, so it is up to them as to how much they say really.' (DS Staff)

'I would be in support of telling the Support Provider the nature of the disability, but no more information, just the title...' (DS Staff)

'I say, no problem, extra hours are not a problem because I think if they are using the support and they need some extra time with them and it helps them, it shouldn't be an issue.' (DS Staff)

Improvements

Disability Services Staff were in favour of the review system suggestion where students would be asked to review their support after so many weeks to see how it was working. This is one way that would allow any issues with SPs to be sorted out at the earliest possible stage so that students would not be disadvantaged. It should be noted that at present, the Register does open a survey at the end of Semester 1 to follow up on NMH support to uncover any possible issues but this may not be early enough. Although additional SP training would greatly benefit students, Disability Services staff recognised that for such changes to be implemented, more resources would be needed. The idea of a weaning-off system was considered but it was pointed out that that such a system would need to be approached with caution as illustrated by the following pertinent quotations:

'Following students up after 10 weeks or 12 weeks is probably a good idea. The support Tutors are supposed to use the first session to prepare a work plan, you know, so that should be available. The difficulty with monitoring all of that is that it is very time consuming and staff have to do it and...we don't have enough staff to do those things. They are very good ideas but they are dependent on available resources at the end of the day.' (DS Staff)

'I think it depends on the nature of the support. Yes, certain aspects could be weaned off... If it is based around their assignment and academic course work, I think it is very, very difficult to reduce that in the third year, you know particularly around the dissertation period.' (DS Staff)

Mainstreaming Support

The final theme that will be discussed is the idea of mainstreaming NMH support and this is depicted in Figure 14. Mainstreaming Support refers to the process of making NMH support completely integrated into the normality of University life. The role the University could play in mainstreaming support would have a significant impact on improving societal attitudes towards disability. However, improving attitudes must start within the University itself and such ideas will be outlined below.

Student

Students noted having very positive experiences of NMH support when the people involved in the process have had an understanding of the disability and their individual circumstances:

> *'It was actually my Personal Tutor who put me in contact and I really have to say I haven't looked back, especially with having some time out and coming back I had a lot of anxieties, you know, joining the year group, and I have to say, having that extra support, I have seen my grades go from, before I left, going from a pass to getting 2:1 and that is really down to the extra support.'* (Student FG2)

It is concerning that one student highlighted that some individuals involved in disability research at QUB were not aware of the support offered by the Register. This suggests that NMH support should have a higher profile within the University so that both staff and students are aware of the potential support available. The students who attended the focus groups suggested that more education was needed for the University population – students and staff - on the reasons why students with disabilities receive support and the importance of that support. This should lead to NMH support being regarded as a normal part of the university experience for students with disabilities and any associated stigma should disappear. For such a mainstreaming process to work, the current complex and confusing structures and support systems need to be simplified:

> *'There is a PhD student in our school and she is nearly finished and she works really closely with the disability sector in Northern Ireland...She said "I didn't think of Disability Services or to mention that to the students. What sort of help can they get?" And this is somebody who is really involved in the whole disability sector, so it needs to have a much higher profile I think.'* (Student FG1)

> *'I didn't find out I had dyslexia until half way through my degree and by the time the support was in place, it was quite late on. I just feel that there should be more when you register to become a student at Queen's. It should be clearer to what's there and what's available and how to go about accessing stuff rather than students finding out, well not at the very end, but mid-way through, could greatly change people's grades if they had that from the very beginning.'* (Stu FG2)

One student suggested that having someone with a comprehensive knowledge of NMH located within each school would greatly benefit the integration of support into the mainstream Queen's. Such developments would demonstrate the importance that the University places on inclusive education which will ultimately be beneficial to society as a whole. However, with regard to resources this is unlikely to be possible so it was instead suggested DA roles should be offered to individuals who have a particular interest in disability and DAs should have to complete intensive training. The following quotation illustrates the student viewpoint:

> *'Disability Services could place somebody within each of the schools, so instead of you having to go to a lecturer and get an appointment within their times, actually there is somebody within each School. One person in each School is not a huge amount, where they are aware of what your rights are, they can lobby or advocate for your specific problems, they have an understanding of different conditions, you don't need to explain your condition each time you go.'* (Stu FG4)

Support Provider

SPs themselves are at the cutting edge of mainstreaming NMH support. They suggested that by explaining the legislation behind NMH support, this would affirm support entitlements. Promoting acceptance in students with disabilities is the first step in trying to mainstream the position of NMH support within the University:

> *'I really try to explain the legislation. I say to students it is* (because of) *legislation that you have this support. We don't feel sorry for you. We don't feel like you can't manage without us. And I think when you try to explain to them that it is a right... I say to them "If you had a child and they were dyslexic, would you want them to get help?" and they always go, "Of course I would". Then I would say, "What is wrong with you? Why are you not allowed to have the same support?" '* (SP FG4)

SPs have described feeling valued by the Register as they are provided with excellent training opportunities. However, some SPs noted that they did not feel that all members of the University staff held them with such high esteem. For example, they found some Queen's staff members to be uncooperative and dismissive, illustrating possible cultural issues. Due to space restrictions, only Tutors, Campus Assistants and Library Assistants are allowed into the McClay Library. However, other simple changes such as Wi-Fi, Queen's Online access and QUB email addresses would help SPs to feel more valued and respected within the University. This would also be beneficial for the students as

SPs would be able to receive their emails 'on the go', meaning a larger pool of Note Takers offering to cover last minute note taking sessions. Also, the opportunity to interact with other SPs through message board type facilities on QOL would allow for discussion and the exchange of advice and examples of good practice. These points are indicated by the following quotations:

> *'There is good support from the things that they had at the start, like the training sessions for Note Takers and they were optional and I found them really helpful. You know things like that they have organised to help you break into the role, which was very considerate.'* (SP FG2)

> *'Even if you had Wi-Fi access and that is really basic. I don't have a Smart Phone but I have a Kindle and I thought, well I will just get Wi-Fi access through that, otherwise you miss out on opportunities for last minute work and of course I can't get in* (to my email account) *because I don't have Wi-Fi access.'* (SP FG2)

> *'I suppose it actually highlights the issue that the problem has to be addressed that at the end of the day we are seen as a "bolt-on" and the only way to fix the problem for the students is for it to be in the mainstream before it goes into the university or whatever way they are going to work it out.'* (SP FG3)

Disability Advisers

DAs have noted the increasing number of students entitled to NMH support. They highlighted the issue that some students feel uncomfortable registering with Disability Services. If NMH support was mainstreamed, students would not perceive any stigma registering with Disability Services and as a result, there would be fewer students contacting their Disability Adviser at crisis point. This would make the student journey smoother for all concerned. In addition, if disability support was more mainstream, it was suggested that information regarding student's disabilities, their NMH support and exam requirements for example, could be made readily available to those concerned via QSIS, to DAs or the Exams Office, School staff etc.

> *'We have followed a module in our School with* (those) *who had a disability support agreement, so we had a 60% increase in one year.'* (DA FG2)

> *'I wonder if a little bit more support from Disability Services in checking on students might actually help, and I am not sure that they recognise that they can be helped. Some of them just skim through that information and they just don't think that they should go and see somebody, so I am not sure that the profile is obvious, or that the services that are available are entirely communicated to the students.'* (DA FG1)

> *'At present, from QSIS, every lecturer has an electronic list of the students who are given lectures. All that needs to be done is that in that electronic list, have a flag by the name of every student who is registered with Disability Services, so that when*

the lecturer clicks on the flag he gets a non-downloadable electronic image of the (student's support) *memo.'* (DA FG1)

Disability Services Staff

Disability Services staff have supported the idea that NMH support needs to be mainstreamed. It was noted that there is only limited awareness throughout the University of the NMH support that disabled students can avail of. This was in line with the discourses of the other groups which also suggested that there should be a higher profile within the University. Although a move towards fully integrating disability support within QUB would require increased resources, it would ensure that the University is aiming towards becoming truly inclusive to all.

'I think that a lot of students that come in and register with us ... find out that the non-medical help is available, and at that stage they are only made aware of it.' (DS Staff)

'Well, it opens up the whole question of how integrated Disability Services is in the scheme of things, both in terms of student support and University support because we have widened our participation with Disability Services and then we have Careers, you know, so ideally it should be a seamless service where students are being engaged... If you take the example of an Asperger's student, there is probably work to be done there in terms of support provision and then when they get here, providing support through Support Providers, etc. and part of that could be the "finishing off" bit, where they are being prepared for the world of work, so there is an idea around that.' (DS Staff)

'The thing is about inclusion, I think you have to put disability on every agenda in the University....' (DS Staff)

This concludes the thematic analysis. It has demonstrated how the five key themes were clearly supported by the focus group discourses. The graduate survey will now be discussed in terms of how it supports the key themes.

Graduate Survey

As the statistical analyses and the focus groups did not extensively touch on the impact that NMH had on the "employability" variable, a graduate survey was conducted. The survey was divided into three sections: General Information, Your Time at University and Employment. When the results of the survey were examined, it became evident that it provided much support for both the deductive themes and the key themes.

Convergence with Person Support

Important affirmations for the theme of Person Support were given by 83% of respondents who felt that NMH support made their University experience more positive. 85% of participants indicated that they would have struggled with their respective courses in the absence of support. However, only half of respondents felt that NMH Support helped them to develop a sense of belonging within QUB, perhaps because SPs are not perceived to be a real part of the University. Similarly, only 50% of students felt that support helped them develop socially, because perhaps, the main focus of NMH support is academic. The following quotations illustrate the positive and negative feedback given on the theme of Person Support -

> *'It would have impacted on my mental health. Having the support meant that I managed to cope better with the demands of academic life.'*
>
> *'Having a Campus Assistant meant I could go to places like the Library more regularly in addition to that day's classes, so I felt more part of the Queen's community because of this.'*
>
> *'They were very pushy and not particularly helpful. I felt more anxious after seeing them and when I said I didn't want to see them again they wouldn't leave me alone and I felt hounded.'*

Convergence with Procedures and Systems

Procedures and Systems was the most prevalent theme within the questionnaire. Suggestions made by the graduates echoed the recommendations given by individuals within the focus groups. The possibility of the development of a support package was reinforced by graduates who highlighted a lack of consensus between the support given by different SPs. Further to this, the idea of online Work Record sign-off was also raised. These points are illustrated by the proceeding quotations:

'There could be a session that explained to everyone what you were to expect from each NMH. When I was at QUB, the NMH themselves did this on the first meeting, but from talking to other students it became clear that what your NMH said they were to do was different from what others said, even though they were to be getting the same support.'

'It would be better if NMH could have their Work Records signed through an online process, to avoid friends and peers knowing that they are there for you.'

Other recommendations that arose inadvertently from the survey were firstly, the possibility of a review system and secondly, the idea of an enhanced recruitment and vetting process. The following quotations are pertinent for these issues -

'Note Takers should be monitored as they do not always give proper notes to their students. There are a number who are really excellent Note Takers but there are a number who came to only give about three to five sentences in their notes (for an entire hour they sat down in class) which is of no value to (the) *student.* (The) *student should be asked how* (the) *Note Takers are performing after three meetings and not after the entire semester.'*

'A better screening and checking up on carers. My first supporter was useless and completely uninterested and simply gave me printed hand-outs I could have got online from Queen's, whereas my new supporter tailored the help to my needs asking what I needed help with instead of just assuming what I needed.'

Finally, underneath this theme, it was particularly interesting that when graduates provided explanations for support non-use, there was evidence that the suggestion of a weaning-off system could be useful:

'I used the support for two semesters over two years. In my final semester I was offered them but did not take them up as I no longer felt the need for them.'

'I had already learnt a lot of the strategies from my undergraduate support and given how busy I was I didn't find it useful to access the support.'

Convergence with Mainstreaming Support

The theme of Mainstreaming Support was highlighted by graduates who suggested that NMH Support did not help them to develop a sense of belonging. Rather, it made them feel like an exception to the norm as opposed to a part of the wider student community. In addition, some graduates suggested that academic staff should be more informed about support needs. These issues are outlined below:

'Made me feel isolated and unique.'

'I was very happy with the support that was offered to me during my time at QUB but felt there could be a better link between the lecturers. Some seem to be more understanding than others.'

Convergence with the Deductive Themes

As some of the survey questions closely mapped onto the deductive themes, these themes will be discussed in their own right. The deductive theme of "attainment" was highlighted by 69% of respondents who felt that they achieved a better final degree mark as a result of the support. Conversely, some individuals felt that their attainment was impacted upon by poor quality SPs. Additionally, the responses to the survey greatly demonstrated the deductive themes of "progression and retention". In fact, 40% of graduates felt that having access to NMH support improved their retention prospects. However, just over 30% felt that either NMH support was "Not Applicable" or were unsure whether or not NMH Support helped them stay on at QUB. The aforementioned points are outlined in the quotes- below:

'Given that I am now following on to do a PhD, when I was scraping by in the first two years of my undergrad (before I looked for help from DSA) I would strongly agree that it has led to more staying power in the work environment.'

'The support provided definitely encouraged me to stick with university even through the tough times and I am so grateful I did.'

'The support I received was minimal. Often I could not understand the Readers and they themselves struggled to read my exam papers as they either had English as a second language or they didn't have any knowledge of science (I studied Chemistry). I also had Readers who arrived late to my exams, went to the toilet in the middle of my exams and read books during my exams.'

As expected, the dominant deductive theme apparent within the survey was "employability". Although, 65% of graduates did not feel that NMH support had assisted them in acquiring employment, other graduates felt that the support helped them to develop transferable skills beneficial to workplace performance. These points are exemplified by the following quotations:

'More emphasis on interviewing and employment.'

'I developed organisational skills and time management during my support. This has been useful in all aspects of employment.'

'We didn't specifically cover this area but I think in dealing with another professional person and talking things through with them it gives me confidence that I can express myself clearly and competently with other professionals e.g. in an interview.'

This concludes the results section of the report. The discussion will now bring together the results from the quantitative and qualitative feedback to allow recommendations to be suggested for the future development of NMH support and Queen's Register of Support Providers.

Discussion

As outlined in the Introduction, the purpose of this study was to assess the service supplied by the Queen's Register of the Support Providers over a six year duration from 2008 when the service first came into being. The research question addressed the impact of NMH support on inclusive learning and the student experience in terms of transition, retention, engagement, progression, attainment, aspiration, empowerment and employability. The following two hypotheses were put forward in order to investigate the research question:

1. NMH support utilisation will lead to better student experiences and academic outcomes which will be evaluated by impact on the eight key factors
2. NMH Support utilisation will be influenced by factors such as disability type, age and gender of student.

These hypotheses were tested directly by the quantitative analyses and indirectly explored via the focus group analyses. As the findings have already been discussed within the Results section, they will only be briefly outlined here, together with further explanation for the outcomes. To support the recommendations for the future development of the service, references will be made to relevant literature. In addition, as no research is conducted within a vacuum, every study will have its limitations so these will also be addressed within this section.

Summary of Findings

Hypothesis one was supported by the qualitative analysis which allowed the construction of five key themes which were contingent upon the initial eight key factors. Under the theme of Person Support, it was noted that when support worked well, a consistent and sensitive approach was in operation where a rapport had been developed and both parties were aware of the support boundaries. These factors were of utmost importance for students with ASD who preferred to work with a familiar person and required a structured approach. Person Support was also very important for students in receipt of Note Taker support which was optimal when they were afforded subject-specific note takers.

The theme of Student Acceptance was addressed by the process of acceptance. The less advanced a student was on the process of acceptance, the less likely he or she was to take ownership of their support needs or to utilise the recommended NMH support. This is supported by Richardson (2009) who noted that students with disabilities do not want to be seen as any different to other

students. Less accepting students were also likely to believe that disability disclosure would have a negative impact on his/her studies or career.

Within the theme of Communication, students suggested that they would benefit from communicating with other students who have disabilities. However, the most prevalent factor within this theme was that there are many intermediaries contributing to the miscommunication of information. Fuller et al. (2008) highlighted the importance that communication between intermediaries holds and they suggested that better communication would lead to more effective support for students with disabilities. The current study revealed that the means of communication used by SPs was not always appropriate and that student non-communication could lead to SPs not getting Work Records signed. Poor communication may therefore be linked to complex procedures and systems which other authors have noted prevail in disability support (Hopkins, 2011). SPs also felt that the procedures and systems do not shelter them from being subject to unfeasible expectations. All participant groups were in agreement that a more integrative learning environment needs to be created and suggestions to achieve this were online Work Record sign-off, a more thorough recruitment and vetting process, a review system for SPs, a weaning-off system and the use of NMH utilisation data to judge requests for extensions at the School level. The latter example demonstrates how NMH support needs to be more mainstreamed. Mainstreaming support would empower students because the study demonstrated that when students were educated about their support requirements, they had good outcomes. However, there is still a way to go in terms of mainstreaming NMH support and this is the case in many institutions (Hockings, 2010). Such developments would require a 'holistic approach' (Madriaga, 2007) and normalising the idea of NMH Support within the University and the potential of giving Wi-Fi and QOL access to Support Providers would go a long way in mainstreaming support.

There was much overlap between the qualitative and quantitative results but both types of data helped to provide some backing for Hypothesis Two. It was found that disability type related to the level of support usage. Students with mental health difficulties were the group most likely to use high levels of support. This suggests that by registering with Disability Services, students with mental health conditions ignore the possible stigma attached to their disability as they are aware that they need help to overcome their issues. This was backed up within the key theme of Student Acceptance where it was noted that students were more likely to engage with their NMH support when they had accepted their disability as part of their identity.

In contrast to other types of support, Dyslexia Tutor support usage was more likely to range from no support to low/medium levels of support use as opposed to high levels. However, Figure 3

highlighted that those who used a high level of Dyslexia Tutor support were more likely to achieve a higher 2.1 degree classification than those who used a medium level of support, and those who used no dyslexia support at all were likely to achieve a 2.2 classification. This is a very important finding as high levels of competition in the current job market mean that graduates who achieve a 2.1 are likely to gain better employment more quickly than those with a 2.2. It is necessary to uncover the reasons why students with dyslexia do not use a high level of support and one possible explanation is that, like many students with hidden disabilities, they do not see themselves as having a disability (Fuller, Healey, Bradley & Hall, 2004).

Despite the support for hypothesis two in terms of disability type, the quantitative analysis highlighted no support with regard to two further factors, age and gender. However, the key theme of Student Acceptance revealed that maturity is an important factor in support utilisation and this can be linked indirectly to age. Students noted that they attached less stigma to their support as they progressed through the years and this demonstrates the impact of maturity on a student's stage on the process of acceptance.

Earlier in the section, it was acknowledged that students with mental health difficulties are significantly more likely than other students to use a high level of support. It is important to state that despite this group utilising support, they actually tend to achieve much lower degree marks than those who use a medium level of support or no support at all. It was anticipated that this is because students using the highest levels of support experience their disability as having an intense impact upon their daily functioning and as a result, their difficulties impact negatively on their academic outcomes. The positive here is that, despite achieving the lowest academically of all students receiving tutoring support, the support allowed them to remain at Queen's to complete their degrees. This is noteworthy because often due to the fluctuating nature of mental health conditions, students with this disability tend to drop out of their studies (Richardson, 2010).

In spite of the lack of statistical significance, it is important to note the interesting graphical displays derived from ASD and Study Skills Tutoring support (Figure 3). The fact that students with ASD Tutor support have the best outcomes when they received a high level of support but the poorest outcomes with a medium level of support may relate to the fact that those with ASD need structure to develop their skills as was noted by MacLeod and Green (2009). With only a medium level of support, it was unlikely that the users in this group were using their support in a structured way, unlike those high level users who tended to meet their Tutors on a weekly basis. Another reason why students with ASD may not use support is that if they have a negative experience with a SP, they tend not to ask for a new SP (Fleischer, 2012). The explanation given for this by one student was the feeling that their DO would misunderstand his reasoning (Fleischer). A more serious finding was that of Knott

and Taylor (2014) who stated that those with ASD did not value all of the support they received at university. Some students with ASD felt that social mentoring led to them feeling less included whereas the unofficial support services, like games societies, provided them with a better, more inclusive style of support.

Those who received Study Skills Tutor support tended to achieve lower marks with higher levels of support utilisation. The study revealed that those using a low level of support tended to achieve 2.1s, whereas those using a high proportion of support were more likely to achieve 2.2s. Perhaps this is because students receiving Study Skills Tutor support are a much more diverse group, with disabilities that range from visual impairments to dyspraxia. As such, Study Skills Tutors are presented with a much greater challenge, they may not have the experience necessary to work with students with mental health issues or dyslexia for example. In addition, many students within this group have dyslexia and they may have opted for this form of support as they believed lower levels of stigma are attached to Study Skills Tutoring in comparison to Dyslexia Tutoring. Study Skills Tutoring is not tailored to the specific needs of students with dyslexia as Dyslexia Tutor support is. Hence, students with dyslexia may be disadvantaged by deciding to take Study Skills support instead of Dyslexia Tutor Support. Needs Assessors should therefore encourage students with dyslexia to opt instead for Dyslexia Tutoring support as it provides students with more appropriate support tailored specifically to their disability.

Recommendations

The aforementioned findings have provided the basis for the following recommendations that will now be outlined under the subheadings of NMH Support Recommendations, Systematic and Procedural Recommendations and Mainstreaming Recommendations.

NMH Support Recommendations

The first recommendations link to "employability". One suggestion was that the Careers Service and Disability Services could explore collaborative working options in order to support the transition of students with disabilities from University into the workplace. Another suggestion was the possible extension of the ASD Tutor role into the realm of "employability". The ASD Tutor would be permitted to work with their students on various issues relating to placement and graduate employment. The main reason for this suggestion is because of the nature of their disability, students with ASD may have difficulty working with an unfamiliar person. Students' with ASD will have already formed a rapport with their Tutors by the time they start thinking about placements/graduate employment,

and as such, ASD Tutors are in a prime position to provide support in this area. Moreover, as experts on the sensitivities of those with ASD, ASD Tutors, alongside the Careers Service, would be able to tailor interview awareness specifically to the needs of those on the autistic spectrum. Other institutions, for example the University of Cambridge, already operate systems involving specialist careers advice for students with ASD. This development is of particular importance because students with ASD find it extremely difficult, and in some cases, impossible to secure work placements and graduates with this disability are more likely to be unemployed than other graduates (Hastwell, Harding, Martin & Baron-Cohen, 2014).

Secondly, research has suggested that individually tailored support packages could provide the necessary structure and flexibility needed for those with ASD (MacLeod & Green, 2009). The current study documented that consistency and stability are crucial for a successful outcome from ASD Tutor support. Therefore it is recommended that the notion of tailored support packages is extended to all types of Tutor support. This would mean that staff would be able to monitor more easily and closely the progress of students, plus, having a more targeted approach should help to improve the outcomes associated with Study Skills Tutor support. Additionally, Needs Assessors should be advised that because students tend to perform better when provided with a more specialised type of support, Study Skills tutoring should not be recommended if another option is available such as AMH, Dyslexia or ASD Tutor Support.

Thirdly, it is recommended that, where possible, Note Takers with the appropriate specialised disciplines including science, mathematics, technology and engineering, are assigned to STEM subject students. Without the appropriate STEM subject background knowledge and expertise, Note Takers were unable to take comprehensive and accurate notes. As a result, the playing field may not have been levelled for some students because the notes were not sufficiently comprehensive for examination and coursework preparation. In addition, the mathematical and formula-driven nature of these disciplines means that a Note Taker is a more appropriate recommendation than a Dictaphone. Again, this is something Needs Assessors should keep in mind as it was suggested that a Dictaphone may actually hinder a student's performance in such disciplines.

Systematic and Procedural Recommendations

In line with Fuller et al. (2008), a better system of communication should be established between intermediaries. The following suggestions would help to improve communication channels. Firstly, SPs should be made aware of their student's disability. This means that they could take disability-

related issues into account when meeting their student for the first time and through constructive questioning Note Takers, for example, would be better able to tailor their notes to the student's needs. Currently, the Queen's Register requires Tutors to produce an Interim Report for each of their students but the evaluation process could be advanced by the implementation of a review system. This would involve contacting students half way through the first semester to determine how they are progressing with their NMH support. This would mean that students could report any issues discreetly for resolution at the earliest possible stage, prior to examinations. This converges with the monthly progress reports on SP performance that the University of York implements. Even adding an area to the website or QOL where students could discreetly feed back on their support at any time (as has been done by other institutions) would allow the provision of ongoing feedback.

It was also suggested that SPs are more closely monitored. For example, the University of Leeds operates a system whereby notes are randomly checked and Tutors are required to do several supervised sessions per year. Furthermore, SPs could potentially engage in a more thorough recruitment and vetting process, involving the implementation of a new assessment procedure for new SPs that requires the completion of mandatory practical tests. For example, under test conditions, Note Takers would be required to take comprehensive notes and demonstrate high levels of spelling and grammar and those providing Tutor support would need to demonstrate effective interpersonal skills and an ability to plan comprehensive support sessions.

Moreover, it is suggested that procedures are put in place so that SPs are not subject to unfeasible expectations. The implementation of an Electronic Work Record sign-off system would mean that Work Records are easily confirmed remotely, eliminating the need to meet face-to-face, meaning that students are no longer singled out at lectures. Electronic Work Record sign-off would also eliminate non-communication issues which can lead to payment delays or non-payment. Such a measure has already been sanctioned within other universities, including the University of Cambridge. Furthermore, it is suggested that the paid type-up time for Note Takers is increased to one hour because Note Takers reported being unable to complete their notes in the thirty minutes designated for each hour of note taking. Increased type-up time should mean that notes are of better quality as diligent Note Takers will have more time to write up their extensive notes.

The potential of a support weaning-off system has been postulated so that as the student progresses through their studies, their NMH support is scaled down. The aim of NMH support is to equip students with skills to be self-sufficient, independent learners. However without a weaning-off process they may become overly dependent. The objective of the weaning-off system would be to produce independent graduates equipped with the transferrable skills required in the work place.

However, because of the nature of some disabilities, the system would need to be selectively implemented.

In addition, students have noted that they would like the opportunity to communicate with other students with disabilities, particularly those who have experience of the NMH Support system. Manchester Metropolitan University for example, has instigated a peer mentoring service whereby current students help with the transition of peers with disabilities, while simultaneously developing their own transferrable skills that will be beneficial to them in their search for graduate employment (Equality Challenge Unit, 2014). Taking a slightly different approach, the University of Liverpool has a forum where students with disabilities can discuss their support and get advice and guidance from peers.

Mainstreaming Recommendations

Mainstreaming support is the key to ensuring wider acceptance of NMH support. Promoting student acceptance would result in a variety of beneficial outcomes including diminishing the stigma attached to NMH support. This should result in students taking greater responsibility for and ownership of their support packages, this in turn ensuring that the NMH support is tailored specifically to their needs. As the study revealed, using a high level of structured support can make the difference between students achieving a 2.1 or a 2.2 so enhancing student acceptance is crucial for job market competitiveness. Another suggestion is the provision of services for SPs such as access to Wi-Fi, Queen's Online and Queen's email addresses which would demonstrate the importance the University places on NMH Support and would allow SPs to perform their roles more effectively. Additionally, one suggestion was that academic staff should be given access to information regarding whether or not their students are using their NMH support. This would allow them to make more informed decisions with regards to coursework extensions.

Limitations

In spite of the range of recommendations that have come from this project, every study has limitations and these must be highlighted. Firstly, the focus group participants were recruited via email and as a result would have included a large number of individuals who already had acceptance of their disability. Also, this method of recruitment meant that certain disabilities were underrepresented, for example ASD students because of communication difficulties or students who perceived stigma attached to NMH support. When interpreting the survey results, it was also necessary to remember that many of the individuals who responded to the survey tended to have had either a very good

experience or a very bad experience. Therefore, at this point, it is essential to mention that as the researcher, I was able to ignore incongruent responses, although in some cases these may have arisen through communication or language difficulties.

A methodological short coming with the statistical analysis meant that the same student may have appeared several times from having used the same type(s) of NMH support each year over the duration of their degree programme. The year that the student was in while using the support may have also had an impact on usage. However, as data recording the precise level each student was in while using the support was not kept, it was not possible to break down the support usage by stage. There was no record of whether a student was repeating a year for example. If such data was available, perhaps there would have been more significant results. Furthermore, no baseline scores indicating how students were performing prior to support implementation were available for interpretation. Even for future research, such a baseline would be almost impossible to obtain unless the students had taken the exact same qualification previously. The idea of having a control group who did not receive disability-related support would be unethical and would fail to take account of the premise that each individual, regardless of their disability, has a different starting ability.

Conclusions

Regardless of the limitations, this study provided an excellent insight into student and professional perceptions of NMH support. The overall consensus was that NMH support is very important to the academic achievement of students with disabilities and so the work of the Queen's Register of Support Providers, over the six year period must be highly commended. It is suggested that this research is updated on a yearly basis by small-scale consultations with students conducted by staff. In conclusion, the core premises of the current report are that the views of the students and the associated professionals will be considered alongside the recommendations and that NMH support is delivered as efficiently and effectively as possible, facilitating optimal student achievement and experience, in line with Vision 2020.

Summary of Suggested Recommendations

- Extension of ASD Tutor Role
- Implementation of Support Packages
- Subject-specific Note Takers for STEM students
- Support Providers informed about their students' disabilities

- Review System for Support Providers
- Support Provider recruitment and vetting process
- Electronic Work Record sign-off system
- Increase in Note Taker type-up time
- Support weaning-off system
- Promotion of student acceptance
- Provision of services for Support Providers e.g. Wi-Fi
- Link between NMH support utilisation and in School academic extensions

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Appendices

Appendix A

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Memorandum

To	Clare Donnelly
From	Katrina Lloyd, Chair, Ethics Committee
Date	17 June 2014
Distribution	File
Subject	Ethics Approval for Research Proposal "The impact of non-medical helper support on students with disabilities" submitted on 10/6/2014

The School of Education Ethics Committee has reviewed your proposed study and has granted approval for you to proceed.

- It is important to ensure that you follow the procedures outlined in your submission. Any departure from these may require additional ethical approval.

Note for the principal investigator: it is the responsibility of the investigator to add any research projects involving human participants, their material or data, to the University's Human Subjects Database for insurance purposes. (The Human Subjects Database is accessible through QOL under 'My Research').

The Committee wishes you every success with your research.

Appendix B

Queen's University Belfast

Disability Services

Student Guidance Centre

91a University Road

Belfast

BT7 1NN

Participant Information Sheet

Impact of Support Services on Students with Disabilities

Thank you for expressing an interest in participating in this research project. The project is funded by Queen's Register of Support Providers, with the aim of uncovering the impact that non-medical helper (NMH) support has on students with a disability, at Queen's University Belfast (QUB). This is the first comprehensive assessment of NMH support for students with a disability at QUB since the implementation of the Register of Support Providers in 2008. You have been selected as a participant due to your entitlement to NMH support.

The research will be based partly on the information gathered from focus group discussions and partly on data collected through interviews and surveys. The information obtained through these various methods of data collection will examine whether the NMH services provided to students are operating effectively. In addition, it is hoped that the findings will be presented to key stakeholders including the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL), QUB staff, Support Providers, prospective students, to demonstrate the value and importance of the service and suggest any necessary improvements. Your contributions to these discussions are, therefore, of crucial importance.

Focus groups are a beneficial means of data collection as they allow participants to share their personal experiences which can be expanded upon and critiqued by other group members. Due to extensive analysis required, you would need to consent to the recording of the focus groups via Dictaphone. This recording will be transcribed by qualified audio typists who will be employed by QUB and will commit to safeguard any personal information they may have access to as a result of their work in transcribing focus group recordings. No names will be transcribed and data will all be anonymised via a coding procedure. Any other identifying remarks will be removed to ensure anonymity. Quotations from the focus groups will be used in the final report, to support emergent

themes and the research conclusions. The final report and oral presentations of the findings will not contain data that could lead to the identification of any individual.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and if you decide not to partake, there will be no impact on your studies or any aspect of your life at QUB.

Consent and Withdrawal

After having read the information sheet, if you are happy with the outlined procedure and would like to be a participant, I would ask you to sign and date the attached consent form. You have the right to withdraw and if you wish to do so, you must contact Clare Donnelly (email below).

However, due to the structure of focus groups it would not be possible for the information already collected to be discarded as this could impact on conversation flow. Any questions regarding this should be directed to Clare Donnelly (see below).

- **It is imperative that everything discussed within the focus group remains confidential.**
- **According to QUB regulations, data will be stored securely for at least 5 years after the study is completed.**
- **This project has been granted ethical approval from the School of Education Ethics Committee at QUB**

- Thank you for reading this information and if you have any further queries do not hesitate to contact Clare Donnelly at clare.donnelly@qub.ac.uk.
- If you would like more information regarding service provision or disability support please contact Disability Services at disability.office@qub.ac.uk
- If any issues raised in the focus group or interviews have caused you distress, do not hesitate to contact counselling at qubstudents@carecallwellbeing.com

Disability Services

Student Guidance Centre

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Participant Information Sheet

Support Provider Perspective

Thank you for expressing an interest in participating in this research project. The project is funded by Queen's Register of Support Providers, with the aim of uncovering the impact that non-medical helper (NMH) support has on students with a disability, at Queen's University Belfast (QUB). This is the first comprehensive assessment of NMH support for students with a disability at QUB since the implementation of the Register of Support Providers in 2008. You have been selected as a participant as you provide NMH support to students.

The research will be based partly on the information gathered from focus group discussions and partly on data collected through interviews and surveys. The information obtained through these various methods of data collection will examine whether the NMH services provided to students are operating effectively. In addition, it is hoped that the findings will be presented to key stakeholders including the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL), QUB staff, Support Providers prospective students, to demonstrate the value and importance of the service and suggest any necessary improvements. Your contributions to these discussions are, therefore, of crucial importance.

Focus groups are a beneficial means of data collection as they allow participants to share their personal experiences which can be expanded upon and critiqued by other group members. Due to extensive analysis required, you would need to consent to the recording of the focus groups via Dictaphone. This recording will be transcribed by qualified audio typists who will be employed by QUB and will commit to safeguard any personal information they may have access to as a result of their work in transcribing focus group recordings. No names will be transcribed and data will all be anonymised via a coding procedure. Any other identifying remarks will be removed to ensure anonymity. Quotations from the focus groups will be used in the final report, to support emergent

themes and the research conclusions. The final report and oral presentations of the findings will not contain data that could lead to the identification of any individual.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and if you decide not to partake, there will be no impact on your job or any aspect of your life at QUB.

Consent and Withdrawal

After having read the information sheet, if you are happy with the outlined procedure and would like to be a participant, I would ask you to sign and date the attached consent form. You have the right to withdraw and if you wish to do so, you must contact Clare Donnelly (email below).

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Participant Information Sheet

Support Services – A Staff Perspective

Thank you for expressing an interest in participating in this research project. The project is funded by Queen's Register of Support Providers, with the aim of uncovering the impact that non-medical helper (NMH) support has on students with a disability, at Queen's University Belfast (QUB). This is the first comprehensive assessment of NMH support for students with a disability at QUB since the implementation of the Register of Support Providers in 2008. You have been selected as a participant due to your professional association with students in receipt of NMH support.

The research will be based partly on the information gathered from focus group discussions and partly on data collected through interviews and surveys. The information obtained through these various methods of data collection will examine whether the NMH services provided to students are operating effectively. In addition, it is hoped that the findings will be presented to key stakeholders including the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL), QUB staff, Support Providers prospective students, to demonstrate the value and importance of the service and suggest any necessary improvements. Your contributions to these discussions are, therefore, of crucial importance.

Focus groups are a beneficial means of data collection as they allow participants to share their personal experiences which can be expanded upon and critiqued by other group members. Due to extensive analysis required, you would need to consent to the recording of the focus groups via Dictaphone. This recording will be transcribed by qualified audio typists who will be employed by QUB and will commit to safeguard any personal information they may have access to as a result of their work in transcribing focus group recordings. No names will be transcribed and data will all be anonymised via a coding procedure. Any other identifying remarks will be removed to ensure anonymity. Quotations from the focus groups will be used in the final report, to support emergent

themes and the research conclusions. The final report and oral presentations of the findings will not contain data that could lead to the identification of any individual.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and if you decide not to partake, there will be no impact on your job or any aspect of your life at QUB.

Consent and Withdrawal

After having read the information sheet, if you are happy with the outlined procedure and would like to be a participant, I would ask you to sign and date the attached consent form. You have the right to withdraw and if you wish to do so, you must contact Clare Donnelly (email below).

However, due to the structure of focus groups it would not be possible for the information already collected to be discarded as this could impact on conversation flow. Any questions regarding this should be directed to Clare Donnelly (see below).

- **It is imperative that everything discussed within the focus group remains confidential.**
- **According to QUB regulations, data will be stored securely for at least 5 years after the study is completed.**
- **This project has been granted ethical approval from the School of Education Ethics Committee at QUB.**

- Thank you for reading this information and if you have any further queries do not hesitate to contact Clare Donnelly at clare.donnelly@qub.ac.uk.
- If you would like more information regarding service provision or disability support please contact Disability Services at disability.office@qub.ac.uk
- If any issues raised in the focus group or interviews have caused you distress, do not hesitate to contact counselling at qubstudents@carecallwellbeing.com

Appendix C

Queen's University Belfast

Disability Services
Student Guidance Centre
91a University Road
Belfast
BT7 1NN

Participant Consent Form

- I _____ (PARTICIPANT NAME) consent to taking part in this research project on the non-medical helper support provided to students with disabilities.
- I have read the attached participation information sheet and am aware of the associated implications and that I have the right to withdraw at any stage up until the point of data being anonymously coded.
- I am aware that my anonymity will be maintained and that my name will not appear on any reports.
- I fully understand that this research may be published as a journal article.

☐ I **AGREE** to take part in a focus group.

☐ I **DO NOT AGREE** to take part in the above research.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Consent forms can be returned to Clare Donnelly at the above address or handed in on the day of the focus group.

Appendix D

Student Transcript

- Meet and Greet
- Labels and pens
- Get Lunch – encourage the participants to chat amongst each other.
- Get everyone to **sit down** and give them the **information sheet and consent forms. Ask if they would like me to read it out before we start.** Ensure everyone has returned the consent forms prior to starting and ensure they are signed.
- Ensure everyone is happy with being recorded.
- Start focus group.
- Explain what the study is about
- *My name is Clare. I am looking at the impact of Non-Medical Helper support, provided by Queen's Register of Support Providers – we want to know your experiences as this is the only way we will be able to provide the best service for future students. This is very much a discussion and I will take a back seat and let you talk to each other. I will introduce and maybe steer people if we are going off in the wrong direction. So I want you to talk to each other, rather than me. Also, for the purpose of the recording, it is very important that only one person speaks at a time. If you have a point to make ensure the previous person has finished speaking first. I may make notes at times.*
- (not their personal experience in great detail as that could end up breaching confidentiality and anonymity)
- **CONFIDENTIALITY**
- **Anything that an individual discloses within this environment may be a sensitive issue to them about their disability and therefore should not be discussed outside this safe environment.**
- **After having read the information sheets and signed the consent forms, does everyone understand what we are doing?**
- **Does everyone understand that withdrawal is possible right up until the end of the focus group – after that data is anonymised and will not be able to be identified? Great!**
- **Any other questions? Does anyone need the term non-medical support verified?**
- **I want everyone to introduce themselves for the purpose of the recording. I'll go first I'm Clare and I am the group facilitator.**
- Everyone Introduced.

How do you feel about Disability Services?

- See what comes from this first point very open ended and then decide where to move on from there
- If it doesn't move to the support direct them towards their non-medical helper support.

Prompts for me

- Support providers
- Benefits/ problems with the support.
- How many hours of NMH have you used? Is there a reason for this?
- Transition to university
- Retention at university
- Engagement
- Has NMH impacted on your attainment?
- Socially / University Life as a whole? Life changing impacts
- Employment
- Any stigma to NMH?
- Enough awareness of NMH?
- Has support provided transferrable skills?
- Has anyone else had a similar experience?
- That's fantastic z but...
- Very interesting...I notice Y is being very quiet what do you think about this?

Thank-you for taking part! You have been fantastic and have provided me with a great insight into the student's view of the non-medical helper support at Queen's. I hope you enjoyed it and would be happy to take part in future research. I will give you some cards and you can give them to any of your friends who received support and tell them to contact me, if interested.

Support Provider Transcript

- Meet and Greet
- Labels and pens
- Get Lunch – encourage the participants to chat amongst each other.

- Get everyone to **sit down** and give them the **information sheet and consent forms. Ask if they would like me to read it out before we start.** Ensure everyone has returned the consent forms prior to starting and ensure they are signed.
- Ensure everyone is happy with being recorded.
- Start focus group.
- Explain what the study is about
- *My name is Clare. I am looking at the impact of Non-Medical Helper support, provided by Queen's Register of Support Providers – we want to know your experiences as this is the only way we will be able to provide the best service for future students and support providers. This is very much a discussion and I will take a back seat and let you talk to each other. I will introduce and maybe steer people if we are going off in the wrong direction. So I want you to talk to each other, rather than me. Also, for the purpose of the recording, it is very important that only one person speaks at a time. If you have a point to make ensure the previous person has finished speaking first. I may make notes at times.*
- (not their personal experience in great detail as that could end up breaching confidentiality and anonymity)
- **CONFIDENTIALITY**
- **Anything that an individual discloses within this environment may be a sensitive issue and therefore should not be discussed outside this safe environment.**
- **After having read the information sheets and signed the consent forms, does everyone understand what we are doing?**
- **Does everyone understand that withdrawal is possible right up until the end of the focus group – after that data is anonymised and will not be able to be identified? Great!**
- **Any other questions?** Does anyone need the term non-medical support verified? (Not really with support providers)
- **I want everyone to introduce themselves for the purpose of the recording. I'll go first I'm Clare and I am the group facilitator.**
- Everyone Introduced.

How do you feel about Disability Services/ Register of Support Providers?
How do you view your role?

- See what comes from this first point very open ended and then decide where to move on from there
- If it doesn't move to the support direct them towards their non-medical helper support.

Prompts for me

- **Non-Medical Helper Support and STUDENTS**
- **Benefits/problems with the support.**
- **Students not using support**
- **Non-communication of students**
- **Do students want you to go beyond the remit of your role?**
- **Pinpointing aspects of the Register's provision that could be changed/ developed/ enhanced/ improved?**
- **Any gaps in current provision?**
- Transition to university
- Retention at university
- Engagement
- **Do you feel NMH impacts on attainment or any of the above factors?**
- Socially / University Life as a whole? Life changing impacts
- Employment
- **Any stigma to NMH?**
- **Enough awareness of NMH? And the requirements of students taking the support.**
- Has support provided transferrable skills?
- Has anyone else had a similar experience?
- That's fantastic z but...
- Very interesting...I notice Y is being very quiet what do you think about this?

Thank-you for taking part! You have been fantastic and have provided me with a great insight into the Support Provider's view of the non-medical helper support at Queen's. I hope you enjoyed it and would be happy to take part in future research. I will give you some cards and you can give them to any of your friends who you think might be interested in this project.

DA Transcript

- Meet and Greet
- Labels and pens
- Get Lunch – encourage the participants to chat amongst each other.

- Get everyone to **sit down** and give them the **information sheet and consent forms. Ask if they would like me to read it out before we start.** Ensure everyone has returned the consent forms prior to starting and ensure they are signed.
- Ensure everyone is happy with being recorded.
- Start focus group.
- Explain what the study is about
- *My name is Clare. I am looking at the impact of Non-Medical Helper support, provided by Queen's Register of Support Providers. You have been invited here today because you all perform the role of Disability Adviser within your respective schools. I want to know about your experience in your role and your subjective opinions on how students are supported by yourselves, Disability Services and the Register of Support Providers. Your contributions to discussions will help Disability Services and the Register to provide the best service for future students. This is very much a discussion and I will take a back seat and let you talk to each other. I will introduce and maybe steer people if we are going off in the wrong direction. So I want you to talk to each other, rather than me. Also, for the purpose of the recording, it is very important that only one person speaks at a time. If you have a point to make ensure the previous person has finished speaking first. I may make notes at times.*
- (not their personal experience in great detail as that could end up breaching confidentiality and anonymity)
- **CONFIDENTIALITY**
- **Anything that an individual discloses within this environment may be a sensitive issue linked to a student's disability and therefore should not be discussed outside this safe environment.**
- **After having read the information sheets and signed the consent forms, does everyone understand what we are doing?**
- **Does everyone understand that withdrawal is possible right up until the end of the focus group – after that data is anonymised and will not be able to be identified? Great!**
- **Any other questions? Does anyone need the term non-medical support verified?**
- **I want everyone to introduce themselves (name & school) for the purpose of the recording. I'll go first I'm Clare and I am the group facilitator.**
- Everyone Introduced.

We will start with and general question

What do you see as the role of a Disability Adviser?

- See what comes from this first point very open ended and then decide where to move on from here

Prompts for me

- How well do you feel **supported** by Disability Services / the Register of Support Providers?
- Do you think the **communication** between the different services could be better? – **more/less communication with DOs/SPs**
- Do some subjects need **subject specific recommendations**? – Some recommendations are **inappropriate to certain subjects**.
- Were you assigned your role? Compelled.
- Do **students understand** your role? Have an awareness of the DA's **existence**.
- Should there be a **greater promotion** of the **DA role/DS** in general?
- Your **subjective view** on how beneficial the services provided to students are. Do they help 'level the playing field'?
- Do you feel that **your role** and **the role of Disability Services** aids the **transition to university/retention/engagement/attainment/aspirations** of students with disabilities?
- Issues with **Students – Too many points of contact for students?/Confusion**
- Issues with support providers
- **Understanding of the role of the support provider** – Do they try to go **beyond the remit**? What are the **boundaries for communication with support providers and staff? (Exam scribes etc.)** Would it be helpful to students if there was more communication?
- Knowing the nature of the student's disability?
- Enough **awareness of disability within the population in general/ the student population/ staff**?
- Is there **enough awareness of NMH**?
- Is there any **stigma** attached to NMH?
- Any **social impact** for the student?
- Do you feel that the services that are provided lead to **transferrable skills into employment?**
- **Are there any ways that you think the services could be improved or developed?**

- Has anyone else had a similar experience?
- That's fantastic z but...
- Very interesting...I notice Y is being very quiet what do you think about this?

Thank-you for taking part! You have been fantastic and have provided me with a great insight into the Disability Adviser's view of the non-medical helper support at Queen's. I hope you enjoyed it and would be happy to take part in future research.

Disability Services Staff Transcript

- Meet and Greet / Lunch

- Give everyone the **information sheet and consent forms.** Ensure everyone has returned the consent forms prior to starting and ensure they are signed.
- Ensure everyone is happy with being recorded.
- Start focus group.
- Explain what the study is about
- *As you already know, I am looking at the impact of Non-Medical Helper support, provided by Queen's Register of Support Providers. You have been invited here today because you all work in Disability Services at Queen's. I want to know about your experience and your subjective opinions on how students are supported by the Register of Support Providers. Your contributions to discussions will help Disability Services and the Register to provide the best service for future students. This is very much a discussion and I will take a back seat and let you talk to each other. I will introduce and maybe steer people if we are going off in the wrong direction. So I want you to talk to each other, rather than me. Also, for the purpose of the recording, it is very important that only one person speaks at a time. If you have a point to make ensure the previous person has finished speaking first. I may make notes at times.*
- (not their personal experience in great detail as that could end up breaching confidentiality and anonymity)
- You will already be aware of most of these points but I have to state have them on tape for ethical reasons!
- **CONFIDENTIALITY – As you will be very much aware of due to the various roles you perform – the importance of confidentiality – you will be aware that quotations may be used in the final report –the identity of individuals who are quoted will not be revealed, however the report will state 'a member of staff'.**
- **Anything that an individual discloses within this environment may be a sensitive issue linked to a student's disability and therefore should not be discussed outside this safe environment.**
- **After having read the information sheets and signed the consent forms, does everyone understand what we are doing?**
- **Does everyone understand that withdrawal is possible right up until the end of the focus group – after that data is anonymised and cannot be identified? Great!**
- **Any other questions?**

We will start with a question

How do you feel about NMH support?

- See what comes from this first point very open ended and then decide where to move on from here

Prompts for me

- Is there **enough awareness of NMH**?
- Is there any **stigma** attached to NMH?
- **The role of the support provider** – Do they try to go **beyond the remit**? What are the **boundaries for communication with support providers and staff**? Would it be helpful to students if there was more communication?
- **Knowing the nature of the student's disability – should support providers know this? They feel that it would greatly help the service they provide.**
- Do you think the **communication** between the different links in the chain could be better? **– more/less communication with students/support providers/ schools**
- Issues with **Students – Too many points of contact for students?/Confusion**
- Should there be a **greater promotion** of **DS** in general?
- Do you feel that **NMH** aids the **transition to university/ retention/engagement/aspirations** of students with disabilities?
- Enough **awareness of disability within the population in general/ the student population/ staff**?
- Any **social impact** for the student?
- Do you feel that NMH develops **transferrable skills for employment**?
- **Are there any ways that you think the services could be improved or developed?**

- Has anyone else had a similar experience?
- That's fantastic z but...
- Very interesting...I notice Y is being very quiet what do you think about this?

Thank-you for taking part! You have been fantastic and have provided me with a great insight into the Disability Staff view of the non-medical helper support at Queens.

Appendix E

Queen's Register of Support Providers

Student Contract

Queen's Register of Support Providers arranges non-medical support for disabled students. Our qualified and experienced Support Providers are self-employed and do not work on a voluntary basis. Support Providers assist students in the following roles:

Note Takers	Maths & Statistics Tutors	Asperger's Autism Tutors	Academic Mental Health Tutors
Study Skills Tutors	Dyslexia Tutors	Readers	Exam Scribes
Campus Assistants	Proof Readers	Foreign Language Tutors	Typists
Library Assistants	Audio Typists	Interpreters	IT Tutors

Non-medical support is intended to 'level the playing field' between you and your non-disabled peers by allowing you to fully access teaching, learning and assessment at Queen's. As such, it is extremely important that you engage with the support process, take ownership of your own learning experience and manage your non-medical support effectively.

Student Responsibilities

All students receiving non-medical support through Support Providers must:

- Regularly check your 'phone/Queen's email account for messages from Support Providers.
- Respond quickly to messages about arranging to meet with your Support Provider.
- Familiarise yourself with the support roles for which you have been referred (please see p4 of the 'Students' Guide to Queen's Register of Support Providers' which includes brief outlines of the various job descriptions and our web site: www.qub.ac.uk/directorates/sgc/disability/SupportProviders/)
- Be clear about what to expect and the limitations of the support for which you have been referred (see above).
- Respect the professional boundaries of the working relationship - do not ask your Support Provider to provide support beyond the remit of their support role(s) (see above).
- Be aware that support is not subject-specific.
- Ensure that you make yourself available to your Support Provider(s) to sign off their Work Record so they may be paid (Support Providers do not work on a voluntary basis).
- Give your Support Provider at least 24 hours notice where possible if you are no longer able to attend and have to cancel a support session or class.
- Advise your Support Provider and Disability Services of any changes to your contact details, particularly to your mobile or home telephone number(s).
- Advise Disability Services and your Support Provider of any temporary or permanent withdrawals from study.
- Report any problems immediately so that corrective action may be quickly implemented.
- Stop working with your Support Provider after the last day of the summer exam period, even if you have hours left (unless you are a postgraduate student or you have re-sit exams/re-submissions to prepare for over the summer and a prior arrangement to continue has been made with your Disability Officer/funding body).

Complaints Procedure

The majority of students are happy with the support arranged for them through the Register. However, if you have a complaint about the support you are receiving, a particular Support Provider you are working with or an issue with the Register itself, please refer to our Complaints Procedure at www.qub.ac.uk/directorates/sgc/disability/SupportProviders/InformationforStudentsReceivingAssistancefromSupportProviders/

Student Responsibilities: Note Taker Support

Students receiving Note Taker support have **additional responsibilities**. Students must:

- Confirm in advance with your Note Taker(s) the **timetable details** of relevant classes ie the days/times/venues. **Please note:** the Register only has access to timetable information on QSIS and often this is out-of-date, inaccurate and/or incomplete.
- Let your Note Taker(s) know as soon as possible if there have been **changes** to class times/venues.
- Clarify **how you want your notes written up** and structured (eg narrative vs bullet points).
- Clarify which **font size and style** works best for you.
- Confirm the **turnaround time** for the return of notes.
- Ensure that you and your Support Provider have completed a **Statement of Agreement** to reflect the aforementioned.
- **Attend all classes** unless it has been agreed in advance with your Disability Officer that the Note Taker may attend in your absence if you are off for reasons relating to your disability.
- **Arrange to meet with your Note Taker after class to sign off their Work Record** or make alternative arrangements for meeting away from class if you prefer your Note Taker support to be discrete.

Please note: students are under no obligation to use Note Taker support arranged by the Register. Although this facility is available for student convenience, students are free to engage their own Note Takers or to use Assistive Technology (AT) instead such as dictaphones or Livescribe pen recorders. **If you would like to arrange your own Note Taker cover or would like to swap Note Taker support for AT, please contact your Disability Officer to discuss.**

Please also note that the Register **cannot guarantee 100% class cover** for students receiving Note Taker support for a variety of reasons including unscheduled timetable/venue changes, inaccurate/incomplete timetable information and *Note Taker availability.

*Like anyone else, Note Takers may have to take time off to attend appointments, deal with family problems, illness etc. As they are self-employed, they are also free to schedule their own working days/weeks and to take up or refuse any offers of work from the Register.

IF IN DOUBT, CONTACT US:

Disability Services
90 975251; disability.office@qub.ac.uk

Queen's Register of Support Providers
90 975275; supportprovider@qub.ac.uk

Queen's Register of Support Providers

Student Contract

I have discussed the above student responsibilities with my Needs Assessor/Disability Officer and I agree to abide by them in relation to any non-medical support arranged for me through Queen's Register of Support Providers:

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Please return to:

Queen's Register of Support Providers
Disability Services
Student Guidance Centre
Queen's University Belfast
BT7 1NN
Tel: 028 90 972727
Email: supportprovider@qub.ac.uk;
Web: www.qub.ac.uk/directorates/sgc/disability/SupportProviders/

Appendix F

Queen's Register of Support Providers

Code of Conduct for Support Providers

Introduction

Queen's Register of Support Providers is a service that provides one-to-one academic support through Support Providers for disabled students studying at Queen's University. As such, Queen's Register of Support Providers exists primarily to meet the needs of the students whilst simultaneously supporting and providing guidance to those Support Providers who deliver the support.

Support Providers are self-employed individuals who provide a variety of non-medical academic support (see below) to students to assist them develop strategies to overcome the academic challenges associated with their particular disabilities. Support is tailored to meet the individual needs of the student. **All Support Providers are self-employed, are engaged on a freelance basis and do not become employees of Queen's University.**

Support Provider Roles	
Study Skills Tutor	Note Taker
Campus Assistant	Maths & Statistics Tutor
Dyslexia Tutor	Academic Mental Health Tutor
Exam Scribe	Asperger's / Autism Tutor
Foreign Language Tutor	Proof Reader
Reader	Library Assistant
IT Tutor	Typist
Interpreter (BSL & ISL)	Audio Typist

This document is a Code of Conduct which all Support Providers must agree to upon joining Queen's Register of Support Providers. Please carefully read through the document and complete and return **as soon as possible**, to Queen's Register of Support Providers, the **Declaration form** at the end of this document.

Recruitment and Selection

All Support Providers go through Queen's Register of Support Providers' recruitment and selection procedure before being considered for one of the support roles. Following short listing, interviews take place and Support Providers are asked a range of questions in relation to the role(s) they have applied for.

If successful at interview, Support Providers must complete and forward to Queen's Register of Support Providers, the following:

- A signed **Declaration form** (at the end of this document).
- **Non-Staff Payment (NSP) forms** (see Payments through Queen's for further information) and documentation to support your Right to Work in the UK or
- A letter from HM Revenue & Customs stating your **Unique Taxpayer Reference** (UTR)

Only when Queen's Register of Support Providers has received the above documents, plus at least one satisfactory reference, will your details be added to our database.

Employment

All Support Providers are engaged on a freelance basis and are not employees of Queen's University. All payments made to Support Providers by the local Education and Library Boards/Business Services organisation (BSO) on behalf of individual students do not include any tax or national insurance contributions and as such, **Support Providers are responsible for their own tax returns.** Queen's Register of Support Providers does not accept responsibility for forwarding information regarding individual Support Providers to HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC).

Payment via Work Records

Support Providers are paid monthly on submission of accurate and complete Work Records. Incomplete or incorrect Work Records cannot be processed for payment (for further information see Work Record Guidance Notes). Work Records should be checked thoroughly by both the Support Provider and the student. Support Providers are responsible for ensuring all Work Records are completed correctly and submitted to Queen's Register of Support Providers on time, in accordance with the monthly payment schedule (for return deadlines see Work Record Payment Schedule). Work Records must be submitted monthly and **should not be 'held back'** by Support Providers until the end of the semester/year as Queen's Register of Support Providers monitors the number of hours of support being used.

The Work Record proformas have been designed to allow for sign-off at the end of each session. It is important to ensure that your Work Records are signed off regularly as **unsigned Work Record entries will not be paid and cannot**, in most instances, be countersigned instead by the student's Disability Officer. Please also note that for audit purposes, only original signatures are acceptable – scanned, photocopied or initialled (unless this is the student's normal signature) Work Records cannot be processed for payment. If you have completed work for a student and you have not, for some reason, been able to arrange to meet to get your Work Record(s) signed off, please refer to the guidance on Difficulties Contacting Students and Getting Work Records Signed.

Please do not leave Work Records at the Information Desk, Student Guidance Centre, for signature. There is no arrangement for this facility between the Register and the Information Desk. It is not something that the Register is in a position to monitor and as such, the Register cannot guarantee the security of the student information on the Work Record or any personal information (address, bank details) that you have given on the proforma.

Payments Through Queen's

Where a student's support is funded by Disability Services, European Social Fund (ESF) or one of the GB funding bodies such as Student Finance England, or where a class has been cancelled / re-scheduled by the University causing a missed session, the support will be paid for via Queen's. To receive such payments, new Support Providers will be asked to register with one of the Queen's payment systems. If you are registered with HMRC as self-employed, you will need to forward to the Register a letter from your accountant or HM Revenue & Customs stating your UTR (Unique Tax Payer Reference number). As you are registered as self-employed and responsible for your own tax returns, payments will be received in full. Support Providers not registered as self-employed will be

asked instead to complete a Non-Staff Payment (NSP) form. Any payments made through the NSP system will have tax taken off at source.

Guarantees of Work and Levels of Work

As the service is very much a student-focused one, Support Providers are allocated to students based on student requirements and the skills/experience of the Support Provider. Unfortunately therefore, **Queen's Register of Support Providers cannot ever guarantee levels of work.** This is for a variety of reasons but mainly these relate to the students themselves:

- It is the student's choice as to whether or not they decide to take up the support recommended by their Disability Officer;
- It is the student's decision as to whether they continue with the support or with the particular Support Provider allocated to them;
- A student may decide at any stage to temporarily suspend their studies;
- A student may withdraw (or be withdrawn) from the University, either for reasons relating to their disabilities or for purely academic reasons;
- Incomplete/inaccurate timetables and schedule changes in the first few weeks of semester (the timetables sent to Note Takers should be used as starting points only which is why Note Takers are asked to check timetable information directly with students before commencing support);
- The majority of students referred to the Register are undergraduates and as such, there is very little work for Support Providers over the summer months.

Support provision is work that requires a lot of flexibility and because the Register is unable to provide guarantees of work, it may not be a viable option for those looking for a steady, regular income throughout the year. Equally, Support Providers are under no obligation to accept any of the support work offered to them by Queen's Register of Support Providers and they are free to leave the Register at any time, either on a temporary basis or permanently.

Matching Students with Support Providers

After joining Queen's Register of Support Providers, Support Providers will be matched with particular students. Support Providers will be given, in writing via email, the student's contact details, support needs and the total number of hours of support allocated. **It is the responsibility of the Support Provider to make initial contact with the student and to arrange a first meeting.** After initial contact has been made between the Support Provider and the student, both parties thereafter have equal responsibility for arranging further support meetings. Please note that as the Register cannot disclose the nature of a student's disability to their Support Provider(s), you are encouraged to discuss with your student(s) their particular support needs when you first meet with them.

All support is arranged for students by Queen's Register of Support Providers. As such, Support Providers should not agree to and provide students with any support outside of this format. Support must be arranged formally through Queen's Register of Support Providers otherwise Support Providers run the risk of not being reimbursed for support that has not been officially sanctioned.

Recommended Support

Please note that the support recommended for students follows from an extensive one-to-one needs assessment interview with a Needs Assessor / Disability Officer. During the needs assessment, the various types of support available and their advantages and disadvantages will have been discussed and the student will have agreed to a particular support package. Support Providers, especially those in Tutor roles, should not therefore suggest to their students that they are 'entitled' to particular software, alternative assessment, extensions on assignments etc. **It is unfair to raise a student's hopes of accessing a particular type of support if the need cannot be justified.**

If, however, your student's support needs change or they would like to review their current support package at any stage, please encourage them to make an appointment with their Disability Officer as soon as possible to discuss what options are available to them. **It is the student, not the Support Provider, who should approach the Disability Officer about issues relating to their support.**

Hours and Location of Support

Support Providers should note carefully the hours allocated to them and keep a record of the number of hours used to date. **Do not exceed the total number of hours of support detailed on your letter of confirmation** as you will run the risk of not being paid for support given over and above the original hours allocated to you. If you find that your student has only 5 hours of support remaining and your student thinks that additional hours may be required, please ask the student to contact their Disability Officer to request more hours. Please also advise Queen's Register of Support Providers.

Support Providers should be punctual for support meetings. If support has to be cancelled for any reason, as much advance notice as possible should be given to the student and to Queen's Register of Support Providers if a replacement is to be organised in the interim. The minimum notice required, where possible, is 24 hours.

Support must not take place in either the home of a Support Provider or a student. Support should be provided in a neutral public space, where both parties feel secure eg the University Library, public libraries, cafés or in the bookable rooms in the Student Guidance Centre, McClay Library etc (see Places to Work with Your Students for more information).

Documentation

Support Providers are responsible for returning to Queen's Register of Support Providers, a number of documents including:

- A Statement of Agreement for each support relationship, excluding one-off Note Taker covers;
- Monthly Work Records;
- Learning Plans (for those Support Providers providing Tutoring support);
- Interim Report (again, only for those Support Providers providing Tutoring support).

Finally, at the end of each academic year, Support Providers will be asked to complete an online evaluation questionnaire. This is important as it helps Queen's Register of Support Providers evaluate the support provided to students that year. It also gives Support Providers an opportunity to feed back on various aspects of the Register and to make comments and suggestions for enhancing / improving.

Student Responsibilities

For a summary of the students' responsibilities towards their Support Providers, please see the Student Contract which students are asked to sign at their needs assessment interview.

Student Attendance

Students with note taking support (for lectures, tutorials and/or practical classes) must still attend classes. Whilst the student may not wish to sit beside you or liaise with you during class, he/she must attend the class themselves. Support Providers are not there to attend in lieu of students. Only in very special circumstances may the Support Provider attend the class alone if the student is absent for disability-related reasons. This type of support must be arranged in advance through the student's Disability Officer and if applicable, you will be notified of this in advance. In a large lecture hall it can be difficult to spot your student so please check with the student to confirm his/her attendance.

If you find your student is not attending class, stop note taking for them. Let Queen's Register of Support Providers know immediately and do not write up any of your notes. The student's Disability Officer will be apprised of the situation and appropriate action will be taken. Similarly, if you become aware of a significant downturn in the student's condition, you should again report to Queen's Register of Support Providers and the information will be passed on to the student's Disability Officer.

If your student does miss or cancel a session with less than 24 hours notice, you will be paid for the first hour of that session. Payment for support sessions may be suspended if valid reasons are not provided by the student for the benefit of the Education and Library Boards/BSO. As clarification must come from the students themselves, please ensure that they countersign a Missed / Cancelled Sessions Proforma and attach this to the relevant Work Record claim.

After paying for two consecutive cancelled sessions, payment of support will be suspended by the student's funding Board pending an investigation of the extenuating circumstances which resulted in the cancelled appointments. If there are no mitigating circumstances, funding for the support may cease. For this reason it is essential that you stop providing support to your student until the situation has been resolved and notify the Register immediately otherwise you run the risk of not being remunerated for any subsequent support provided.

Supporting Undergraduate Students over the Summer Months

If you have been asked to continue to support your undergraduate student beyond the end of the second semester (ie after the exams and over the summer months), this must be agreed in advance with the Education & Library Boards/BSO, even if your student has enough hours left to accommodate their requirements. Please ask your student to contact their Disability Officer directly and he/she will make a case for the student to the relevant Board. If you do give support to students without this prior agreement in place, you run the risk of not being paid for that support as it was provided outside of semester time. Please note that this arrangement applies only to summer and not to the Christmas and Easter holiday periods.

Training

An Induction session(s) and a number of non-accredited and accredited training programmes will be provided throughout the year for Support Providers. Newcomers are expected to attend the Induction session. All Support Providers are encouraged to attend any training of interest as well as those courses of direct relevance to their Support Provider role(s). Participation in a number of core training courses will be expected of the following categories of Support Provider:

- Dyslexia Tutors - Study Skills Training; related Assistive Technology (AT) training
- Study Skills Tutors - Study Skills and Mental Health Awareness Training
- Academic Mental Health Tutors - Study Skills and Mental Health Awareness Training
- Asperger's/Autism Tutors – Study Skills and Mental Health Awareness Training

Guidance Documents

A range of guidance documents and other information for Support Providers has been made available on the Disability Services Web site at www.qub.ac.uk/directorates/sgc/disability/SupportProviders/

Support Providers are expected to read and digest those guidance documents that are of most relevance to the Support Provider role(s) they are undertaking or hope to undertake, and should contact Queen's Register of Support Providers if they have any other queries.

Health and Safety

Support Providers must be mindful of their individual health and safety and that of the student they are working with. **Support Providers should not engage in the personal care of any student or any manual handling or lifting.**

Keeping in Touch

The main mode of contact with Support Providers is via email so it is important that as a Support Provider, you check your email account regularly for support opportunities and other communications from Queen's Register of Support Providers.

As the Register conveys your contact details (email address and mobile 'phone number) to the students with whom you are matched, it is important to let us know as soon as possible if you change your email account, mobile 'phone number or address.

Professional Conduct

All Support Providers are requested to follow a number of protocols for professional conduct:

- **Professional boundaries** should be maintained when supporting students and support relationships should not become too involved or over-supportive.
- Support Providers should generally **not accept or encourage gifts** from any students they may be working with. All gifts should be detailed with Queen's Register of Support Providers upon receipt and the Register will give advice on the appropriate action to take.
- Support Providers are expected to deliver **high quality support** to all students, irrespective of the student's age, gender, race, disability, sexual orientation, religious or community background.
- Support Providers should **practice only within the boundaries** of their skill competencies and under no circumstances, give academic or personal advice to students outside of the remit of

their Support Provider role(s) (see Job Descriptions and Personnel Specifications for further information).

- Support Providers must ensure that assignments and projects are always the student's own work.
- The support delivered should be in line with any recommendations conveyed to you by Queen's Register of Support Providers at allocation.
- If the nature or level of support is found to be inappropriate, please advise your student to speak with their Disability Officer directly to arrange for a reassessment of their support needs.
- Support Providers should not act as intermediaries between students and academic staff. Any concerns regarding academic progress should be reported to Queen's Register of Support Providers and this will be conveyed to the student's Disability Officer for following up.
- Students are expected to meet a number of responsibilities (see Student Contract for further information) when using support arranged via Queen's Register of Support Providers. You should contact Queen's Register of Support Providers at the earliest opportunity if you are experiencing difficulties in relation to particular students.

Confidentiality

Support Providers are required to keep confidential all information relating to the individual students they are working with. Support should be delivered in a discreet and private manner and Support Providers must respect the privacy of disabled students.

Support Providers should only breach confidentiality if they are concerned about the welfare or well-being of any student they are working with, in particular if the student may be at risk to themselves or to others. Any such concerns should be highlighted to Queen's Register of Support Providers as soon as possible and these will be investigated by the student's Disability Officer. There are a number of sources of support for students both within and outside of the University. Please see Sources of Support for Students in Distress for further information and contact details.

Safeguarding Student Information

As a Support Provider, you will be given some information on the student you are matched with. This information will include:

- their name
- the student's course details
- their contact number(s) (home and/or mobile 'phone numbers)
- their Queen's email address
- details of their disability where appropriate
- the student's date of birth
- the student's funding body

Once you begin to develop a working relationship with your student, you will find that you will gradually acquire other personal information about that student. For example:

- information about the nature of their disability
- their academic strengths and weaknesses
- an alternative or home email address
- learning plans for the semester
- feedback on assignments
- email/text communications from your student
- texts/emails about missed sessions and the (often personal) reasons for missing or cancelling a session with you at short notice

Please remember therefore that as a Support Provider, you are responsible for safeguarding a range of personal and sensitive data relating to the student(s) with whom you are working. As such, it is essential that you take the appropriate precautions to ensure that this data is not inadvertently disclosed to other parties.

Safeguarding Student-Related Information

1. If you are working with your students using paper-based material, remember not to leave any papers, your folder or case behind in any public place eg the Library or on the bus/train/taxi.
2. If you are working with your student on a portable computer, do not leave it unattended – laptops are extremely attractive to thieves.
3. Likewise, mobile 'phones / Blackberries are also very prone to theft / loss.
4. Similarly, memory sticks are easy to loose and again, are attractive to the opportunistic thief.
5. Think about where you are and do not access sensitive information about your student in public areas where someone else may inadvertently (or intentionally) read it.

Precautions

1. Check that you have everything with you (papers, memory stick, mobile 'phone, laptop etc) before leaving the area you have been working in with your student or when leaving public transport.
2. Make sure that your laptop/PC has a screensaver, is password protected and locks after a period of inactivity. Your password should be at least 30 characters long and mixed (ie of both letters and numbers) so that it is more difficult for a thief to crack.
3. Remember that email is an inherently insecure way of transferring sensitive information and should be used with caution.
4. Similarly, ensure that your mobile 'phone is pin protected so that if it is lost/stolen, your texts and contact numbers cannot easily be accessed.
5. Ensure that your laptop or home computer is protected against viruses.
6. To safeguard any sensitive data on your computer, use encryption software. TrueCrypt, the University-approved software package, is not dependent on Windows 7 and is available free-of-charge to download from the internet.
7. Similarly, use memory sticks that are fully encrypted. As add-on encryption can be left turned off, the University recommends using IronKey memory sticks that have inbuilt encryption. This encryption cannot be turned off, is resistant to physical dismantling and destroys the data after 10 failed access attempts.
8. Try not to unintentionally build a pool of information on someone. Delete any contact details, emails or other information about a student as soon as you have finished working with that student eg at the end of the academic year or if your student swaps over to another Support Provider or after you have completed the note taking process for a one-off lecture.
9. If you do have your laptop/PC/mobile 'phone breached or stolen and the device contains data relating to the student(s) you are working with, please let Queen's Register of Support Providers know as soon as possible.

Further Information and Guidance

For additional information on securing your laptop and/or PC, please read the University's various security policies and see the guidance notes available on the University's Information Services web site at: www.qub.ac.uk/directorates/InformationServices/Services/Security/SupportSecurity/Policies/

Complaints

In the main, one-to-one student/Support Provider working relationships function well. Occasionally however, a student may seek support beyond the boundaries of the support remit, may behave rudely and/or aggressively or may fail to engage with or keep in contact with their Support Provider. If you are unhappy about any aspect of a working relationship and have not been able to resolve the issue with your student, please refer to the Complaints Procedure for further guidance.

Summary of Expectations

Support Providers are required to:

- Practice only within the remit(s) of their Support Provider role(s)
- Maintain professional boundaries at all times and not become too involved or over-supportive.
- Encourage, develop and promote independent learning.
- Take responsibility for the safe storage and handling of personal, sensitive and academic-related student information.
- Take responsibility for their finance administration and tax returns.
- Keep the Register advised of address, email or contact number changes.
- Give adequate notice if intending to take time off so that alternative cover may be arranged in advance.
- Give notice as soon as possible if unwell and where alternative cover is to be arranged.
- Advise the Register if intending to withdraw either on a temporary or permanent basis.
- Read and be familiar with the University's Code of Practice and Good Conduct in Relation to Children and Vulnerable Adults (www.qub.ac.uk/directorates/HumanResources/PersonnelDepartment/SafeguardingChildrenandVulnerableGroupsPolicy/)
- Uphold the principles embodied in the Code of Conduct for Support Providers.

Declarations

Please sign and return the Declaration on the next page as soon as possible to Queen's Register of Support Providers.

Queen's Register of Support Providers

Code of Conduct for Support Providers

Declaration

- I acknowledge that I have read and accepted all of the principles outlined in the Code of Conduct for Support Providers. I will adhere to these principles when delivering support through Queen's Register of Support Providers and I accept that failure to do so may result in my being removed from Queen's Register of Support Providers.
- I have read the guidance documents pertinent to my Support Provider role(s) and I will seek advice or further clarification from Queen's Register of Support Providers if there is anything that I am unsure of.
- I accept that I am responsible for the safe storage and handling of sensitive, personal and academic-related information relating to the student(s) with whom I am working as a Support Provider.
- I have read and understood the preceding information and the various University information security policies and guidance notes provided on the Information Services web site at: www.qub.ac.uk/directorates/InformationServices/Services/Security/SupportSecurity/Policies/

Name:_____

Role(s) on Queen's Register of Support Providers:

.....

Date:_____

Signature:_____

_____

Please complete, sign and return this page to:

Queen's Register of Support Providers
Disability Services, Student Guidance Centre
Queen's University
Belfast, BT7 1NN
Tel: 028 90 972727
Email: supportprovider@qub.ac.uk
Web: www.qub.ac.uk/directorates/sgc/disability/SupportProviders/

Appendix G

OFFICE USE ONLY
PAYMENT AUTHORISED DATE SENT TO FUNDER INVOICE NO

Queen's Register of Support Providers

Work Record

Support Provider Name:	Support Provider Address (incl post code):
Bank Account No:	Sort Code:
Student Name:	Funding Body:
Student Date of Birth:	Month & Year of Claim:
University: Queen's University Belfast	Nature of Support:

Details of Support

DATE OF SUPPORT		NO OF HOURS	AREAS COVERED	STUDENT SIGNATURE	COST (£)
DAY	DATE (DD.MM.YYYY)				
TOTAL NO OF HOURS:			TOTAL COST OF SUPPORT PROVIDED (£):		

I confirm that the above is an accurate record of the support provision that has taken place during the timeframe detailed. Any cancelled or non-attended support is recorded.

Support Provider Signature:		Date:	

Please complete in full (word processed/typed or neatly handwritten) and forwarded to Queen's Register of Support Providers, Disability Services, Queen s University, Belfast BT7 1NN, before the submission cut-off date for the appropriate month. Incomplete forms cannot be processed for payment. Queries Tel 028 90 972864, Email supportprovider@qub.ac.uk

Appendix H

Queen's Register of Support Providers

Missed / Cancelled Session Proforma

One proforma to be completed for each missed/cancelled session where less than 24 hours notice has been provided by the student or by the University if a class is unexpectedly cancelled/scheduled. **Note Takers: If you are scheduled to note take for more than one class in the day, only one hour may be claimed for a full day of cancelled support.** If you have not been able to contact your student ie he/she has failed to return your communications, please tick the 'Student failed to return calls/texts/emails' box and return the form with just your own signature.

The proforma should be attached to the relevant Work Record and returned as normal to Queen's Register of Support Providers by the submission deadline for that month.

Student Name:

Support Provider Name:

Date & Time(s) of Absence:

Reason for Absence (please tick):

[ ] Class cancelled by the University with less than 24 hours notice

[ ] Additional class scheduled by the University with less than 24 hours notice

[ ] Session cancelled by the student with less than 24 hours notice because of:

- [ ] Illness *(**please elaborate** briefly eg 'flu, migraine etc)*
- [ ] Accident *(**please elaborate** briefly eg car, fall etc)*
- [ ] Family issues *(**please elaborate** briefly eg death, child/dependant illness etc)*
- [ ] Reasons relating to student's disability *(**please elaborate** briefly eg poor organisational skills, poor memory, worsening of condition etc)*

[ ] Student forgot about the session / neglected to cancel the session

[ ] Student failed to return calls/texts/emails

[ ] Other *(please state)*

Student Signature:.....

Support Provider Signature:.....

Appendix I

Participant Infomation

You have been selected to take part in this survey as, while a student at Queen's University Belfast (QUB), you were entitled to Non-Medical Helper (NMH) Support arranged through Queen's Register of Support Providers.

This questionnaire is part of the first comprehensive assessment of NMH support for students with a disability at QUB since the implementation of the Register of Support Providers in 2008. The project aims to uncover the impact that NMH support has on students with a disability and specifically at whether NMH support encourages the development of skills transferable to the workplace.

The research is funded by Queen's Register of Support Providers and has been granted Ethical Approval by the School of Education Ethics Committee at QUB. It is hoped that the findings and suggestions for improvements will be presented to key stakeholders including the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL), QUB staff, Support Providers and prospective students to demonstrate the value and importance of the service.

- The survey is completely anonymous and at no point will you be required to give your name. This preserves your right to confidentiality.
- Participation in this survey is entirely voluntary and if you decide not to partake, there will be no impact on your studies, employment or on your links with QUB.
- According to QUB regulations, data will be stored securely for at least 5 years after the study is completed.
- If you require further information, do not hesitate to contact me on clare.donnelly@qub.ac.uk

If you are happy to take part in the survey, please click 'Next'.

General Information

1. When did you graduate from QUB?

- 2008
- 2009
- 2010
- 2011
- 2012
- 2013
- 2014

2. What type(s) of NMH (non-medical helper) support were you entitled to? (Tick all that apply)

- Prefer not to say
- Academic Mental Health Tutor
- Campus Assistant
- Dyslexia Support Tutor
- Exam Prompter
- Exam Scribe
- Foreign Language Tutor
- Information Technology Tutor
- Interpreter (BSL & ISL)
- Library Assistant
- Mathematics & Statistics Tutor
- Note Taker
- Autism Spectrum Disorder Tutor
- Proof Reader
- Reader
- Study Skills Tutor
- Typist & Audio Typist

Other (please specify)

3. With regards to the number of hours of support you qualified for, please estimate how much support you used:

- All of the hours
- Most of the hours
- Half of the hours
- Very few of the hours
- I didn't use any hours
- Unsure

Please explain the above answer:

Your Time at University

4. Did your NMH support make your University experience more positive?

- Yes
- No

Please explain your answer:

5. Would any of the following have been likely if you did not have NMH support at QUB? (Tick all that apply)

- Struggled with my course
- Felt isolated
- Likely to drop out of University
- Struggled with transport/consumables costs
- Certain aspects of my course would have been impossible

Other (please specify)

6. Did the support provided foster a 'sense of belonging' within the University?

- Yes
- No

Please elaborate:

7. Did your NMH support help you socially, in any way, such as giving you the confidence to integrate with peers and make new friends?

- Yes
- No
- Not Applicable

If yes, has this contributed to the development of working relationships in the workplace?

8. Did NMH support help you engage more with teaching and learning at QUB?

- Not sure
- Yes
- No

Please explain your answer:

9. Do you feel that you achieved a better degree result because of the support provided?

- Yes
- No

10. Do you think that NMH support encouraged you to stick with University when you might otherwise have given up and dropped out?

- Yes
- No
- Not Sure
- Not Applicable

Has this led to more staying power in the work environment?

Employment

11. Have you been employed at any stage, long or short-term, since you left University?

- Yes
- No

12. Do you believe that receiving NMH support helped you, in some way, to secure a job?

- Yes
- No

Please elaborate:

13. Have you found the transition from University to work difficult?

- Yes
- No

Please elaborate:

14. Are you currently employed?

- Yes
- No

15. Do you work -

- Full-time
- Part-time

Other (please elaborate)

16. Is your current role your ideal occupation?

- Yes
- It gives me experience which will help me to secure the job I desire
- No, just a 'stop-gap'

17. Did your NMH support help you to develop skills that have been beneficial to carrying out any jobs you have held since graduating?

- Yes
- No

Please explain the above answer:

18. Do you think your NMH support gave you more confidence in dealing with the interview process?

- No
- Yes

Please explain the above answer:

19. Is there any other aspect of NMH support provided in QUB that has helped you in the work environment?

- No
- Yes

Please explain your answer:

20. Did you declare your disability/ies to your employer(s)?

- Yes
- No

Please give a reason for your answer:

21. In any occupation undertaken since graduation, have you been provided with support in order to "level the playing field" with your colleagues?

- No
- Yes

Please explain your answer:

22. Do you feel more NMH support should be given in the workplace?

- Yes
- No

Please explain your answer:

23. Do you think it is possible for an employer to implement the same level of NMH support that is offered in University?

- Yes
- No

Please explain your answer:

24. Are there any improvements that you feel could be made to NMH support at QUB?

25. Do you have any other comments on the NMH support you received and how it may have helped you in gaining employment?

End of Survey

Thank-you for taking the time to complete this survey - your feedback is greatly appreciated.

Any further queries do not hesitate to contact me on: clare.donnelly@qub.ac.uk