Educational Support Workers’ Survey
Academic Year 2008-09

(June 2009)

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1. Introduction

An online survey of Educational Support Workers (ESWs) was undertaken in May 2009 to ascertain ESWs’ work satisfaction, their experiences and perceptions in relation to their role of working with students with disabilities who receive educational support from the Disability Service (DS). This survey was similar to the surveys carried out in 2007 and comparisons are made throughout this report (2007 results presented in brackets). All feedback will be used to continue the development of the ESW service. A total of 47 workers out of 107 registered ESWs (44%) responded, up from 38% response rate in 2007 survey.

2. ESW Background

The majority of the ESWs continue to come from the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences Faculties (60%). There has been growth in Engineering, Mathematics and Sciences and this is directly related to the number of students now studying in these areas.

ESWs are predominately postgraduates (65% (66% in 2007)). This reflects the standing of the worker rather than the recruitment route. 16% are undergraduates and are usually drawn from the SS year or work as class note takers where there was difficulty recruiting for specific cover.
3. Areas of work

Note taking continues to be the main service offered to some students with subject specific tuition next. 40% of respondents perform more than one role - (52%) previously. The growth in the number of subject specific tutors reflects the decision to encourage intervention earlier in the academic year. Group supports such as a Library Assistant was a success and this type of support will be continued next year. Previously individual Library Assistants were organised but due to the small number of hours available it was hard to find suitable ESWs.

Due to cutbacks in ESF finances in 08-09 and ongoing new mechanisms of supports such as note taking will be explored as these services are resource expensive.

Sign Language services are provided by an outside agency and not ESWs.
4. Length of service

Just over half of all ESWs are working less than a year with the remainder working one or more years. During the last term, subject specific tutor numbers grow and that inflates the recruitment during that period of the year. Other ESWs recruited later in the year tend to carry on into the following year which leads to continuity of service for students.

5. Recruitment

The most successful form of recruitment is through a general advertisement/mailing via Graduate Studies Office at the beginning of the academic year 47% (43%). Word of mouth, 29% is also growing (23%). The Academic departments/schools have again proved useful in finding subject specific tutors. Those making direct contact usually (6%) come from other colleges or countries where they have worked in similar roles.
6. Who ESWs worked with

ESWs generally work with students with sensory and physical disabilities. Subject specific tutors work with those mentioned here and also with students who have specific learning difficulties.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disability Category</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual impairment</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significant ongoing illness</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific learning difficulty</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deaf/Hard of hearing</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7. Issues raised when working with students with disabilities

The principal difficulties ESWs encountered were limited knowledge of how a student's disability impacts on teaching and learning (11%) and awareness of disability issues (4%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Difficulties in facilitation</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Limited knowledge of ed. implications</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited awareness of disab. issues</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication difficulties</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of the above</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please elaborate</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Of the 44 who answered this question 57% would appear to have no difficulties working in this area. The orientation programme covers disability awareness as a topic thus leading to a greater understanding of students with disabilities.

### 7.1 Specific issues raised

ESWs gave valuable feedback on specific issues raised in the previous question, which included dealing with changes of lectures through to advocating on behalf of students. Some examples are given here:

“I worked with a deaf student who was contacted through web ct on where the seminars and lectures were, sometimes I didn’t know where to meet my student until 5 minutes before the lecture.”

“I am quite uncertain how to communicate with and respond in cases where the person is obviously upset, especially regarding his/her academic progress.”

“Being ‘outed’ in class by curious (unannounced usually) lecturers where attention is drawn to the note taker and, therefore, the student receiving the support.”

Other issues:
- Some felt that lecturers needed to be more aware of the supports required by the student.
- Problems with obtaining course work & essay material from lecturers in enough time to provide the alternatively formatted material to undergrad students when required. Problems with the quality and volume of material provided for alternative formatting.

**DS Response:**

The orientation programme will include a discussion on dealing with upset students and dealing with boundary issues between ESW and students.

DS will also reinforce the student’s responsibility to keep the ESW informed of all changes to their timetable.

ESWs already identify themselves to lecturers at the start of the term. It may be necessary to approach alternative lecturers before the class starts and to introduce themselves. Again, this can be covered at Orientation.

The DS continues to work closely with departments where alternative formatting is needed for a student.
8. Working as a Subject Specific Tutor

There were 24 responses to this question with the majority finding it easy to contact, engage and find space to work with students.

![Bar chart showing ease of contacting the student, availability of tutorial space/room, and ability to keep student's interest.]

Students benefited from Tuition? | Number
---|---
Yes | 24
No | 0

8.1 Specific comments

“Preparation time for subject specific tutoring is needed (and paid for) and more guidance on how the student’s disability impacts on their ability to learn or engagement with the tutoring process.”

“Please try and make available an appropriate space/venue for subject specific tutoring. This should, ideally, be available outside normal business hours and at weekends too to accommodate working schedules for both students and ESWs.”

While these comments were in other sections of the survey, they hold the essence of what may be required to improve this area of support.

**DS Response:**

Time and payment will be allocated to Tutors if required. Additionally the DS will ensure Tutors will be made aware of disability related issues as part of their role orientation.

A specific room for tuition has now been sourced in the Arts Building for ESWs to work with students; this is bookable from the main office.
9. If your role was as an Academic/Library Assistant:

There were 16 responses to this question with the majority showing high level of engagement from students and stating Library staff were very helpful. Accessibility of rooms and photocopying facilities were raised as a concern.

**DS Response:**
College carried out a campus-wide access audit and a plan on improving access is being implemented at present which will lead to improved access to rooms and services over time.
10. If your role was as a Note taker:

There were 23 responses to this question with lack of power supplies in certain rooms being the main difficulty for note takers using laptops to take notes.

**DS Response:**
New laptops will be in use next academic year and the battery life is a lot longer than previously experienced so this should resolve the power supply issue for most lecturer situations.
11. ESW experience with the Disability Service

The majority of ESWs rated the services offered by the DS service as excellent to very good. To continue to offer a valuable service to students, it is important that this continues. This question dealt with the administrative support offered to ESWs.

![Experience of working with the Disability Service](image)

12. ESW suggestions to improve the Educational Support Worker experience

There were 8 responses to this question with an overall satisfaction rating for the DS. This section allows for really in-depth feedback. Many of the topics have been covered in this report. ESWs felt more social interaction with other workers and the service would assist them in their role.

**DS Response:**

DS will aim to organise opportunities for ESWs to meet informally in the service in the next academic year. There will be an opportunity to meet and share information and experiences in a relaxed and comfortable environment.

These may be focussed around a ‘training’ session and used for updating on disability issues as well.
13. Following feedback from previous surveys, a note takers course was run in December 08.

There were 25 responses to this question. The course was attended by 22 note takers and was run over two mornings. The full evaluation from the course is available in the appendix.

![Notetaking Course Chart]

13.1 Specific comments

The course was regarded as being very beneficial. There is a clear need for this being delivered again.

**DS Response:**
This will become a standard requirement for potential note takers and will be run in September and one other time throughout the year. Accreditation will be investigated to allow ESWs to gain a qualification in this area.

14. Ongoing training opportunities

ESWs were overwhelmingly interested in a certified training programme 84% (81%). Timing of any courses was discussed with many stating they had preferred times for any course given, ideally before the beginning of term.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Would you be interested in a Certified Training Programme for an Educational Support Worker?</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
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