



Project Title: Disability Champions Pilot Project

Keywords: Accessible, Associate Lecturer, Disability, Mental Health, Mentor, Peer-peer

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Executive Summary

The Disability Champion project was a pilot programme to support ALs in their teaching of students in design with disability flags given that the proportion of students within this group has been steadily rising over recent years. This is particularly prevalent within the first level design module (U101) since this is often the first experience for students studying with the OU, and for many, represents a return to study after a long gap. Many students face multiple challenges. ALs frequently raised concerns about knowing how best to support students with specific needs, including complex mental health issues. ALs reported that they often found it difficult to know where to find appropriate guidelines and resources, and how they could discuss particular cases to discover if other ALs had used successful strategies in similar situations.

The Disability Champion Pilot Scheme was therefore conceived to offer a more straightforward route for ALs to find information and a dedicated support space where they could share their concerns and their strategies for dealing with particular learning needs. Three ALs were recruited via an Expression of Interest followed by an interview process, and, along with the three staff tutors, they were given the opportunity of gaining their Mental Health First Aid certificate. To further support them, they attended various training sessions

to update their knowledge and understanding of a wide range of disabilities and explored teaching strategies to optimise D-flag students' learning experience.

A Disability Help Desk was set up in the shape of a forum alongside the module tutor forum. ALs were encouraged to post questions so that the Disability Champions could share their knowledge, but also allow other ALs who had dealt with similar issues within their student groups to contribute their experience. It was intended that this space would be one of sharing good practice, peer-to-peer support, and a place of reassurance.

To facilitate quick and easy access to resources, the Disability Champions collated the excellent, but often difficult to find, university resources and policies, in a Disability Champions Toolkit, set up as a VLE with live links and opportunities to update information regularly as well as add blog posts on interesting case studies.

The Pilot was led by staff tutor Dr Lisa Bowers accompanied by fellow staff tutors, Elouise Huxor and Theo Philcox. Together they acted as monitors and guides for the AL Disability Champions who were able to gain valuable professional development through their training and useful experience supporting their peers.

Aims and scope of your project

- What were the main aims of the project?

The project was motivated by the need for timelier specialist knowledge around student learning needs to maintain student engagement and aid achievement. It aimed to create a peer-peer support system for ALs tutoring on U101, which in the future, if successful, could be rolled out across STEM. The module U101 was specifically targeted as the pilot module due to the number of DAR students over the last 2 years. Added to this, U101 demands a level of practical skill, and open creative thinking, which may hold issues for students with disabilities, neurodivergence or poor mental health.

- What were the more specific goals?

The UK government Disability Survey (2021) states “Just 8% of disabled people, 8% of carers and 12% of the general public ‘agree’ or ‘strongly agree’ that the views held by members of the public about disability are generally helpful for disabled people” (UK Disability Survey.gov.uk 2021) This small percentile of agreement (28%) shows that the UK still has some way to go to resolve some of the barriers faced by people with ability needs. The survey went on to highlight that many of the UK public's perceptions of people with disabilities created more barriers for the disabled community.

The specific goals of this project were to facilitate a wider understanding of OU students' ability needs, moreover, to understand how to gain enough expertise to positively help and support students to meet their own goals thereby breaking down their barriers to learning at the OU. As a team, we wanted the Disability Champions to offer more than

facts about disabilities, we wanted to support ALs in gaining insight into a variety of ability needs and how they could more successfully teach students presenting with such a profile. We then created goals around how we could disseminate this knowledge and upskill our teaching team.

Activities

After recruiting three ALs from the U101 module team as Disability Champions, they undertook the Mental Health First Aid course, and further training to support teaching students with a wide range of learning or physical disabilities.

Having completed this training, the aim was for them to sit alongside their peers to offer support, fully cognizant of the challenges they faced. There were three iterations of their peer-to-peer support as Disability Champions which evolved in response to how ALs responded to the project:

1. Establishment of the Disability Champions - Teaching and Learning Help Desk (Formerly named the Disability Champions Cafe Forum)

This was aimed at enabling ALs to share any issues they faced teaching students with particular needs, and for the Disability Champions (and any other ALs) to respond by sharing strategies that had been tried and tested to support such needs. [U101-TUTORS: Disability Champions - Teaching and Learning Helpdesk \(open.ac.uk\)](#)

2. Creation of the Disability Teaching and Learning Toolkit VLE to enable quick and easy access to support for teaching students with a wide range of ability needs.

This was created because ALs reported that they found it difficult to locate information on teaching students with ability needs within the OU website. It also felt important because a few ALs were choosing to ask for assistance on the Disability Champions Helpdesk forum. [Website: Disability teaching and learning toolkit \(open.ac.uk\)](#)

3. Creation of ability and learning needs Personae to offer strategies to support a range of 'case studies' based on types of learning needs. This was well received by ALs as it offered quick and easy access to ideas to apply in their work with their students. [Ability needs student personas.pptx \(live.com\)](#)

The project evolved as a result of surveying ALs on the module to understand why they used (or didn't use), the resource and to elicit their opinions on how the scheme could be improved to support them further. This focused on finding a suitable social space where ALs felt safe to share their teaching needs. Originally it was hoped the

more informal relaxed cafe forum approach would encourage sharing. However, it was discovered that ALs preferred more anonymity; a more discreet space, or one-to-one interaction, but still informal and supportive.

Awarding gaps in STEM 21/22

Table 1 Awarding gaps 21/22 STEM

	Total Students	Total pass	Pass Rate	Awarding Gap	OU Awarding Gap
Disability - Mental Health	6,797	3,516	51.7%	15.7%	13.9%
No Disability	49,008	33,033	67.4%		68.1%

Table 2 Historical Mental Health and Disability & Awarding gap on U101

U101	Total Students	All Disability student registration	Mental Health student registration	Mental health Pass Awarding Gap
12J	566	16.1%	1.6%	-27.5%
13B	394	20.5%	3.6%	-29.8%
13J	509	14.2%	2.2%	-45.5%
14B	302	14.9%	3.6%	-27.0%
14J	553	17.7%	2.0%	-15.0%
15B	314	20.4%	3.2%	-29.1%

15J	559	18.5%	3.0%	-11.6%
16B	299	23.8%	4.7%	-7.8%
16J	626	22.1%	5.1%	-32.5%
17B	285	22.9%	4.9%	-28.2%
17J	564	20.4%	5.9%	-16.5%
18B	370	21.9%	6.5%	-39.3%
18J	547	22.5%	7.9%	-23.6%
19B	436	22.9%	8.0%	-9.7%
19J	774	26.4%	8.8%	-13.6%
20B	430	29.3%	10.7%	-15.4%
20J	996	24.0%	8.4%	-15.1%
21B	668	26.4%	9.6%	-33.7%
21J	837	24.1%	7.4%	-27.0%

Initial Findings

Despite expecting (based on prior experience) that there would be many requests for help over the course of the project, this didn't materialize, as evidenced by the limited number of inquiry posts on the Disability Champions forum. We think there are a number of reasons for this:

- ALs not wishing to expose a lack of knowledge.
- Many ALs continued to come to their STs for assistance possibly due to the above.

- A fear that sharing their own needs might then lead to more loss of time through generating more conversations, research, etc.
- The wave of mental health needs that we anticipated during the covid pandemic wasn't apparent, but actually seemed to surface more as the UK pulled out of the pandemic.

We know that ALs are time poor, and therefore one of our aims was to make information easy to find, including building up a bank of strategies for different learning needs and circumstances. Having made available a VLE rich with information within the tutor space, tutors were able to access this without recourse to their peers or staff tutors which is, of course, positive, although we had hoped to encourage more sharing of proven strategies for tutoring students with specific learning needs.

Given that the wave of mental health needs seems more apparent post pandemic, the groundwork completed for this project will be very useful going forward.

The successes of the project are that we now have more ALs who are very well trained in dealing with mental health and other ability needs. We also now have an easy to access bank of information with strategies to support students with a range of ability needs, including a growing bank of bite-sized 'Personae' based on case studies experienced by tutors and the strategies they used to support their students.

Impact

ALs have now become more aware of how students' learning needs impact on their ability to engage with the module, and also aware of where to go for help.

The VLE is available to all design tutors providing quick links and information for a very wide range of disability needs. A set of 'Personae' has been developed based on the experience of tutors, to offer strategies to deal with a range of issues affecting students and their study. A blog has also been started to provide wider discussion of topics within supporting students with disability needs.

The disability champions have gained a great deal of confidence when supporting students with complex additional needs. The knowledge gained by the disability champions will be highly beneficial to their teaching on all of their modules.

Future aims

a) Students

It was hoped we might be able to invite students with ability needs to participate in a focus group to help us more effectively understand the 'student voice' in the accessibility process. This would need to go before the ethics committee and form the basis of a further project. In this context we would envisage disabled student

committees being able to advise AL Champions on what they would like included in a Disability Champion role and how their conditions and education issues should be addressed and handled. (We have used student interns to help guide the content and format of U101 which has been highly productive.) The overarching aim would support that of the OU to work together with staff to promote an inclusive learning environment where disabled students can succeed.

b) Teaching

The Disability Champions team have gained a better understanding of ALs' needs in terms of supporting students with additional learning needs.

The Disability Champions team and the ALs in general have gained a better understanding of students' learning needs and strategies to support them.

We have shared our project rationale and approach with other schools through both research and teaching and learning conferences, and another team within STEM asked specifically for us to share details with her for implementation in her area. It is envisaged that other module teams within the design school will use the knowledge gained to apply to tutor delivery in the second and third level modules.

There has been no impact beyond the OU as an outcome from this research project so far.

c) Strategic change and learning design

The research and knowledge gained by the staff tutors throughout this project has fed into the development of module materials for the new BDes qualification, and revisions to assignments in terms of the clarity of instructions and modes of submission of U101.

Deliverables

Further to this project it is hoped that the research and outputs will leave an ongoing resource in terms of the Disabilities Toolkit VLE to allow easier access to support for further AL Champions in other modules as well as ALs. Our package of resources will also include all training materials for Champions, our recruitment specification, and links to OU policies.

Deliverables	What did we gain from this?
The development of a VLE based learning and teaching resource with specific help for ALs working with students in design: <u>Website:</u>	This one-stop resource can be easily accessed by all tutors on the module, and regularly updated, including adding new case studies/personae as different learning

Disability teaching and learning toolkit (open.ac.uk)	needs arise, with strategies to support them.
The creation of a set of ability needs 'personae'/case studies with strategies to support a range of ability needs: Ability needs student personas.pptx (live.com)	These have been created by the disability champions with input from ALs based on case studies. ALs have reported that they found these helpful, as they provide quick ideas for learning issues, they recognise among their student cohort. We have encouraged ALs to continue to share new issues to feed into our resources, and to also share strategies to support these.
The opportunity to hand over a resource which is adaptable and updateable with a template capacity to be rolled-out by another school/department.	Other schools have shown interest in this approach to support and our VLE. C&C have already used the Disability Champions set up to model their own Disability Champions framework in their department.
The team have disseminated the findings at the eSTEEeM and STEM teaching conferences.	Delivering the findings at conferences has enabled us to share our findings and resources more widely and gain feedback for further development.

Data collection

In February 2022, we surveyed U101 tutors on the 21J presentation to find out their experiences using the Disability Teaching and Learning Helpdesk. Data was collected using Microsoft forms. **10 tutors responded out of a possible 33 tutors.**

1. Are you aware of the 'Disability champions - Teaching and Learning helpdesk'?

<https://learn2.open.ac.uk/mod/forumng/view.php?id=1770915>

[More Details](#)

 Insights



2. Have you read any posts on the Helpdesk?

[More Details](#)

 Insights



3. Have you posted for advice on the Helpdesk?

[More Details](#)



Figure 1 Microsoft forms U101 tutor Survey (February 2022)

We asked tutors to expand on why they had not used the Helpdesk. All responses were similar and focused on the fact that they had not yet had a situation where they felt they needed advice. One tutor highlighted that 'There's lots of supportive and relevant content that I have read and learnt from resulting in not needing to [use the helpdesk]'.

We also asked what topics tutors would like to see on the Helpdesk in the future. The key areas are listed below:

- Example student profiles and streamlined case studies to give practical support when dealing with similar cases
- Covid related issues and support
- How to make tutorials inclusive
- Recommended tools and aids – such as Read Write (Dyslexia) and ZoomText (Vision impairment)
- A way to share good practice

Student Personae

A set of student Personae was created as a response to feedback from tutors and as a development of the final iteration of the project. We surveyed 21J tutors in May 2022 using Microsoft Forms. **11 tutors responded out of 33 tutors.**

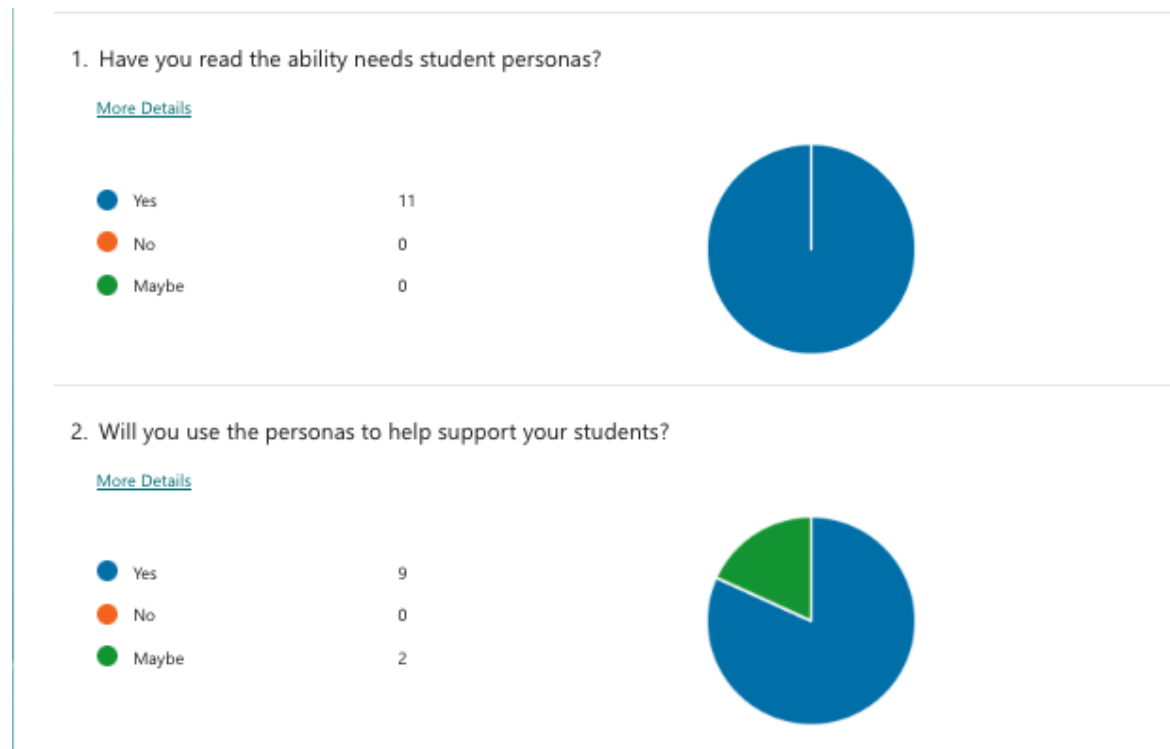


Figure 2 Tutor Survey - Student Personae May 2022

Most responses from the participants were encouraging, and tutors felt the Personae were a useful tool and relevant to their teaching. The key strengths were the strategies that were offered on each Persona, and the ability to use them for reference quickly and easily. Two important critiques were raised 1) that it is vital not to pigeonhole students who appear to fit into the descriptions and 2) that student situations are often very complex, and the Personae do not necessarily reflect this.

The full responses can be viewed below:

Table 3 Tutor Survey - student personae May 2022

Do you think the personae are a useful tool? and if so, can you tell us why?	
Participant	Responses

Tutor 1	Yes: I can see current and/or previous students' issues reflected and offers some strategies for helping them in future.
Tutor 2	Yes, I think the personas go some way to supporting the needs of the students in the focus group. However, it is vital to not 'pigeonhole' all students who seem to 'fit' these descriptions and then assume that the solutions presented will be of use. They may not.
Tutor 3	Makes you understand the variety of different learning issues and needs and what best suits you.
Tutor 4	Yes. Understanding that may students have very specific issues that can affect their working process and with some simple adjustments to how I communicate, and guide students could make the difference to their confidence in studying and ability to succeed. I think it could help some of the students who give up very quickly and drop out of study to keep going and find ways to manage their studies. It could improve student well-being, retention and grades for some and especially as there is now more than ever a large percentage of students openly identifying with some form of disability.
Tutor 5	Good to have something else to refer to
Tutor 6	They help us to see the learning from the student's perspective and remind us that this may differ considerably across the cohort. The personas encourage the tutor to think a little deeper as to how they might better support students. They help identify typical sets of needs and requirements. Provide a useful toolkit, signposting ideas we can use in our practice.
Tutor 7	They are as I can identify patterns of my students.
Tutor 8	Yes, I think they are useful because personas, by their very nature, present typical profiles that others may recognise and identify with. If this is the case, then this may help with not feeling alone and that the OU is sensitive to your specific needs.

Tutor 9	Yes, provides strategies for dealing with student issues.
Tutor 10	Yes, the 'how we can help' tips are useful. They clearly show we don't have to make huge adjustments to make our tutoring accessible.
Tutor 11	I think it potentially could be- giving lecturers more tools and approaches to help and support students with their particular learning needs, but it is complicated too, at a time when research is indicating that people with autism and learning disabilities excel in creative thinking

We asked tutors what elements of the personae they found helpful.

In summary:

Positive elements:

- The 'How can we help' section
- A range of useful strategies such as the student buddy system
- Quick reference points
- Personae overview
- Actions to help students
- Practical advice
- Good clear layout
- Challenge and support tips

Elements to be aware of:

- General understanding of how certain conditions might affect learning can be beneficial, but the personae do not give a nuanced understanding specific to individual students

Recommendation:

- Include more strategies for supporting students with additional requirements on using Compendium – U101 specific software package

The full responses can be viewed below:

Table 4 Tutor Survey - student personae May 2022

What aspects of the personae do you find helpful?	
Participant	Responses
Tutor 1	Both the challenges they face and ways to help.
Tutor 2	The 'How can we help' parts seemed to be useful. However, where students presented 'disorganised' Compendium maps, I'm unsure as to whether showing well-organised maps may make a difference. From an outside view, it appears that it may be Compendium itself may be a part of the problem. Students with forms of autism may be more adjusted to writing in a linear format e.g. in Word and not the complete freedom of using a graphical method with possibly no bounds in terms of layout.
Tutor 3	The strategies that I hadn't thought about before such as having some form of buddying up system and careful boundaries with Katie
Tutor 4	All of it. In the first instance reading the persona overview helps to give me insight into what the student may be experiencing. Then, reading the list of points of what I could do to facilitate the students study gives me ideas and a quick easy reference for ways to do this. It makes the process of guidance easier and fluid.
Tutor 5	Subject based suggestions for supporting students
Tutor 6	Suggestions for how to best support students, by giving me starting points and ideas.
Tutor 7	How to help and give guidance.

Tutor 8	The practical advice on how we, as tutors, can help to support students with specific needs or barriers to learning.
Tutor 9	Actions to take to help students
Tutor 10	I like the way the challenges and support tips are side by side, clear and easy to scan
Tutor 11	The 'how can we help' strategies, which are useful and practical, and many of which stand-alone and are not necessarily dependent on their preceding 'challenges'. Understanding more about how certain conditions might affect a student's learning can be beneficial but teaching and supporting students through their learning is a complex nuanced undertaking which needs understanding, tolerance, compromise, and flexibility.

We asked tutors how we can improve the personae resource.

In summary:

Recommendations

- A section with advice and prompts which tutors can use to ask students about their needs and expectations
- Include a reflective section 'Did it work?' which tutors can contribute to
- Invite students to suggest strategies that may help their studies
- Include areas of motivation and interest relating to their area of study, module or qualification
- Include a persona of a student without ability requirements

Elements to be aware of:

- Make sure advice is clear and not open to interpretation which could be confusing for certain ability needs such as autism
- Tutor time is limited
- Need to take care not to introduce discrimination or negative bias associated with learning abilities or additional requirements

The more detailed responses can be found below:

Table 5 Tutor Survey - student personae May 2022

How can we improve the personae?	
Participant	Responses
Tutor 1	in the 'how can we help?' part there should be advice to, discuss with the students - in the first instance - what their needs are and what their expectations are. e.g., the current tutor-facing advice on student profiles is generic and often 'worse case scenarios' and don't reflect the student's actual requirements, (especially with ASD); discussing disability issues at the earliest stage possible opens up clear channels of communication and avoids misunderstandings.
Tutor 2	Perhaps include an additional reflective column following on from 'How can we help' to report back with 'Did it work'?
Tutor 3	Speak to students/people who have these disabilities and ask for their ideas of what they feel would be helpful for them. I would suggest adding to each persona to 'invite the student to explain any strategies they may use to help them study' as the first step as this can often reveal ways, they use that tutors could work with to help. It also opens the door to positive communication and allows the student to feel empowered. Staggered deadlines - this can be helpful for students who find working with large amounts of information overwhelming - so maybe for ADHD etc. this could help. Offer the student the opportunity to complete the work in stages and send each stage to the tutor so the project builds up to help them manage their time (bearing in mind this is not for feedback as this would be offering an unfair advantage). For Autistic students, make sure communications cannot be interpreted in more than one way as this can confuse them.

Tutor 4	<p>Sarah: Phone call to check she has assistive technology in place and that she knows how to best make use of it (just because she has it, she may not be using it correctly, or at all).</p> <p>Becky: Suggest mind-mapping as a technique to get ideas down on paper or screen (good for getting random ideas down quickly, then linking the afterwards.)</p>
Tutor 5	The personas don't necessarily need improvement, but I am wondering how to help in a suggested way if we have very detailed briefs which allow little flexibility and only a very limited hour of tutorials.
Tutor 6	Perhaps a few words on motivations and interests, particularly creative interests. If this is mainly aimed at U101 design students then this may help to inspire and engender an appreciation for the creative arts and industries.
Tutor 7	Personas are good because they build a picture of the person, not just the disability and I like how these personas focus on the challenges. A lot of the advice on how we can help is similar, which is fine. But maybe it demonstrates how we as tutors don't have to make huge adjustments to be inclusive. If we follow some simple good practise rules, then everyone will feel the benefit regardless of disability. Maybe we could have 1 persona, with no particular medical disability, and show how good practise helps everyone with barriers to learning. Just a thought, not really sure how it would work!
Tutor 8	I find the idea of linking 'challenges to learning' with specific identities or 'personas', uncomfortable, unhelpful and potentially dangerous. Associating certain learning abilities or special requirements with an identity, a name, a photograph, even an ethnicity is unnecessary and harmful. People are individuals- they are not 'types', and we should attempt to minimalist any tendency to prejudice, prejudice or discriminate. As teachers, we need to be as open minded and non-judgemental as possible.

Finally, we asked tutors to give recommendations for new personae and for any further information or tools to include:

Recommendations:


New personae


- Dyslexia
- Hearing loss
- Mobility issues
- Visual impairment
- Anxiety
- Epilepsy
- Speech impairment

Tools and further information

- Tutorial on using closed captioning in PowerPoint for Adobe Connect tutorials
- Adding resources to each persona slide with websites and charities that can be contacted by both the student and the tutor

Figure 3 Example of Persona





Josh

Challenges to learning

- Struggles to interpret instructions, despite attending tutorials
- Compendium maps tend to be rather disorganised.
- Finds reading long chunks of text difficult
- Needs support and clear guidance for assignments
- Finds any changes to arrangements/material difficult to deal with
- Gets anxious in groups and finds sarcasm difficult to understand.

How can we help Josh?

- Break down instructions into small clear chunks. Reinforce the step-by-step nature of the assignments
- Show him examples of good Compendium maps
- Try not to make any changes to tutorials
- Allow him to communicate voluntarily rather than putting him on the spot
- Ask him whether he prefers emails to phone calls
- Ensure there are recordings of tutorials available for him to review

Age: 25 years old
Work: Part-time in a pizza restaurant


Qualification path: Engineering
Family: Lives with his girlfriend
Ability need: Autism Spectrum Disorder and ADHD

Goal: To work in IT
Assistive Technology: None


Josh was diagnosed with autism at the age of 8. His interests include video games and Cyber security.

Josh has completed a BTEC at college but found it quite challenging. He has chosen to study with the OU via distance learning as he feels more comfortable interacting with others online and he is used to this through his gaming.

Figure 4 Example Persona



Katie



Age: 26 years old
 Work: Part-time at local dog rescue centre
 Qualification: Marketing/Psychology
 Family: One of three siblings and living at home
Ability needs: Depression and Anxiety
 Assistive technology: None

Goal: Get a degree in psychology so she can help others who have struggled as she has

Katie is the youngest of three children. She loves to read and learn, but struggles with social interactions. She became interested in psychology to understand herself better.

She initially enrolled in a brick university, but found it overwhelming. She dropped out to live at home and works at the dog rescue centre which she finds therapeutic.

She loves the anytime, anywhere flexibility of online learning. The reduced need for social interactions is easier for her.


Challenges to learning

- Anxiety about deadlines and the quality of her work (perfectionism)
- She tends to rely heavily on her tutor for support and makes regular phone calls as well as sending emails.
- She finds it difficult to take criticism and this can put her in a downward spiral


How can we help Katie?

- Create careful boundaries around contact to manage interactions and level of support in order to help build her independence.
- Suggest buddying up with other young students
- Dedicate part of a tutorial to criticism to help her understand how it is a vital part of the creative process and not personal

Figure 5 Example Persona



Becky



Age: 23 years old
 Work: Part time carer
 Qualification: Social Science

Family: Lives with her girlfriend and 18 month old baby.
Ability need: ADHD

Goal: To discover her strengths and to identify a career she would enjoy.

Becky attended a private school and had a lot of opportunities, however her ADHD meant that she didn't achieve very well and felt a failure in comparison to her classmates. She often got into trouble, and left school without much idea as to what she wanted to do as a career. Despite her difficulties, she is convinced she is capable academically, and decided to take a course with the OU to see if online learning suited her better and to help her discover where her strengths might lie. She still worries that her ADHD might affect her ability to focus.

Challenges to learning

- Struggles to concentrate and follow step by step instructions
- Compendium maps tend to be rather disorganised.
- Finds time management a challenge, and panics when she feels she's running out of time
- Finds reading long chunks of text difficult
- Needs support and clear guidance for assignments

How can we help Becky?

- Breaks down instructions into small clear chunks.
- Show her examples of good Compendium maps
- Schedule progress check with her to help her manage her time.
- Ensure there are recordings of tutorials available for her to review

Discussion

We worked with the three-part process, presented earlier in this document. The following discussion points will further elaborate on this process.

This pilot study was instigated to facilitate a central support network for ALs teaching within module U101. The pilot created varied support opportunities for ALs to connect with a group of trained peers who would share knowledge of how to fully support students within the DAR community. As previously reported, to achieve this we structured activities within the pilot in a three-part iterative approach.

1. Establishing a pilot Champions group:

Establishing the pilot champions group was a relatively simple process, the recruited champions were intrinsically motivated to become established and to begin to support their peers in DAR student inquiries. The champion group members were very engaged and committed, to add to their current knowledge, thereby the project team offered a period of training and upskilling activities. A particular focus was on mental health first aid, as this area appeared to form the largest inquiry base of students at the time.

Once the Champions had completed the training phase, they were then located within the virtual 'helpdesk' housed within the U101 tutor VLE.

Tutor forum
Disability Champions - Teaching and Learning Helpdesk
U101-22J module website
U101-22B module website

Disability Champions - Teaching and Learning Helpdesk

Unsubscribe

Start a new discussion

Page 1 2 Next >

Discussion	Unread post	Last post	Posts	Started by
Hub of Hope		14/12/22, 16:20 Dawn Correia	2	Theodora Philcox
Sharing is caring!		10/10/22, 11:06 Theodora Philcox	1	Theodora Philcox
Video to share widely?		6/10/22, 13:33 Nicole Lotz	1	Nicole Lotz
Student with Advocate		31/05/22, 15:03 Steve Bailey	5	Steve Bailey
Personas: Quick access to strategies to deal with particular needs		27/04/22, 19:39 Laura Fletcher	3	Theodora Philcox
Dealing with a difficult student		14/04/22, 15:49 Maxim Lamirande	5	Maxim Lamirande
Accessibility issue (potentially) flagging up		12/04/22, 14:17 AnnMarie McKenna	1	AnnMarie McKenna
Making docs more accessible		29/03/22, 14:10 Karl Jeffries	2	Laura Fletcher
AL toolkit to support student mental health		24/02/22, 18:43 Ken Eastman	3	Nicole Lotz
Managing very needy (no doubt anxious) students		14/01/22, 20:50 Irene Tsiampakou	5	Theodora Philcox
Links to OU Guidelines Mental Health		9/11/21, 12:19 Dawn Correia	1	Dawn Correia
National Stress Awareness Day		3/11/21, 11:37 Irene Tsiampakou	1	Irene Tsiampakou
Anxious Student		1/11/21, 09:31 Elouise Huxor	9	TM Teresa Monachino
Why we do what we do. - disclaimer, contains potentially upsetting information.		6/08/21, 12:09 Laura Fletcher	7	AnnMarie McKenna
NHS Mental Health Apps Link		7/07/21, 17:48 Dawn Correia	1	Dawn Correia
Disability Grants		7/07/21, 13:09 Irene Tsiampakou	1	Irene Tsiampakou
Your thoughts on the service so far		5/07/21, 13:29 Laura Fletcher	1	Laura Fletcher
Talk to Us #WeListen July Campaign		1/07/21, 11:05 Irene Tsiampakou	1	Irene Tsiampakou
Mental health continuum		27/06/21, 11:42 Laura Fletcher	1	Laura Fletcher
DSA Link to pass on to students and Rethink Factsheet for Mental Health and Studying		11/06/21, 13:42 Laura Fletcher	2	Dawn Correia

Figure 6 Disability Champions Teaching and Learning Helpdesk VLE

Initially, the Champions were engaged with comments and some low-level sign-posting inquiries. However, the daily lines of inquiries soon become less frequent. The Champions voiced their evaluations of the issues behind the lack of postings, and it was deduced that ALs were reluctant to post inquiries for two main reasons:

- 1) Concerns about appearing less confident
- 2) Possibly also due to concerns around raising queries adding more to their workload

The research leads organised a meeting and discussion space for ALs and the Champions to revisit the reasoning and motivations behind the pilot. However, at the meeting it was agreed that an alternative resource should be developed; this led to the development and trial of the Disability Champions Tool Kit - a website space which contained resources and tools that ALs could use as a private inquiry resource alongside the hot desk.

2. Web Toolkit:

From the initial planning discussions, the research leads found that DAR student inquiries were increasing, as well as the complexity of the inquiries, and ALs and Staff tutors were finding it difficult to locate appropriate resources to respond to the student issues. The OU's various repositories held excellent resources, but the resources were not quickly accessible and appeared to be scattered at various locations across the intranet. The Champions and research leads joined together to develop the Disability Champions website which offered easy to access information and tools, all in one place, held within the module VLE. The website contained a number of resources of information and research papers. The website also offered links with text about varied learning needs and a variety of mental health issues. The tool kit was advertised to U101 ALs and the link to the tool kit was released across the module tutor base. The challenge with the tool kit was to provide a depth of information about a variety of disabilities, without overwhelming the users. Further discussions with the Champions appeared to state that the tool kit was an easy-to-access resource, but it held too much information.

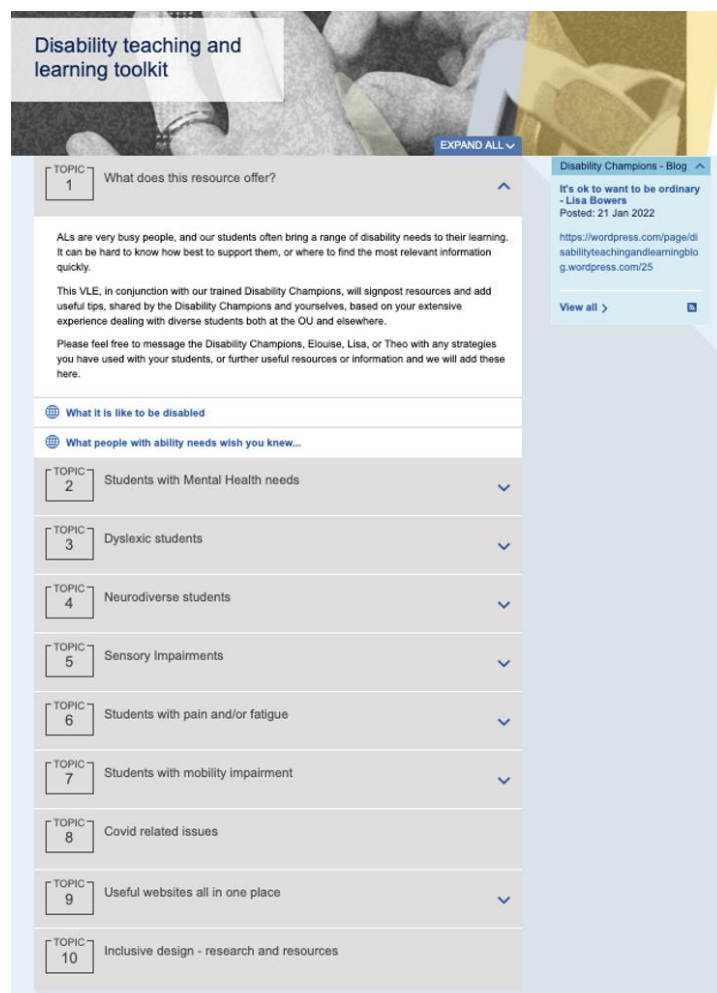


Figure 7 Disability Teaching and Learning Toolkit VLE

3. *Personae*: The final iteration of the Disability Champion pilot was the *Personae* phase. From various meetings and discussions with ALs and Champions, the research leads had deduced that ALs required a resource that facilitated them to inquire about information in their own time, at speed, using their own key word or search enquiries. The previous two iterations were found to be useful but didn't appear to match user expectations or offer information in a format that could be used to respond to particular student case studies on the fly. The development of the *personae*, which were added to the VLE toolkit, offered characteristics of specific ability needs/mental health issues, whilst also offering the variables of study needs and learning complexities with potential of support solutions. The *personae* were offered to the ALs, and they responded with encouraging comments. The use of persona profiles was already familiar to the U101 ALs, as designers often work with user case format. Added to this, the *personae* were seen as easy to access, easy to understand and offered a source of in-depth information that they could consult quickly, facilitating a quick response to their student.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From this pilot project, we have formed the following recommendations to STEM (faculty wide), and to other faculties across the university.

- 1) The facilitation of Disability Champions has been a useful process, and it enables the opportunity to upskill ALs teams of Champions, as well as offering the wider AL community an opportunity to access information and knowledge about specific learning support for DAR students.
- 2) The development of an internal battery of resources located in a central point is useful, but it is more pragmatic to locate the resources/tool kit within the VLE for the module or degree programme. ALs have noted that they are time-poor and do not have the time needed to scope for learning support resources for specific students.
- 3) Within the battery or VLE of DAR support resources, mental health information should be updated regularly, and the website itself should be linked to a named contact, a person who is a specialist in DAR teaching and learning support, and someone who would be happy to be responsible for regular updates of the site e.g., papers, articles, and information, as the field of disabilities and mental health is constantly fragmenting and changing, as more research is disseminated.
- 4) The use of *Personae* appeared to act as a strong stimulus for many ALs teaching on U101. The use of the *Personae* offered a useful resource, by offering specific case details. The *Personae* should also be updated and refreshed to mirror the types of queries that ALs deal with day to day.

References

Resources created for the project:

- Disability teaching and Learning Toolkit – VLE
<https://learn2.open.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=211065>
- Disability Champions – Teaching and Learning Helpdesk
<https://learn2.open.ac.uk/mod/forumng/view.php?id=1770915>

Key Literature

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2. Supporting students with disabilities within a UK university: Lecturer perspectives, Kendall, L, Innovations in Education and Teaching International, 55(6): 694–703, 2017
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12. UK Disability Survey research report, June 2021 (2022). Available at:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-disability-survey-research-report-june-2021/uk-disability-survey-research-report-june-2021>

University approval processes

- *Ethical review – An ethical review was obtained according to the Open University's code of practice and procedures before embarking on this project. Reference number HREC/3895/Bowers*

Annex

The Disability Teaching and Learning Toolkit:

[Disability Teaching and Learning Toolkit](#)

The Ability Needs Personae

[Ability Needs Personae](#)

HREC Application form

[hrec-application-form esteemlib](#)