

High Achievers Project Presentation
Presentation at the Disability Studies Student Society
Symposium, Liverpool Hope University

22nd June 2016

The first presentation of the findings of the High Achievers project was delivered this week at Liverpool Hope University. The aim of the symposium was to bring together students from the North-West (and beyond) to share, discuss and advise on research methodologies in disability studies.

The presentation was prepared by Nick Chown and delivered by Joanna Baker-Rogers with support from Liz Hughes who also attended the event. The presentation included a summary of the remit of the project that was to investigate the extent of support for students with autism at universities in the UK. An overview was provided of methodological considerations, including anticipated response rates associated with different survey methods and the project's chosen multimode approach of online survey followed by Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests. Response rates rose from approximately 10% to the online survey to over 61% after FOIA requests were issued.

To reflect the theme of the symposium, the presentation focused on the technical aspects of combining online surveys with FOIA requests and the issue of copyright of data that arose from the latter. Our key findings were presented that included a 124% rise in students with autism to 9,000 attending university in the four years to 2014/15. The qualifications and experience of disability support for students with autism was found to vary widely between universities. Our recommendations of adopting the statutory guidance issued in connection with the Adult Autism Strategy and that universities should seek accreditation under the National Autistic Society's scheme were outlined.

The presentation was well received and was followed by a discussion of the contribution that students with autism can make to raising academic standards at universities and the issue of claims for copyright of FOIA request data. The general consensus of the symposium was that this research was needed, FOIA request data was not subject to copyright and the findings would be of benefit to students with autism studying at UK universities. The discussion also built on the theme raised by other presenters that impairment is generally viewed as disability by academia, with the emphasis on the student to improve themselves and conform to existing arrangements.