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Reflecting on experiences of people with disabilities participating in the Teacher Induction Scheme

Report on survey responses

Ian Matheson
Patricia Morris

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Table of Contents

1   Introduction

In the GTC Scotland Research Strategy Programme for 2009-2011, approved in September 2009, one of the new projects was one whose purpose was to investigate the experience of people with disabilities who have participated in the Teacher Induction Scheme (TIS).

Initially, this was intended to be a very small-scale project, consisting largely of a statistical exercise, analysing the success rates on the TIS of people with disabilities and including engagement with a small number of people as case studies, to examine the support they received enabling them to succeed or the factors which acted as barriers to success. This phase was also intended to involve a comparison of the support they received as students with that made available on the TIS.

However, the original idea proved to be of questionable validity as it transpired that only a very small number of people on the TIS had disclosed to GTC Scotland that they had a disability and almost all of them had succeeded in obtaining full registration. This, combined with discussions with an academic at Edinburgh University who had done some research about experiences of students with disabilities in her own faculty, led to the conclusion that it was highly probable that many teachers with disabilities had chosen not to inform GTC Scotland of their disability. Therefore, to reach as many people as possible, it was decided to issue a survey to all teachers who had obtained full registration after participating in the TIS between 2002/2003 and 2009/2010 and for whom GTCS had an email address, with the exception of a small number who had left the register since then. This was done in the full knowledge that most of those who received the invitation would not have a disability, but it was the only way of reaching all those who did. This survey was distributed electronically in January 2011 and left open for several weeks to allow as many as wished to respond, to do so.

When the survey data was gathered in March there were 71 responses, five of whom were from teachers who said they did not have a disability, leaving 66 relevant responses.

2   The literature

Attempts to place this work in the context of existing research perspectives revealed that very little has been published in the United Kingdom on the issue of teachers with disabilities. In England, the National Union of Teachers conducted a survey of teachers who have joined its e-network of disabled teachers which had, at that time, over sixty members, 35 of whom responded to the survey. The questions in this survey were less detailed than those in the GTC Scotland survey and produced a report (Rieser, 2008) which contained some interesting comments by individuals on aspects of their experience but which did not provide sufficient evidence to support general conclusions about the experience of disabled teachers. The National Association of Schoolmasters and Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT) also commissioned a report on teachers' mental health (Rothi, Leavey & Loewenthal, 2010), but this was a study of the experiences of teachers who had developed work-related problems, not of people who entered the profession with disabilities.

The only British academic study relating to these issues was specific to dyslexia (Riddick, 2001), a paper given at the fifth British Dyslexia Association International Conference, which examined the experiences of teachers and trainee teachers with dyslexia. The focus of this study was the coping strategies these teachers had developed, investigating the influence of their experiences of literary difficulties on their teaching practices. In Canada, Duquette (2000) also published the results of a very small scale study of four student teachers with disabilities, seeking to discover the extent to which their disabilities and previous school and life experiences had affected their early teaching practice.

3   Survey methodology

The survey sought information and reflection on a range of issues:

❖   Details about the participating teacher to enable us to profile the respondent population: gender, age group, type of initial teaching qualification, university, year of TIS participation, sector and local authority of TIS placement;
❖   The decision to disclose a disability to a variety of relevant groups: GTC Scotland, the local authority in which the probationer worked on the TIS placement, the school management, supporter, other colleagues and pupils;
❖   The reasons for deciding to disclose or to withhold disclosure to each of these groups;
❖   The quality of support received during initial teacher education;
❖   The quality of support received during the TIS placement; and
❖   The extent to which issues related to disability affected the individual's attainment of the Standard for Full Registration.

In addition to questions requiring boxes to be ticked, each section contained opportunities for free responses to enable teachers to give examples or give reasons for their evaluations.

The survey instrument was drafted and then shown to a range of stakeholders who were invited to comment. These included the Education Committee of GTC Scotland, the Equality and Human Rights Commission and the researcher at Edinburgh University who had conducted student research previously, as well as colleagues within the GTC staff. The final version of the survey form is attached for information as Appendix 1.

Although the survey was anonymous, teachers were invited to give contact details if they were willing to participate in further discussion of the issues arising from the survey. Thirty-one teachers chose to provide this information and it is the intention to follow up issues arising from the analysis of survey responses with at least some of these.

Though the evidence is based on a relatively small respondent sample, it nevertheless offers a valuable indication of the feelings of the disabled teachers who participated in the survey and enables us to identify some issues that may be worthy of attention.

4   The respondent population

The sixty-six people who responded included teachers from each TIS cohort and from every teacher education university, the largest groups being from the universities of Strathclyde (22), Edinburgh (16) and Aberdeen (12). They had undertaken their TIS experience in 28 of the 32 Scottish local authorities, with no local authority dominating. Seven had been with the City of Edinburgh, six with North Lanarkshire and four each with Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire, City of Glasgow, East Renfrewshire and South Lanarkshire.

66.1% of respondents were within the age ranges 26-30 or 31-35, though there were respondents from every age group from 21-25 to 51 and over. Fifty-one (77.3%) were female. While all of the above figures show representation of a broad spectrum, in two areas the figures were a little surprising: forty-one respondents (62.1%) were from the secondary sector and most respondents had undertaken PGCE (28.8%) or PGDE (59.0%) qualifications, with only 6.1% holding B.Ed. primary and 3.0% B.Ed. secondary degrees. Four times as many primary school respondents held PGDE qualifications as held B.Ed. degrees.

Table 1: Respondent population by age and gender

	Gender			
Age-group	Female	Male	Grand Total	%
21-25	4	1	5	*7.6*
26-30	20	4	24	*36.4*
31-35	11	2	13	*19.7*
36-40	4	3	7	*10.6*
41-45	6	2	8	*12.1*
46-50	5	2	7	*10.6*
51+	1	1	2	*3.0*
Grand Total	**51**	**15**	**66**	
	77.3	*22.7*		*100.0*

Table 2: Respondent population by TIS sector and year of participation

	TIS sector			
TIS year	Primary	Secondary	Grand Total	%
2002 /03	1	2	3	*4.5*
2003 /04	2	5	7	*10.6*
2004 /05		7	7	*10.6*
2005 /06	2	7	9	*13.6*
2006 /07	5	11	16	*24.2*
2007 /08	5	5	10	*15.2*
2008 /09	2	2	4	*6.1*
2009 /10	8	2	10	*15.2*
Grand Total	**25**	**41**	**66**	
	37.9	*62.1*		*100.0*

Table 3: Respondent population by ITE qualification and university

	ITE Qual.								
HEI	BEd (Prim)	BEd (Sec) Combined Degree	PGCE (Prim)	PGCE (Sec)	PGDE (Prim)	PGDE (Sec)	Other	Grand Total	%
University of Aberdeen	1	1		4	3	3		12	18.2
University of Dundee					1	1		2	3.0
University of Edinburgh	2	1		5	1	6	1	16	24.2
University of Glasgow				1	4	2		7	10.6
University of Stirling		1					1	2	3.0
University of Strathclyde	1		2	3	5	11		22	33.3
University of the West of Scotland (Paisley)			3		2			5	7.6
Grand Total	**4**	**3**	**5**	**13**	**16**	**23**	**2**	**66**	
	6.1	*4.5*	*7.6*	*19.7*	*24.2*	*34.8*	*3.0*		100.0

5   Nature of disabilities

The survey enabled respondents to identify more than one disability. Five identified three conditions, twelve identified two and forty-nine identified one. Table 4 offers a summary of the numbers of teachers reporting each type of condition. A comprehensive breakdown is provided in Appendix 2.

Table 4: Nature of disabilities

Nature of condition	Number of teachers
Long term medical condition (eg asthma, diabetes, epilepsy, heart condition, MS)	21
Specific learning difficulties (eg dyslexia, dyspraxia)	19
Mental health difficulties	12
Hearing impairment	10
Mobility impairment	8
Visual impairment	5
Autistic spectrum disorder such as Asperger's Syndrome	2
Other (mostly physical ranging from injuries to arthritis; one case of chronic depression and one who has a stammer)	11

6   The decision to disclose

The survey invited teachers to state whether they had disclosed their disabilities to various relevant groups and to explain their reasons for disclosure or non-disclosure. The outcomes can be summarised as in Table 5.

Table 5: Decision to disclose

Disclosure to	Yes	%	No	%
GTC Scotland	33	50.0	33	50.0
Local authority for TIS service	32	48.5	34	51.5
School management of TIS school	38	57.6	28	42.4
School TIS Supporter	44	66.7	22	33.3
Staff colleagues in TIS school	39	59.1	27	40.9
Pupils in TIS school	20	30.3	46	69.7

It is perhaps unsurprising that teachers were more likely to disclose their disabilities to those with whom they worked closely during their induction year than to more distant authorities. However, the insights gained from the reasons for their decisions are often revealing.

❖   *GTC Scotland*

On application for registration, GTCS asks applicants if they have a disability. Those who indicate a disability are invited to provide further details for forwarding to the local authority for the Induction placement in order to facilitate the provision of reasonable adjustments during their TIS experience.

Of those who had chosen not to disclose their disabilities to GTC Scotland, a few respondents said that they had simply not regarded the issues as important enough to disclose or did not feel themselves to be disabled. However, despite the information given by GTCS on the purpose of requesting this information, twenty gave reasons indicating their suspicion or distrust of how the information might be used. Some of these referred directly to fears of discrimination:

- *How my application might be viewed.*
- *Scared of being treated differently as a result of disclosing.*
- *Didn't want to be discriminated against.*
- *Stigma attached.*
- *Fear of repercussions.*

Others' concerns were more specific, with some reporting that they feared it would affect their prospects of employment on completion of probation:

- *Fear that it would prevent me from getting a job.*
- *I felt that they would be unlikely to want me as a teacher.*
- *Although it is not meant to happen, I feel that it may put a potential employer off employing me.*

There were even two teachers who were suspicious of GTCS itself and how the Council might use the information. One said that she was "*afraid that barriers would be put in my way to continuing in the profession*" while another "*did not believe that I would be treated fairly or that this information would be kept confidential from my employers or PT*".

By contrast, seventeen of those who did declare a disability at registration stated that they had done so because they expected the information to be passed on, as indicated by GTCS, to enable appropriate arrangements to be made, one even stating that it was *"so that my local authority could be notified and prepare suitable adjustments".* A small number of others said they had done so on moral grounds: to be open or because it would be wrong to withhold disclosure because *"it is important that my pupils are not affected by my disability".*

The respondents who identified their disabilities as specific learning difficulties tended to have polarised views on disclosure. Some did not disclose on the grounds that it would count against them, those with dyslexia showing concern that, for example, *"many people's opinions would be that a dyslexic person would not be as good a teacher in the primary level as a non dyslexic"* or simply that it would put potential employers off. Others who did disclose made firm statements that they were not ashamed of being dyslexic, one saying she was *"proud to be dyslexic".* In responding to a later question about the decision to disclose to pupils, some expressed the view that their dyslexia might even be an asset in some circumstances as it enabled them to show empathy with pupils who have learning difficulties. As one phrased it, *"a child struggling with reading found it reassuring that even adults can find reading difficult but that does not have to stop you doing things".*

❖ *Local authorities and school management*

Perhaps predictably, most teachers made similar decisions about disclosure to local authorities and to school management as they had for GTC Scotland, and for similar reasons. Many simply restated the same points as in their first responses. Those who did disclose often did so for practical reasons:

- *To access additional support and put in place availability of support if while on placement my disability adversely affected my attendance.*
- *In order to receive support and explain necessary absences.*
- *To clarify that I would be required to attend hospital at various times during the school year outwith my control to undergo procedures to manage my condition.*
- *Wanted to make sure they would make reasonable adjustments to classroom and knew time off may be required, if needed.*

For others the motivation related to health and safety issues, either on their own behalf, or potentially for colleagues or pupils:

- *I believe it is important that people are fully aware of my situation – and if there was an immediate need for medical intervention people were fully informed*
- *On occasions I can have hypo-glycaemic attacks and felt the school management should be made aware of this in case it happened during school hours.*
- *I could have been a possible liability to the class so safeguarding myself and my class.*

Some of those deciding not to disclose made this decision, especially in respect of school management, through suspicion of how the information might be used. Some referred directly to concerns about their future employment, one example being a respondent who commented that it "*might hinder my progress as a Probationer, and later as a fully fledged teacher".*

Others said they were influenced by the attitude of some colleagues:

- *During my probationary year I heard staff talking about colleagues having some health/disability. Their attitude and content of discussion were a kind of warning against what to say and to whom. So I decided to keep quiet.*
- *Ummm ... teachers talk, if one head teacher knows, they all know. As I said before I was worried I wouldn't get a job.*
- *Reputation.*

Another chose not to disclose "*due to treatment by management in placement school"*, while another with mental health issues commented that "*all research and statistics show that discrimination occurs so often"*. A teacher with a hearing impairment did not disclose it to her Head Teacher because she was concerned that she might be prevented from becoming a teacher "*or that my disability rather than my ability might have become the focus of attention".*

❖ *School Supporters and staff colleagues*

The necessarily closer relationship with Supporters in particular led two-thirds of respondents to disclose their disability at that level, though rather fewer broadened the disclosure to other staff colleagues.

Most of the reasons given for non-disclosure were as above, but the decision to disclose, though often for the same practical reasons as given for disclosing to GTCS or school management, could be more specific to the classroom. Some referred to the wish or need for direct help from the Supporter; others needed more understanding:

- *I felt it allowed me to be more involved in the learning for children with similar disabilities.*
- *To explain why I sometimes made spelling mistakes in my written work.*
- *To ensure that if I needed help/support, they were aware of the reasons why.*
- *I could have been a possible liability to the class so safeguarding myself and the class. (Teacher with a hearing impairment)*
- *My memory was affecting my teaching ability. (Teacher who had had a stroke)*
- *To increase deaf awareness and so they knew I needed to lipread at all times.*

The decision not to disclose to other staff colleagues was, in many cases, reported as being due to lack of confidence that the teachers would be treated fairly. They referred to a wish not to be judged, to negative attitudes, to a fear of being seen as less than capable, to embarrassment and to a lack of understanding among colleagues. A teacher with a visual impairment noted that she had experienced *"that people think of me differently when they find out about my disability"*. Two comments were particularly illuminating about the concerns of teachers with mental health difficulties:

- *Job stress doesn't encourage staff empathy.*
- *Teachers are not in my experience sympathetic to the health problems of colleagues.*

Those who did disclose their condition to other staff usually did so because the condition was obvious or because they needed help in specific circumstances. In a few cases, teachers said that they had disclosed because of trusting relationships with the colleague or colleagues concerned and in a few others that the disclosure resulted from an event at the school which made the condition more visible, such as someone with a depressive condition who at times became visibly distressed.

❖ *Pupils*

The majority of respondents did not disclose their disability to pupils, with over twenty saying that it would not have been appropriate or that it was private information. Some others believed that pupils would have tried to take advantage of them or, as one put it, *"they would have ripped into me!"* Others felt that pupils would have told others, either staff or, more threateningly, their parents, who would have questioned their ability to teach.

Those whose pupils were aware of their disabilities fell into two categories. Some had disabilities that were obvious for various reasons or which required pupils to be aware so that they could act in an emergency: physical disabilities, hearing impairment that required the teacher to be able to lip read and diabetes were three examples. Other teachers chose to tell the pupils quite deliberately, including the dyslexic teacher whose comments about children were struggling with reading are quoted above (page 6). Another with dyslexia made similar observations:

- *So pupils would understand if ever I tried to spell something and to help pupils who might have been under the impression that dyslexia makes learning impossible.*

Similar motives were evidenced by the teacher with mental health issues who said she had disclosed her condition *"as a show of empathy to those who cannot do the work or think I don't know how they are feeling"* and by the teacher with a long term medical condition who stated that he *"felt it would teach them how to be patient with others who have a disability".* A third, whose disabilities covered hearing impairment, a long-term medical condition and mobility impairment, told them:

- *As a way of encouraging them to reach their full potential and that nothing should stand in their way.*

Such contrasting insights offer revealing glimpses of the very different attitudes of teachers with disabilities towards disclosure of their conditions and the possible implications of such disclosure.

7   ITE : TIS links

Table 6: Respondents' rating of support during their ITE programmes

ITE course - support	Total	*%*
Excellent	20	*30.3*
Good	18	*27.3*
Fair	13	*19.7*
Poor	8	*12.1*
Very poor	7	*10.6*
Grand Total	**66**	*100.0*

The table above shows that most respondents found the support received during their ITE programmes to be at least fair, with almost one in three describing it as excellent. However, more than one fifth of respondents were dissatisfied with the level of support.

Of respondents who added commentary to their ratings, many related more to the school experience than to the support from the university at which they studied. Where they did comment directly about the university the comments were generally positive, with teachers recording a range of types of support:

- *Had extremely helpful staff at the university who helped with aspects of the written course. (Teacher with a long-term medical condition)*
- *Uni support beyond compare. Fantastic. (Teacher with complex disabilities including hearing and mobility impairments)*
- *The staff at the university were very understanding and listened well. (Teacher with a long-term medical condition)*
- *Provided with funding and support to purchase ICT equipment … Access to fetching service at library… University couldn't have been any more helpful. (Teacher with a permanent wrist injury)*

Those with hearing impairments appear to have received more consistent support than teachers with other disabilities:

- *Support from a notetaker and more personal attention from tutors checking I understood the lecture.*
- *Meetings prior to start of course to discuss support arrangements. Discussion with ITE technology advisor to discuss what technologies could be used to support my student course.*

- *Support arrangements were in place at the start of the ITE programme which was a crucial factor in my success with ITE. I worked closely with the Hearing Impaired department and was seen as a role model for their hearing impaired pupils. Mainstream pupils had the opportunity of working with someone with a hearing impairment which helped them understand the difficulties a hearing impaired person faced.*

In view of equalities legislation, which requires public buildings to have assistive technologies and access for people with physical disabilities, it is perhaps not surprising that the less complimentary observations tended to come from teachers with less visible conditions, and especially from those with mental health issues or with specific learning difficulties. For them, the issues ranged widely:

- *One reported a feeling of being just one of many students and so unable to access support.*
- *Another with a long-term medical condition reported that the university refused to change a school placement to a closer location when her condition deteriorated leading to a diagnosis that required significant lifestyle changes.*
- *Someone with specific learning difficulties said she was supposed to receive additional notes from tutors but struggled to keep up with the pace of lessons when this did not happen.*

One teacher, who had a long-tem medical condition and specific learning difficulties, had a specific complaint about the attitude of one tutor:

- *Nasty comment from a tutor outlining the fact that she did not think people with disabilities should be allowed to teach. Told you are an adult so what is your problem get on with it. Banned from using an insulin pen in a school staff room on placement.*

Others reported similar attitudes among school staff members. A dyslexic teacher was told that people with dyslexia should not be allowed to teach *"as they could not teach children as effectively as anyone else"*. Another diabetic teacher found a lack of understanding among her colleagues of how debilitating the condition can be, noting that some people assume that having diabetes is of your own doing. Similarly, a teacher with mental health difficulties felt that most members of staff did not understand her illness:

- *They gave the impression that I should 'snap out of it' and get on with feeling good. One day, in the middle of a severe anxiety attack, I was told that I had to return to the class and get on with teaching.*

Another was asked if she thought she was in the right job due to her stammer. She observed:

- *If she says that to me what is she saying to pupils or other staff who have disabilities?*

To summarise, experience of initial teacher education appears to have been variable from one individual to another, with those having less evident disabilities finding it a less positive experience than those with sensory or other visible disabilities. It is of course important to recognise that it is not possible to investigate the circumstances of the instances cited, so there is no way of corroborating the statements made. Nevertheless, they provide a valuable insight into the perspective of the teachers concerned.

8   Experiences of TIS

Table 7: Respondents' rating of support during their Induction experience

Overall TIS arrangements re disability	Total	%
Very well	9	*13.6*
Well	16	*24.2*
Adequately	16	*24.2*
Poorly	14	*21.2*
Very poorly	11	*16.7*
Grand Total	**66**	*100.0*

GTCS - support	Total	%
Excellent	4	*6.1*
Good	14	*21.2*
Fair	26	*39.4*
Poor	12	*18.2*
Very poor	10	*15.2*
Grand Total	**66**	*100.0*

LA - support	Total	%
Excellent	6	*9.1*
Good	17	*25.8*
Fair	24	*36.4*
Poor	8	*12.1*
Very poor	11	*16.7*
Grand Total	**66**	*100.0*

Supporter - support	Total	%
Excellent	28	*42.4*
Good	17	*25.8*
Fair	8	*12.1*
Poor	6	*9.1*
Very poor	7	*10.6*
Grand Total	**66**	*100.0*

Senior School Staff - support	Total	%
Excellent	17	*25.8*
Good	26	*39.4*
Fair	7	*10.6*
Poor	5	*7.6*
Very poor	11	*16.7*
Grand Total	**66**	*100.0*

School colleagues - support	Total	%
Excellent	26	*39.4*
Good	22	*33.3*
Fair	10	*15.2*
Poor	6	*9.1*
Very poor	2	*3.0*
Grand Total	**66**	*100.0*

Examination of respondents' views on their Induction experience reveal a similar breadth of opinion on the levels of support they received, with some very positive, especially about the support they received at school level, while others regarding the support as poor or very poor. In almost all sections of the table, roughly one in six described the support as "very poor".

Although over two thirds of respondents rated the school level support as excellent or good, nearly one in five gave negative ratings to their school Supporters and almost one in four described support from school senior management as poor or very poor. It is noticeable that the highest ratings were given to school colleagues, who did not necessarily have a formal role in the Induction process.

While all disabled groups reported variations in the levels of support they received, those with physical disabilities such as hearing or mobility issues were again more likely to rate the support they were given positively than were those with long term medical conditions, mental health issues or specific learning difficulties. Examples of adjustments made to support individuals included:

- Moving a colleague and clearing a classroom to assist a teacher with tunnel vision;
- Assistance with form filling and proof reading of reports for teachers with dyslexia;
- Paid time away from school to visit a therapist for a teacher with a stammer; and
- The provision of a smartboard for a teacher with a permanent wrist injury to use with his own laptop (although this teacher also stated that this led to "initial disfavour" by some members of staff who resented his being given such "preferential treatment").

Some teachers also reported that they had received strong personal support from the mentor or Principal Teacher or in some cases from other school colleagues. A teacher with a hearing impairment had helpful meetings with the local authority probation coordinator, while others referred to colleagues being patient with their mistakes, being treated as an equal within the school, receiving understanding or help in planning or in form filling from colleagues or support when a long-term medical condition flared up. One teacher with mobility problems commented:

- *I had a fantastic experience on my TIS placement. All staff, without exception, treated me with absolute equity and I couldn't have asked for anything more.*

Such positive experiences were not, however, universal, even some of those giving positive statements also indicating issues of concern. The teacher with tunnel vision noted that those arranging local authority CPD events did not tell providers that adjustments would be necessary; the teacher who had helpful meetings with the local authority probation coordinator reported being told by the Depute Head Teacher that she was unsure of whether to indicate satisfactory progress at the end of the year and felt it necessary to contact GTC Scotland for advice; the teacher with a stammer reported colleagues laughing and completing sentences for her when she found difficulty in speaking; and the teacher with specific learning difficulties who had help with planning was unimpressed to hear the head of learning support tell staff at an in-school CPD session that, "*dyslexics have a neanderthalic brain so need to be taught differently*".

Some teachers with long-term medical conditions, with mental health difficulties or with specific learning difficulties did not feel that the system, their senior managers and sometimes their colleagues understood their conditions or their needs, as the following responses illustrate:

- *Gossiping about my illness. Non 1-1 mentoring (group mentoring of both probationers). (Teacher with a long-term medical condition)*
- *People not fully understanding condition and consequences. (Teacher with diabetes)*

- *My "supporter" made a big issue over a spelling mistake I had made and made me feel particularly paranoid over all spelling throughout the year … My confidence was knocked during my ITE period and therefore have not officially disclosed to any employers since. (Teacher with dyslexia)*
- *Both myself and the other probationer had made some minor spelling errors in our forward plans. I was pulled up for it but she was not! (Teacher with dyslexia)*
- *I was made to feel like I hadn't put in enough preparation time when I had actually struggled to remember all of the preparation I had done. My supporter would sneak into my classroom and check the children's jotters. She would also ask the children about me and speak to my 0.3 partner about me when I wasn't there. (Teacher who had had a stroke that impacted on short term memory)*
- *I have rated all of the above very poor because at no stage during the induction period did I receive the slightest indication from anyone that it was acceptable to be open about a mental health issue. In school it was made very clear that it was wise to keep such matters very quiet indeed. (Teacher with mental health difficulties)*

It is important to recognise that these views are self reported and the researchers recognise the limitations of this methodology. The decision to encourage responses by making these anonymous prevents any possibility of triangulation by obtaining the views of others with whom they had interacted.

To an extent, the views of respondents may also have been coloured by their own expectations, which may not always have been justifiable. For example, the last quotation is from a teacher who said she did not disclose her condition to anyone at all, so it is difficult to envisage a situation in which the indication she sought could have been given. Similarly, a teacher with a range of disabilities who only disclosed to colleagues who noticed her symptoms and to pupils "as a way of encouraging them to reach their own potential" (though not to GTCS, local authority or school management or supporter) rated support as good but commented that she had found walking between classes troublesome and that noise levels in certain places made it difficult for her to gather information. Without such disclosure it is not easy to understand what she expected to be done.

9 Attaining the SFR

Access to Continuing Professional Development

Table 8: Respondents' views, whether they encountered barriers relating to their disability which made it more difficult for them to access relevant CPD during their TIS placement

	Total	%
No	48	*72.7*
Yes	16	*24.2*
(blank)	2	*3.0*
Grand Total	**66**	*100.0*

Sixteen of the sixty-six respondents stated that they had encountered barriers related to their disability which made it more difficult to access relevant CPD during their TIS placements. Twelve of these and two teachers who had not encountered difficulties, entered comments.

The reported barriers related to three types of issue: those relating to the venue; those relating to the delivery of the CPD; and those relating to the nature of the CPD activity.

- Four comments (three from teachers with mobility issues) related to difficulties with transport to venues. A teacher with mobility issues described some buildings as "inaccessible" while one with a physical disability found that ICT provision on some courses was not suitable.
- Although one teacher commented that there was no difficulty as she told the staff running the course of her disability, another teacher with hearing difficulties reported that some courses were held at venues with poor acoustics, course leaders failed to use microphones and talked while walking away or with their backs turned.
- Two teachers with specific learning difficulties found the need for hand written work, either note taking during the session or writing reports, difficult, and one person with a wrist injury reported a similar issue in having to hand write forms with no electronic alternative.

Overall, 32 respondents rated the effectiveness of support to overcome barriers relating to their disability which made it more difficult for them to access relevant CPD during their TIS placement.

Table 9: Respondents' rating of the effectiveness of support to overcome barriers to accessing relevant CPD during their TIS placement

Issues - CPD	Supported effectively to overcome 'CPD' issues	Total
No	Very well	4
	Well	2
	Fairly well	7
	Poorly	
	Very poorly	3
No Total		**16**
Yes	Very well	
	Well	
	Fairly well	5
	Poorly	5
	Very poorly	6
Yes Total		**16**
Grand Total		**32**

Achieving the Standard for Full Registration

Table 10: Respondents' views, whether they encountered barriers relating to their disability which made it more difficult for them to demonstrate their achievement of the SFR during their TIS placement

	Total	%
No	49	*74.2*
Yes	15	*22.7*
(blank)	2	*3.0*
Grand Total	**66**	*100.0*

Fifteen respondents reported that they had encountered barriers relating to their disability which made it more difficult for them to demonstrate their achievement of the SFR during their TIS placements.

The thirteen accompanying comments did not reveal any factors that were common to more than two respondents. Issues raised included the belief that their disabilities had led to bias against them, lack of confidence, issues of stress, difficulties in completing administrative tasks and with completing the online profile, with one person with a mobility impairment asked "if you can't physically get to all meetings then how can you take an active role in whole school development?".

Overall 29 respondents rated the effectiveness of support to overcome barriers relating to their disability which made it more difficult for them to demonstrate their achievement of the SFR during their TIS placement

Table 11: Respondents' rating of the effectiveness of support to overcome barriers to demonstrating achievement of the SFR during their TIS placement

Issues - SFR	Supported effectively to overcome 'SFR' issues	Total
No	Very well	3
	Well	4
	Fairly well	6
	Poorly	
	Very poorly	1
No Total		**14**
Yes	Very well	3
	Well	
	Fairly well	3
	Poorly	5
	Very poorly	4
Yes Total		**15**
Grand Total		**29**

Additional barriers to attaining the Standard for Full Registration

Table 12: Respondents' views, whether their disability created additional barriers to attaining the SFR

	Total	%
No	39	59.1
Yes	25	37.9
(blank)	2	3.0
Grand Total	**66**	100.0

Although only fifteen people said that they had faced barriers relating to their disability in demonstrating their achievement of the SFR, twenty-five felt that their disability had created additional barriers to their actual attainment of the Standard. There were twenty-two explanatory comments, including two from people who did not think this was the case for them.

Eight of these comments, all from teachers with mental health issues, specific learning difficulties or long-term medical conditions, related to issues of stress, anxiety or fatigue. Four others related to dealing with paperwork, especially where hand written, while in contrast three had difficulties with some aspect of computer use - one dyslexic teacher referred to the online profile as having "the worst spell checker I have ever experienced".

Overall 36 respondents rated the effectiveness of support to overcome *additional* barriers relating to their disability which made it more difficult for them to attain the SFR.

Table 13: Respondents' rating of the effectiveness of support to overcome additional barriers to attaining the SFR

	Supported effectively to overcome additional 'SFR' issues	Total
No	Very well	4
	Well	1
	Fairly well	6
	Poorly	
	Very poorly	2
No Total		**13**
Yes	Very well	3
	Well	3
	Fairly well	5
	Poorly	6
	Very poorly	6
Yes Total		**23**
Grand Total		**36**

10   Additional comments

The final section of the survey invited respondents to make any other comments in addition to their responses to particular questions. Thirty-three respondents did so, covering a wide range of themes. Some were very general or repeated points the respondents had made earlier.

In a few cases the teachers wished to communicate their positive experiences, including the teacher who is used in his school as a role model for disabled pupils and the hearing impaired teacher who had received excellent support from departmental colleagues. One, with a mobility impairment, commented:

- *My TIS placement was a fabulous experience, with no negative issues being raised in relation to my disability at all.*

Another, who had a long term medical condition and specific learning difficulties, felt that the support and attitudes she encountered in the TIS were far superior to those in university, perhaps due to the fact that she had a very supportive mentor and head teacher. By contrast, a teacher with diabetes found the university tutor more understanding and helpful than were the school staff when a chest infection caused her condition to flare up.   Though it is to be expected that such variations in experience will occur as individuals and their approaches will be different from place to place, perhaps it suggests that some form of common strategy, professional development or guidance would be appropriate.

This theme arose in the responses of others who, critical or not of the support they had received personally, made constructive suggestions relating to various aspects of the process. Some of these related to Initial Teacher Education:

- *With regards to the ITE year, I think staff should be trained specifically on helping teachers with disabilities to overcome barriers when often the simplest of solutions is required.*
- *I feel that the PGDE course should incorporate more aspects of stress management in workload and managing pupils' behaviour as these are two main reasons why people leave the profession. To simply know that experienced teachers struggle at times makes all the difference and to observe their coping strategies would be invaluable at that early stage.*
- *Students/probationers with disabilities should be interviewed during the PGCE and upon entry into a placement school to determine what barriers are there and what steps can be taken to support the person. Too often, having a disability - especially an unseen one - is a piece of information which is confined to a form in a filing cabinet.   The disabled person must be considered as a person, not a statistic.*

In addition, a small number of respondents offered constructive suggestions related to support provided by schools and local authorities:

- *All CPD for all teachers, probationers or not, should be inclusive. This means thinking in advance about what people with different abilities might be able or not able to do The assumption that all teachers are great speed readers is wrong. If people feel that they are a part of a group who are trying to include everyone they are more likely to disclose their disability and to ask for help or support.*
- *Perhaps GTCS could arrange for meetings with senior staff in schools where TIS candidates have indicated a disability to make them aware of the GTCS standard?*

- *Time at start of TIS to ensure support arrangements are in place would assist, as would earlier allocation of local authority. I found that the LA was put under a lot of pressure to put a support assistant in place prior to the start of the session – could this have been done earlier?*

Of particular note in the additional comments section was the number of comments from respondents who had chosen not to disclose a disability, also discussed in a previous section:

- *I did not seek support for my disability beyond the school in which I was placed, therefore I feel I cannot fairly comment on support offered by GTC or the authority.*
- *Although I have said that the GTC and local authority supported me well I had not actually informed them that I have diabetes.*
- *People with any mental health history are very scared about admitting this even though they may be hard working, conscientious, highly creative and dedicated to their jobs. There always seems to be a them and us attitude.*
- *I see no reason why I should / would disclose any problems to my school or LA especially when they don't affect my teaching.*
- *I have never told any of my employments about my dyslexia, preferring to prove my ability on my work rather than being seen as getting special help.*

In comparison, two respondents who had not disclosed a disability at the start of their TIS experience reflected that with hindsight, they may have made a different decision:

- *The fact that I have never trusted the system enough to disclose my illness means that instead of now having eight years experience and pension rights etc, I now have three. If I could have been open then I could have worked a lot more, I was certainly capable of doing so had there been support.*
- *In retrospect, I think that I would have received good support from Senior Management, some colleagues and pupils had I disclosed my disability during my induction year.*

Finally, one respondent commented that they hoped this research heralds a new approach towards the whole issue of disabilities within the teaching profession, an ambitious challenge which may contribute to further thinking as the research findings are shared with the profession and possible next steps are identified.

11   Conclusion and recommendations

This research investigates the experience of people with disabilities who have participated in the TIS, both during their time as a student at an HEI and their time on the TIS.

The evidence is based on a relatively small respondent sample, which makes it difficult to provide general conclusions about the experiences of disabled teachers. Nevertheless, the statistical data and accompanying analysis, together with the narrative comments provided by respondents, provide a valuable indication of the experiences of teachers with disabilities and enable the identification of a number of issues that may be worthy of further discussion and consideration. It is hoped therefore, that the findings of this research will aid reflection and discussion on current practices, and help contribute to planning for further improvement.

The research indicates that, in general, the experiences of the participants have been positive, with encouraging information regarding levels and quality of support in universities, local authorities and establishments. However, the research also indicates that the experiences of some participants were not quite so positive. To summarise, experiences of ITE and the TIS of people with disabilities appear variable depending on a range of factors, including the nature of the disability, the support provided in ITE and in the TIS and the decision to disclose or otherwise. It would appear that respondents with less evident disabilities report a less positive experience than those with sensory or other visible disabilities. It is important to remember that it is not possible to investigate the circumstances of the instances cited, so there is no way of corroborating the statements made. Nevertheless, they provide a valuable insight into the perspective of the teachers concerned.

Crucially, the research reveals very different attitudes of teachers with disabilities towards disclosure of their conditions and the possible implications of such disclosure. Clearly, the decision to disclose disabilities by students and teachers prompts assistance and support, although a number of respondents indicated a suspicion as to how this information may subsequently be used. Whilst it is understandable that some people may choose not to disclose a disability, this may have contributed to a subsequent lack of understanding and a deficiency in support in a number of the situations described in the report. It is important therefore, to continue to ensure that teachers with a disability are informed about the use of disclosed information by HEIs, GTCS and local authorities, in order to ensure that appropriate support is available throughout their time as a student, and on the TIS. Effective communication is vital to ensure that all TIS participants have access to support mechanisms, guidance and information. Although it is to be expected that variations in experience will occur as individuals and their approaches will be different from place to place, perhaps it suggests that some form of common strategy, professional development or guidance would be appropriate. Continued education and awareness-raising at events for prospective and current students, as well as for new teachers embarking on the TIS, will continue to foster a climate where acceptance and understanding are the norm.

Finally, because the number of respondents was fairly low there may be potential for conducting one-to-one sessions with individuals in order to gather further information about specific experiences. Thirty-one participants provided contact information for this purpose. The additional information collected could form the basis for case studies of individual experiences which could be made available on-line to inform current and prospective TIS participants, as well as HEI and local authority staff.

References

Duquette, C., (2000) Examining autobiographical influences on student teachers with disabilities, *Teachers and Teaching*, 6:2, 215-228.

Riddick, B., (2001) The experiences of teachers and trainee teachers who have dyslexia, Paper given at the Fifth British Dyslexia Association International Conference, University of York.

Rieser, R., (2008) Disabled Teachers Survey, September 2008, NUT, London.

Rothi, D., Leavey, G. & Loewenthal, K, (2010) Teachers' mental health: a study exploring the experiences of teachers with work-related stress and mental health problems, NASUWT, Birmingham.

DISABILITY DISCRIMINATION ACT 1995

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 states that a disabled person is someone with 'a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities'.

You do not need to be registered disabled to meet this definition. It is sufficient that you have an impairment or long-term medical condition that you consider to have had an adverse effect on your day-to-day work.

Having read the above definition, did you consider yourself to have a disability during your TIS placement?

◯ Yes

◯ No

SECTION A - PERSONAL DETAILS

In this section we ask you to provide some brief personal details to enable us to differentiate between different respondent groups.

1. Please indicate your gender:

◯ Male

◯ Female

2. Please indicate your age group:

◯ 21-25

◯ 26-30

◯ 31-35

◯ 36-40

◯ 41-45

◯ 46-50

◯ 51+

3. Please indicate the Initial Teacher Education qualification you achieved:

◯ BEd (Prim)

◯ BEd (Sec) Combined Degree

◯ PGCE (Prim)

◯ PGCE (Sec)

◯ PGDE (Prim)

◯ PGDE (Sec)

◯ Other

(please specify)

[   ]

4. Please specify the University at which you completed your teacher education:

[   ]

5. Please indicate the year in which you were a probationer teacher:

○ 2002/03

○ 2003/04

○ 2004/05

○ 2005/06

○ 2006/07

○ 2007/08

○ 2008/09

○ 2009/10

6. In which sector did you complete your Teacher Induction Scheme (TIS) placement?

○ Primary

○ Secondary

7. In which Local Authority did you complete your TIS placement:

[   ]

SECTION B - DISCLOSURE OF DISABILITIES - PART 1

In this section we ask you to provide some brief details relating to your disability or long term medical condition, and your decision whether to disclose this information or refrain from such disclosure, at various stages relating to your TIS placement.

8. Please indicate the nature of your condition(s):

☐ Autistic spectrum disorder such as Asperger's syndrome

☐ Hearing impairment

☐ Long-term medical condition (eg asthma, diabetes, epilepsy, heart condition, MS)

☐ Mental health difficulties

☐ Mobility impairment

☐ Specific learning difficulties (eg dyslexia, dyspraxia)

☐ Visual impairment

☐ Other

(please specify)

☐

SECTION B - DISCLOSURE OF DISABILITIES - PART 2

9. Did you disclose a disability as part of the process of registration with GTC Scotland?

◯ Yes

◯ No

What was the main reason for your decision

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                                                              ▲
                                                              ▼
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10. Did you disclose a disability to the Local Authority in which you worked during your TIS placement?

◯ Yes

◯ No

What was the main reason for your decision?

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                                                              ▲
                                                              ▼
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11. Did you disclose a disability to the school in which you worked during your TIS placement:

(a) to the school management?

◯ Yes

◯ No

What was the main reason for your decision?

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                                                              ▲
                                                              ▼
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(b) to your school supporter?

◯ Yes

◯ No

What was the main reason for your decision?

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(c) to other colleagues on the school staff?

◯ Yes

◯ No

What was the main reason for your decision?

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(d) to pupils in the school?

◯ Yes

◯ No

What was the main reason for your decision?

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SECTION C - INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION : TEACHER INDUCTION SCHEME LINKS

In this section we invite you to share your views on the support you experienced on your ITE programme prior to undertaking your induction year.

12. How would you rate, overall, the support your received whilst undertaking your ITE course?

◯ Excellent

◯ Good

◯ Fair

◯ Poor

◯ Very poor

Please use the space below to highlight, in relation to your disability, any particularly POSITIVE aspects of support whilst undertaking your ITE programme:

Please use the space below to highlight any particular NEGATIVE aspects of support (or barriers encountered) whilst undertaking your ITE programme:

In this section we invite you to share your views on the support you experienced while undertaking the TIS in respect of your application for registration with GTC Scotland, TIS placement and consequent experience of the TIS year.

13. To what extent did the arrangements for you to participate in the TIS take account of your needs as a teacher with a disability?

( ) Very well

( ) Well

( ) Adequately

( ) Poorly

( ) Very poorly

14. How would you rate the support you received from GTC Scotland?

( ) Excellent

( ) Good

( ) Fair

( ) Poor

( ) Very poor

15. How would you rate the support you received from the Local Authority?

( ) Excellent

( ) Good

( ) Fair

( ) Poor

( ) Very poor

SECTION D - EXPERIENCES OF THE TEACHER INDUCTION SCHEME - PART 2

16. How would you rate the support you received from your Supporter in the school where you carried out your TIS placement?

◯ Excellent

◯ Good

◯ Fair

◯ Poor

◯ Very poor

17. How would you rate the support you received from the senior staff (eg Headteacher, regent) in the school where you carried out your TIS placement?

◯ Excellent

◯ Good

◯ Fair

◯ Poor

◯ Very poor

18. How would you rate the support you received from other teaching colleagues in the school where you carried out your TIS placement?

◯ Excellent

◯ Good

◯ Fair

◯ Poor

◯ Very poor

Please use the space below to highlight, in relation to your disability, any particularly POSITIVE aspects of support received whilst undertaking your TIS placement:

Please use the space below to highlight any particularly NEGATIVE aspects of support received (or barriers encountered) whilst undertaking your TIS placement:

SECTION E - ATTAINING THE STANDARD FOR FULL REGISTRATION (SFR)

In this section we invite you to share your views on your experiences in attaining the SFR.

19. Did you encounter any issues relating to your disability which made it more difficult for you to access relevant CPD during your TIS placement?

◯ Yes

◯ No

If YES, please describe these issues:

[text box]

How effectively were you supported to overcome these issues?

◯ Very well

◯ Well

◯ Fairly well

◯ Poorly

◯ Very poorly

20. Did you encounter any issues relating to your disability which made it more difficult for you to demonstrate your achievement of the SFR during your TIS placement?

◯ Yes

◯ No

If YES, please describe these issues:

[text box]

How effectively were you supported to overcome these issues?

◯ Very well

◯ Well

◯ Fairly well

◯ Poorly

◯ Very poorly

21. Do you think your disability created any additional issues to attaining the SFR?
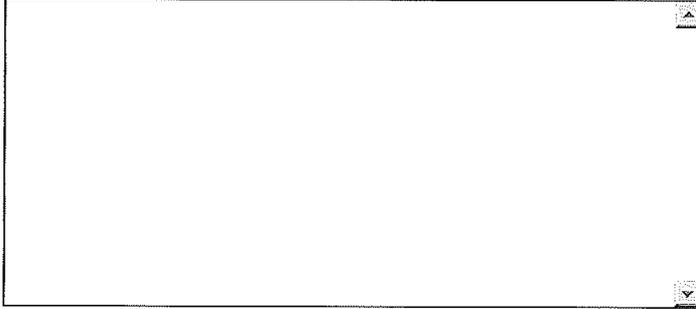
◯ Yes

◯ No

If YES, please describe these issues:

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How effectively were you supported to overcome these issues?

◯ Very well

◯ Well

◯ Fairly well

◯ Poorly

◯ Very poorly

SECTION F - ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Please use the space below to make any other comments relating to the topics covered in this questionnaire:

OPTIONAL ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Dependent on the success of this survey and its outcomes, there may be an opportunity to investigate this research project further, eg focus groups. If you would like to be involved please complete the following details:

Name:

Registration Number:

Address:

Address 2:

City/Town:

Postal Code:

Email Address:

Phone Number:

THANK YOU

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.

Nature of your condition(s)			Number of teachers
Autistic spectrum disorder such as Asperger's syndrome	Long-term medical condition (eg asthma, diabetes, epilepsy, heart condition, MS)	Other: *Fracture of cervical vertebrae, healed in wrong position causing intermittent pain.*	1
Autistic spectrum disorder such as Asperger's syndrome	Mental health difficulties	Specific learning difficulties (eg dyslexia, dyspraxia)	1
Hearing impairment	Long-term medical condition (eg asthma, diabetes, epilepsy, heart condition, MS)	Mobility impairment	1
Hearing impairment	Mobility impairment	Other: *55% deaf/25% lame*	1
Long-term medical condition (eg asthma, diabetes, epilepsy, heart condition, MS)	Mental health difficulties	Mobility impairment	1
Hearing impairment	Specific learning difficulties (eg dyslexia, dyspraxia)		1
Hearing impairment	Visual impairment		1
Long-term medical condition (eg asthma, diabetes, epilepsy, heart condition, MS)	Mobility impairment		4
Long-term medical condition (eg asthma, diabetes, epilepsy, heart condition, MS)	Specific learning difficulties (eg dyslexia, dyspraxia)		3
Mental health difficulties	Specific learning difficulties (eg dyslexia, dyspraxia)		1
Mental health difficulties	Other: *Back trouble*		1
Specific learning difficulties (eg dyslexia, dyspraxia)	Visual impairment		1
Hearing impairment			6
Long-term medical condition (eg asthma, diabetes, epilepsy, heart condition, MS)			11
Mental health difficulties			8
Mobility impairment			1
Specific learning difficulties (eg dyslexia, dyspraxia)			12
Visual impairment			3
Other: *Arthritis*			
Other: *Chronic Depression*			
Other: *Fibromyalgia*			
Other: *Stroke 2007 - impact on short term memory.*			
Other: *Stammer*			
Other: *Muscle weakness in arms, back and legs*			
Other: *Permanent wrist injury*			
Other: *Physical impairment*			8
			66

GTC Scotland aims to promote equality and diversity in all its activities

Direct weblinks

Main site:
www.gtcs.org.uk

Probation department:
www.gtcs.org.uk/probation

Probation site for teachers:
www.probationerteacherscotland.org.uk

Registration department:
www.gtcs.org.uk/registration

Chartered teachers:
www.gtcs.org.uk/charteredteacher

Professional recognition:
www.gtcs.org.uk/professionalrecognition

Professional conduct:
www.gtcs.org.uk/professionalconduct

Research:
www.gtcs.org.uk/research

Code: GTCS……