

**International Educational Excellence Programme for Students with Disabilities of University of Delhi to Universities in United Kingdom  
(29<sup>th</sup> June - 9<sup>th</sup> July, 2013)**

**Executive Summary**

The International Educational Excellence Program for students with disabilities is a unique initiative envisioned by the Honourable Vice Chancellor of the University of Delhi, Prof. Dinesh Singh, to provide these students with international exposure in the field of higher education for persons with disabilities. It is the firm belief of our visionary Vice Chancellor that such exposure will provide the students with disabilities of the University with long term perspectives like – acquaint them with the different technological advancements available to facilitate their pursuit of higher education, provide them with experience of the different teaching methodologies and learning strategies adopted abroad to optimise the benefits they can derive from their educational enterprise and inculcate in them an awareness of the processes through which a much desired inclusive teaching and learning environment can be created. This project was supervised by a working committee of the university and implemented through its Equal Opportunity Cell in active collaboration with the British Council.

**Working Committee**

To give shape to his vision, the Vice Chancellor constituted a working committee under the chairmanship of Prof. Malashri Lal [Dean, Academic Activities and Projects]. Its other members included Mrs Alka Sharma [Registrar], Prof. Satwanti Kapoor [Proctor], Mr. ZVS Prasad [ Finance Officer], Prof. Usha Rao [Coordinator, Equal Opportunity Cell (EOC)], Prof. Shriram Mittal [Professor, Central Institute of Education] and Dr. Bipin Tiwari [OSD, Equal Opportunities Cell] as member secretary.

The objective of this committee was to work out the modalities with reference to

- Identification of institutions abroad
- Evolving a process of selection of students with disabilities.
- Identification of faculty members
- Finalization itinerary and modalities for the programme.

### **Equal Opportunities Cell**

The Equal Opportunity Cell was then entrusted with the task of overseeing the overall preparation for the programme for selecting the students with disabilities to be part of the Delhi University delegation to arrange passports and visas, conducting awareness classes and assisting in other general preparations for the journey. It was also told to get in touch with the British Council to formalize and give shape to the programme.

### **The British Council**

The active support of the British Council is to be acknowledged here, particularly in formalising the programme and selecting the two universities in the UK to be visited by the Delhi University delegation. The prestigious King's College, London and the University of Edinburgh, Scotland were chosen as the British Institutions to host the team from India. It is also important to register our deep sense of gratitude towards the Council for making this programme a success.

### **The Group**

It is worth mentioning that the University of Delhi is the university with the maximum number and the most diverse group of students with disabilities in the country. A representative team of students (Annexure-A) which included students with vision impairment, hearing impairment, orthopaedic impairment and learning disabilities. Conscious attempts were made to provide representation to students from different strata of society.

The faculty and student volunteer members of the delegation were nominated by the University from various colleges and departments based on their rich experience and contribution in the field of Education and Disability (Annexure-B).

The delegation was then organized into two groups of fifteen each (11 special ability students, 1 student volunteer & 3 faculty members). While one team went to visit King's College, London, the other went to the University of Edinburgh, Scotland.

### **The London and Edinburgh Experience**

The experience in London and Edinburgh was quite enriching. As we went through the days, the philosophical aspect of acceptance of disability as a difference rather than as a deficit became evident. We were made to realize that the persons with disability in the UK were neither sheltered nor pitied. They were rather accepted for who they were. Even those with disabilities themselves wanted people to accept their differences and not treat them differently. This was an experience that we encountered across every walk of life.

Details of day-wise programmes are enclosed (Edinburgh Annexure- C, Summary of Kings College report Annexure -D and detail day-wise report of Kings College Annexure - E).

### **The Highlights of the Programme**

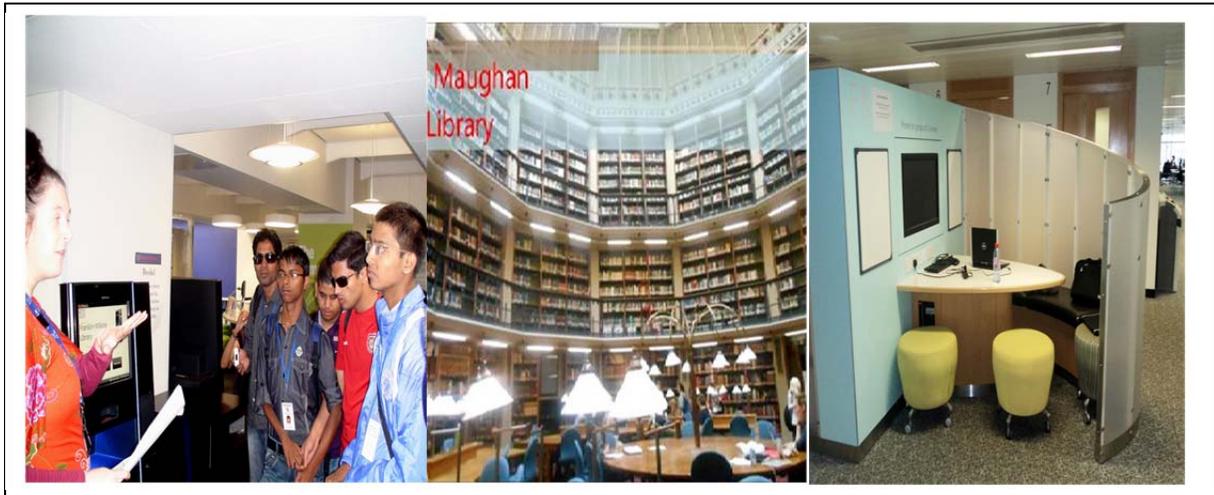
#### **Talks /Sessions**

The talks and lectures arranged for the group both at King's College, London and the University of Edinburgh, Scotland were informative as well as interactive, acquainting us with how the issue of disability is treated in the UK. The students were also allowed to attend King's summer school for a day touching upon subjects such as British Crime Writing, Global Health and Ancient Philosophy. The College also hosted a talk on UK Higher Education Policy in which we discussed how things work differently in India,



and what the two countries should learn from each other. The Disability Convenor at King's College , David Arnold, presented a comprehensive lecture on the various activities related to the empowerment of the disabled community. All these lectures went a long way in helping our students to understand the phenomenon of disability within the social and cultural milieu of Britain in particular and the World in general.

## Library



Both at King's College, London and the University of Edinburgh, Scotland, the libraries were well equipped to handle the various needs of the students with disabilities. These

libraries were equipped with the latest assistive technologies (refer to Day 6, July 4, of the King's College report and Day 4, July 2, Edinburgh Diaries). The shelves of these libraries had Braille writings on them to enable visually impaired students to navigate through the library in search of their books. They also had separate sections for Braille and audio books.

### Accessibility @ University

Both the Universities are fully accessible to all, starting from the entrance , corridors, lifts , classrooms , Library , Dinning areas etc.



‘A picture conveys more than a thousand words,’ which is why this part of the executive summary has far more photographs than generally is the norm, as it depicts the accessibilities and other facilities far better.

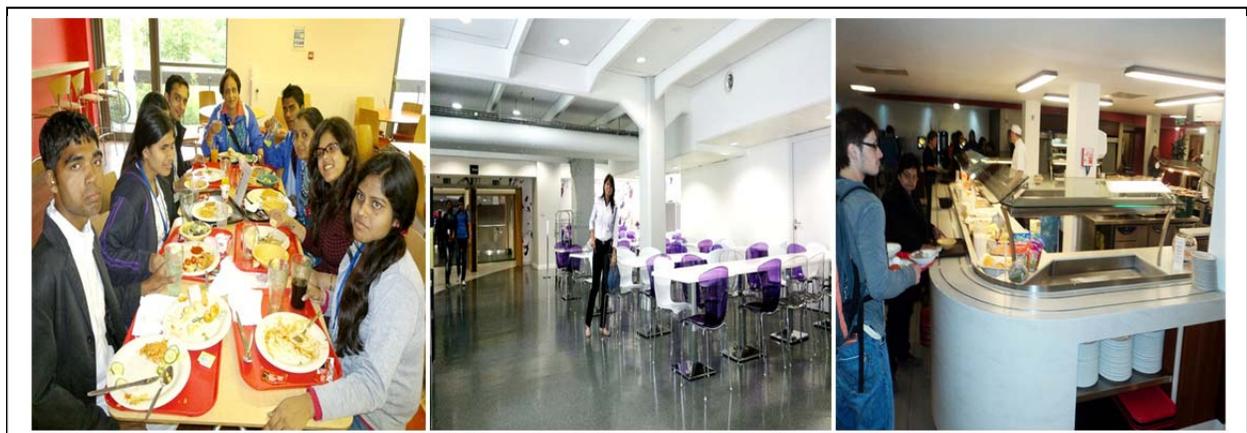
Being a wheelchair user was no reason for a student to be late for classes. The passages were cluttered free and the doors were either installed with electronic sensors and opened on their own or had electronic/mechanical switches to open them. It was also pleasing to

note that rails along the steps, as well as inclined paths running parallel to the steps were present throughout the university.



Almost all lifts, bathrooms etc. were provided with embossed Braille signage. Towards the end of our stay, all the students with visual impairment confidently moved in and out of the lifts by themselves.

The dining spaces were also pretty comfortable, not only for persons with disabilities but also for others who would rather keep their tray on the table and slide it forward instead of carrying it in one hand and serving with the other.



Being able to use the bathroom by oneself and without too much of extra time as compared to one's so called able bodied colleagues goes a long way towards maintaining one's self esteem and confidence. The presence of fewer fixtures in the bathrooms made them disabled-friendly. The pictures below are self-explanatory.



**Accessible Toilets**

### **Accessibility @ City**

As the photographs make it obvious, the roads in and around universities in the UK are provided with clear signs, usable well planned sidewalks and emergency parking points. The smoothness of the roads and the absence of potholes, give full movement to vehicle with modification for special needs is worth emulating in our country.



The buses, with their low steps, are easily accessible to persons with special needs. They also have a provision for a portable ramp to enable the wheelchair users to enter. Though one can occasionally sight similar bases in India, each and every bus in the UK is

disabled-friendly. The same can be said for the taxis, which, besides being spacious, also have a pull out ramp system for easy entry and exit for persons with special needs.



**The comfortable buses & ‘The tube’ as we call it, ‘the metro’**



**Ramp and steps**

**The fire alarm drill**



### **Technological Aids**

It was pleasing to see that in the universities in the UK, the demand for study material in Braille has gone down substantially. Softwares and other technology have provided students with different disabilities with greater access to study material. We, at the Univeristy of Delhi, also have such resources, if not more. The primary concern here, however, is that they are available only at certain places in the University. Many of the colleges are working towards reaching global levels of excellence with respect to resources and technology within the University of Delhi.

The emphasis needs to be laid on encouraging the colleges and other centres of the university to install these technologies and softwares even if it is meant for a single student. What is of use for a student can often be used by many others to facilitate their

learning experience. For example a talking software or a scan to screen/text to speech software is not only useful for the visually impaired but also for the hearing impaired as well as for the dyslexic.



**Drop boxes: another step towards self- discipline**



**Interactions with students**



**Automatic book return system**

## Museums and Art Galleries



The visits to the museums and art galleries that was quite revealing, particularly the way in which these places were made accessible to the visually impaired. Visits such as those to the Tate Modern Art Gallery and the Hunterian Museum were both educational and informative. The visually impaired students were taken for a touch tour of the Tate Gallery and at the Hunterian Museum, there was a special session for them to touch and feel the objects as they were described to them.

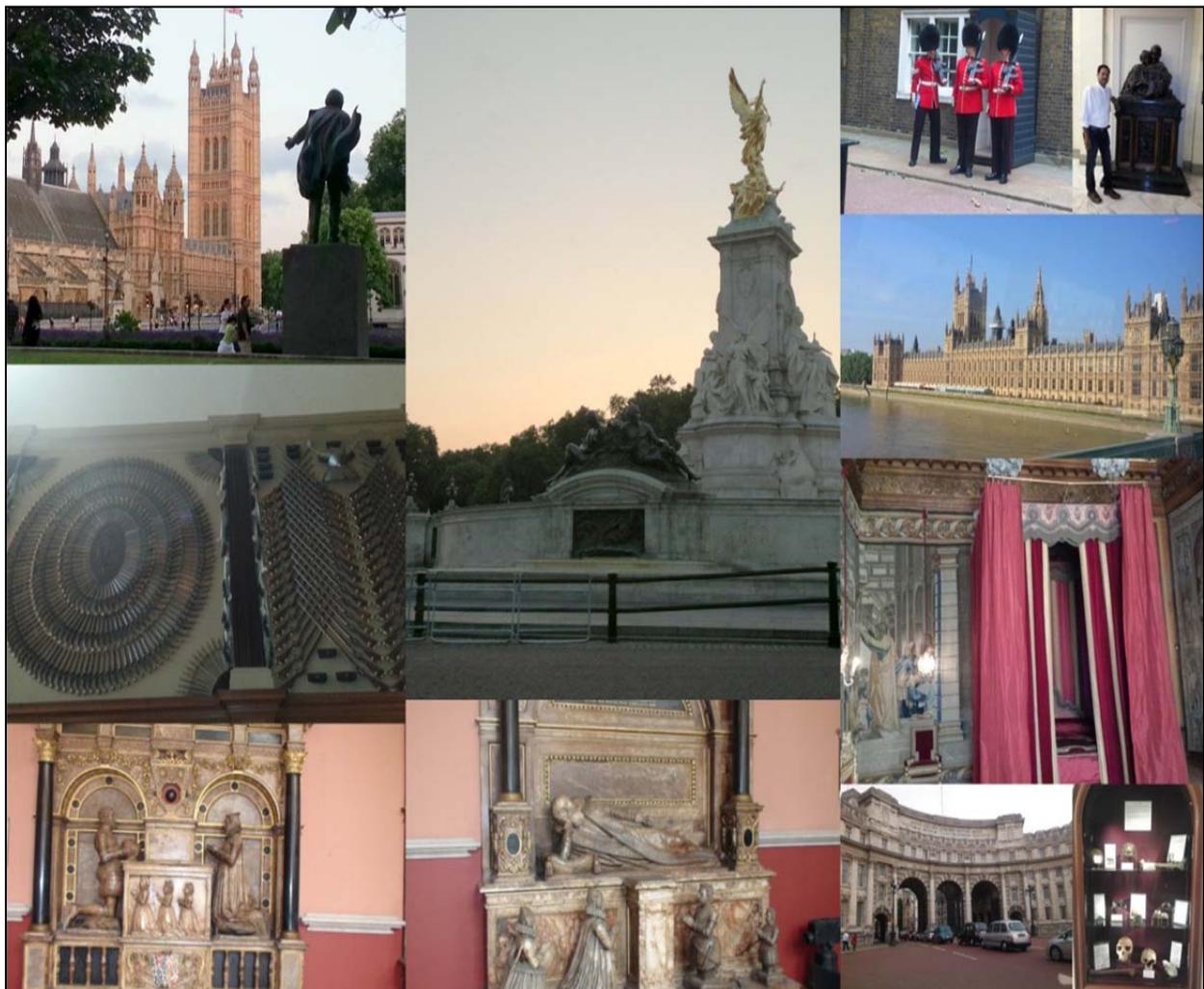


Also, every object had a tag with a number corresponding to the audio file to hear its description. At the Tate Modern, we enjoyed visiting different galleries – Tate 2000 gallery, Jacob gallery, Frank Lloyd gallery, Lydia and Hanfred Gorvy gallery, Headley

Trust gallery, The Gotesman gallery. It was worth noting that the lifts in all these places had strict instructions to prioritize the physically challenged.

## **Historical Places**

During our stay in the UK, we had the opportunity to visit places of historical importance both in London as well as Edinburgh. The entire city of Edinburgh seems to be one large consortium of historical buildings. The group was fortunate to be able to visit castles and the Royale Mile in Scotland and the Buckingham Place in London. We also took a walk on the Millenium Bridge to reach St. Paul’s Cathedral.



**Historical Places in London**



## Historical Places in Edinburgh, Scotland

### Exploring the City

During our stay in the UK, we visited many Historical & Popular places to explore the city. In Edinburgh, we went to the beautiful Royal Palace, Dynamic Earth, Scottish Parliament Castle of Edinburgh. Walking on the streets of Edinburgh one feels like as if he has time-travelled to the past. On the other hand in London, the group was fortunate enough to visit Buckingham Palace, Madame Tussads, London Eye. The group captured the amazing panoramic view of the entire city from the London Eye.

## Sightseeing in London



## Sightseeing in Edinburgh



## **General Populace**

The general sensitisation and awareness in the general populace was much more than what we find in India. As soon as the person on the road realised that someone has a disability, he/she would extend a helping hand to the person, be it in the shopping area, the bus, the restaurant, the washroom or elsewhere. This stands in sharp contrast to the experience in India. Students reported that in India people would seldom be able to recognise that someone was visually handicapped or hearing impaired. Even if they did, they would treat the person as an object of curiosity, wanting to know everything related to their disability – What is the disability? What is the cause? How does it feel? And so on. This has an alienating effect on a disabled person.

## **Most Prominent Features Observed**

- It came as a great surprise to us that the universities in the United Kingdom do not reserve seats for students with disabilities, and hence they have to gain admission only on the basis of merit. Yet, even before taking admission the student is invited to visit the University for discussions with the disability services, student union services and counselling services. It is the complete responsibility of these services to provide an enabling environment to students with special needs. Rather than providing disabled students with special concessions, the educational institutions in the UK provide them an opportunity to feel that they are just like others, while providing attention when and where they need it.
- It came as another surprise to us that in the UK, out of the entire population of students with disabilities in higher education institutes, nearly 40% are in the category of specific learning disabilities (dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia). In these universities, the maximum amount of psychological counselling is done for students with specific learning disabilities. In India, however, the difficulties of this group of students are not understood adequately even by the concerned

professionals. To make matters worse, Dyslexia, Dysgraphia and Dyscalculia are yet to be recognized by any Act of law as disabilities.

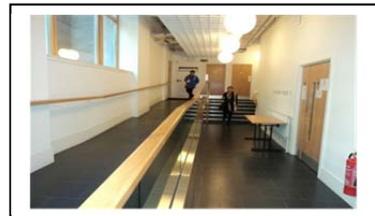
### **Lessons Learnt**

- The public infrastructure in the United Kingdom is very enabling for most, which leads to independence and an increase in self-confidence.
- Empathy (and not sympathy) is a part of the general public's attitude; for example, waiting for the person to complete a task when in a queue without any show of discomfort regarding the extra time being taken. This could be while serving oneself food, or climbing a bus, or queuing for billing and so on. Offering help but not insisting on helping.
- There are attempts to provide spaces for the others which could be physical spaces or psycho-social spaces. As some of the visually impaired students remarked, 'no one bumps into you here'.
- There is no reservation of any kind along the lines of disability or class. Merit is compulsory. Yet once a person with a disability becomes a part of the system, all resources are guaranteed as per the persons need.
- The career counselling units, disability services, mental health counselling units and student unions all work together providing the best for each student.
- The career counselling units, disability services, mental health counselling units and student unions function under close supervision of the members of the teaching faculty so as to provide a student with disability maximum benefit from his/her pursuit of higher learning.
- Effective and strategic use of technology resources across various institutes in the University.

## Recommendations

### Physical Infrastructure and assistive devices:

- The roads within the University need to have smooth footpaths without obstructions.
- Embossed footpath as well as embossed directions needs to be present in all buildings of the university and its colleges.
- Ramps of appropriate incline need to be made of all requisite places.
- Libraries may be encouraged to have Braille writing on its shelves.
- University buses to have GPS & announcing system.
- The teaching community in India needs to play an important role in developing adequate and effective legislation pertaining to disability in the country.



### Classrooms:

- Provision of Smart board technology in all lecture rooms.
- Provision of assistive devices such as;
  - a. Signage and library shelf classification in Braille and audio mode.
  - b. Drop boxes for students' assignments.
  - c. Hydraulic box lifts where ramps are difficult to construct or not possible.
  - d. Sensors for opening doors and lights in washrooms.
  - e. Microphones in every classroom/ lecture room.



- Kiosks can be installed near the information desk/ service points at the colleges to help students with disabilities.
- Sensitization of faculty and students' groups about not only the visible disabilities but especially about the invisible disabilities such as specific learning disabilities and Autism Spectrum Disorder.

### **Training and development**

- Mentoring services by engaging the alumni with reference to sharing job related experiences and knowledge.
- Training the trainers- Faculty orientation/ training with reference to disability and strategies for inclusive classrooms.
- Conferences/ discussions related to the special needs of the persons with special abilities.
- Outreach programmes with the supervision of faculty with specialisation/understanding of various disabilities to the community, students' peer group, parents and of course the teaching as well as non-teaching staff of the university.

## **Collaborations and Networking**

- Collaborating with industry for internship placements of students with disability.
- Student exchange and faculty exchange programme in the area of disability studies.
- Collaboration of online courses with other Universities.
- Liaising between teachers, EOC, student support group and college Principals with reference to students with disabilities.
- Paid Student Volunteers/buddies.

## **Research**

- Meaningful Research collaborations with like-minded universities based in other countries.

## **Publications**

- Publication of material in reference to understanding different types of disability and strategies for inclusive classrooms at higher education level.
- Development and publication of Bibliography books/booklets in the Indian context.

## **Information dissemination**

- Up gradation of the current website in reference to the career counselling for the students.
- Each discipline working out its key competence skills. This would facilitate the assessment of the possibility of each student's skill development and hence the admission in that area.

## **The Way forward**

- Promotion of similar Student exchange programmes.
- Encouragement and facilitation of students with disability to study abroad.
- Cross University Collaborative research oriented projects.
- Promotion of action research projects on disabilities.
- Establishing faculty exchange programmes.
- Dissemination of information with reference to the nature and needs of different disabilities to the general public, University/College teaching and non-teaching staff, students with and without disabilities.
- Documentation of work related to disability issues within the University.
- Encouraging organization and participation in international and national conferences and seminars.

**( Bipin Tiwari )**

**(ZVS Prasad )**