

Tutoring students with disabilities: survey of the initiatives at Spanish and European universities

Tutorización de los estudiantes con discapacidad. Revisión de las iniciativas en las universidades españolas y europeas

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Resumen

Las universidades europeas están poniendo en marcha iniciativas para implantar planes de acción tutorial que proporcionen orientación y apoyo a los estudiantes mientras cursan estudios universitarios, si bien estos planes de acción tutoriales a menudo no contemplan acciones específicas para los estudiantes con discapacidad. El objetivo de este artículo es presentar una relación de las actuaciones llevadas a cabo por 10 universidades españolas y 12 europeas, las cuales disponen de un servicio específico de atención al estudiante con discapacidad. El análisis ha tenido en cuenta aquellas dimensiones más importantes en un plan de acción tutorial: promoción, acogida, permanencia y egreso. Según los resultados las universidades españolas y europeas dedican un mayor esfuerzo a buscar mecanismos de inclusión para los estudiantes universitarios con discapacidad durante su permanencia en la universidad, especialmente en la orientación sobre los estudios y la adaptación curricular. Asimismo, las universidades europeas tienen más desarrolladas las actuaciones en el momento del egreso y disponen de programas de orientación para la inserción laboral.

Palabras clave:

Plan de acción tutorial, tutorización de estudiantes con discapacidad, discapacidad, educación inclusiva, universidad.

Abstract

European universities have begun to launch initiatives to implement tutorial action plans that provide guidance and support for students as they earn their university degrees. However, these plans seldom include specific actions for students with disabilities. The purpose of this article is to present a list of the actions offered by 40 Spanish and 12 European universities which have a specific service catering to students with disabilities. The analysis bore in mind the most important dimensions to be implemented in any tutorial action plan, namely promotion, orientation, retention and graduation. From the results we can glean that both Spanish and European universities devote most efforts to seeking mechanisms to include disabled university students during their stay at the university, especially guidance on academic programmes and curricular adaptations. Likewise, European universities, unlike their Spanish counterparts, implement more actions at graduation and offer job insertion guidance programmes.

Keywords:

Tutorial action plan, tutoring students with disabilities, disability, inclusive education, university

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1. Introduction

A lot of work remains to be done to make the principles of equal rights, non-discrimination, equality and social justice an everyday part of our educational system. In the ongoing struggle to achieve this, organisations such as the World Education Forum (UNESCO, 2000), the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN, 2006) and the European Disability Forum (2009) stress the social, economic, political and legislative changes needed to secure the development of educational inclusion processes which strive to understand, address and respond to the educational needs of all students. Inclusive education, which has been on the upswing since the 1990s, is defined as the education of individuals with special educational needs at conventional education centres as opposed to at special centres (Ruijs, Van der Veen and Peetsma, 2010; Ainscow and César, 2006; Meijer, 2001; Ruijs and Peetsma, 2009; Salend and Garrick, 1999).

As Parrilla (2002) noted, inclusive education does not signal a new approach to education, nor is it limited to the sphere of education; rather it stresses equality above difference and embodies a new ethics and cultural and educational enrichment throughout the entire educational system. However, educational inclusion is described as an open, dynamic process under constant construction and analysis, so the time dimension sometimes poses the complex dilemma of the right to inclusion contrasted with the conditions under which this inclusion takes place. Therefore, it is necessary for all the different areas within the public administration to promote educational systems that are capable of welcoming all students, regardless of their abilities, interests or needs, and to provide them with the support they need. It is important for educational actions aimed at developing each individual to the utmost of their abilities to be conducted based on social participation and interaction with people in the surroundings. Therefore, these actions must respect the value of the disability and include relationships of recognition established in spaces that are open to uncertainty. And in this context, universities neither can nor should remain apart from the educational currents that value diversity and strive to follow the pathway of social and educational inclusion.

In recent years, the principle of equal opportunity has gained particular prominence in social policies. The United Nations and the European Union, through the Rome Declaration on Education (2002) and the European Council Resolution dated the 5th of May 2003, have asked European governments to particularly support disabled university students with appropriate tutoring systems and support services.

In Spain, Organic Law 4/2007 (article 44) on universities guarantees the principle of equal opportunities and non-discrimination for any reason, including disability, in access to universities, admission into centres, retention at universities and the exercise of academic rights. This law also stipulates that means, support and resources that ensure real, effective equal opportunities in relation to the other components of the university community should be promoted, and that specific support programmes be established, such as personalised help, support and adaptations to the educational system.

In the same vein, the 2011 Statute of University Students (Chapter II, article 4) stipulates equal opportunities and regularisation to ensure that students with disabilities can participate actively in different dimensions of university life. Specifically, it states that each university should promote the creation of services that cater to the disabled university community.

As the outcome of these kinds of policies and regulations, in recent years we have witnessed an increase in the number of students with disabilities attending university, even though they still only account for 0.5% of the student body (Royal Board on Disability, 2007: 35), and despite the fact that university policies to support students with disabilities have not always risen to the needs of this demographic surge (Abad, Álvarez and Castro, 2008: 131).

Higher education institutions, as promoted by the European Higher Education Area, have begun to launch initiatives to implement tutorial action plans that provide guidance and support to students as they study at the university (Gairín *et. al.*, 2009). These tutorial action plans seldom contain actions that meet the needs of students with disabilities, who are left solely with the universities' disabled student support services, if they exist, despite the fact that one of the compulsory quality standards required by the EHEA is precisely services for students with disabilities.

According to figures from the Royal Board on Disability (2007: 55), around 75% of Spanish universities already have programmes or services to support students with disabilities in place. In the case of European universities, the majority have these services and are further supported by a unit devoted exclusively to ensuring the principles of equality and non-discrimination, such that all students enjoy the same opportunities, not only in terms of their abilities but also in terms of religion, race, sexual orientation and other traits.

In order to meet the needs of the students with disabilities at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, a Tutorial Action Plan for Students with Disabilities was developed, financed by the Ministry of Education's "Tutorial Action Plan for Students with Disabilities" project as part of the call for participation in the 2011 Development of Projects and Actions Aimed

at Improving Comprehensive Care and Employability of University Students (reference CAIE037). The purpose of the project was to develop a document which defines the agents, actions and times at which the university should serve this group.

As a step prior to designing the plan, it was imperative to identify what kinds of actions are currently underway at Spanish and European universities in order to ascertain the state of the issue as well as to inform the groundwork of the plan being proposed. To this end, in this article we present a comparative analysis of the actions being conducted at a series of 40 Spanish and 12 European universities. We should note that the sample of European universities was chosen for having a unit to support students with disabilities and their positive references on advances in tutoring them, and that the goal is thus not to compare Spain and Europe but to detect the areas for improvement that will bring Spanish universities closer to their European counterparts that are renowned in this sphere.

2. Beneficiaries of disabled university student services

When we embarked upon our analysis of the services provided to students with disabilities at Spanish and European universities, we first noted that the concept of disability differs from one country to another.

Indeed, in its Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the United Nations recognises that disability is a concept that is evolving and that stems from the interaction between people with impairments and the barriers around them. According to the World Health Organization (2001), disability is a generic term that includes impairments, limitations and restrictions in participation; it indicates the negative aspects of the interaction between an individual (with a “health condition”) and their contextual factors (environmental and personal factors). Along the same lines, the United Nations (2006) notes that persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which may hinder their full, effective participation in society under equal conditions as others as they interact with diverse barriers. Consequently, disability is a complex phenomenon which reflects an interaction between the characteristics of the human organism and the characteristics of the society in which it lives.

With the goal of being able to determine the kinds of disability that university students may have when they reach the university, we have devised the following classification:

- Physical motor disability: needs of support for mobility. This can be associated with a variety of disorders: cerebral palsy, spinal injuries, degenerative diseases, fibromyalgia, muscular dystrophy, paraplegia, etc.

- Organic physical disability: any organic disease that requires medical-health care. This category includes renal diseases (chronic kidney failure), heart problems, cancer, immunological issues, etc.
- Visual sensorial disability: blindness, low vision and other eye conditions.
- Auditory sensorial disability: deafness, deafness in one ear, hypoacusis, etc.
- Intellectual disability: borderline intellectual functioning, chromosomal alterations associated with cognitive limitations, etc., borderline mental retardation, Down Syndrome, etc.
- Anxiety disorders: psychotic disorders, generalised anxiety disorders and personality disorders.
- General developmental disorders: Asperger's Syndrome and autism.
- Learning disabilities: dyslexia, attention deficit disorder (ADD) with or without hyperactivity, etc.

3. Services for students with disabilities at Spanish universities

In recent years, university services set up to help disabled persons have spread to a significant number of Spanish public universities due, among other reasons, to the legislative changes that were enacted in 2007, which made it possible to create specialised services at universities that did not previously have them and to consolidate these services where they already existed.

According to recent figures (Fundación Universia, 2013), today there are 75 specific services or university disabled student support programmes, which means that the majority of public universities and a significant number of private universities in Spain have some kind of service or programme to cater to students with disabilities as part of the university structure.

With regard to the services they offer, we noted some heterogeneity among the universities, some of which depended upon the requirements and kinds of disabled university students and the human and economic resources available to cater to them at each institution.

By analysing the information published in the resource guide in *Universidad y Discapacidad* (*University and Disability*, put out by the Spanish Committee of Representatives of Disabled Persons, 2006), the services offered to students with disabilities can be classified as follows: technical resources (specific software and a bank of technical resource products); human resources (personal assistants, sign language interpreters); support for transport and mobility (disabled-accessible transport service); accessibility programmes;

curricular adaptations; tutoring programmes; job placement programmes; specific scholarship programmes; specific volunteer programmes for students with disabilities.

The support services for disabled university students are one way of channelling and spearhead accessibility measures, technical support, accompaniment and other personal support measures. This then guarantees an accessible university environment and respect for the principles of universal accessibility and respect for everyone in the curriculum, as stipulated by Organic Law 4/2007 (Section XIV), as well as design for everyone and universal accessibility as stipulated by Law 51/2003 (article 2) on equal opportunities, non-discrimination and universal accessibility for disabled persons.

As noted by the Royal Board on Disability (2007), universal accessibility is no longer associated with merely eliminating architectural barriers and now extends to all kinds of spaces, products and services with the goal of guaranteeing the principle of equal opportunities proclaimed by democratic states. This principle evens out opportunities, lowers disadvantages, reduces risks, improves performance and productivity and consequently contributes to improving everyone's quality of life, especially individuals with some sort of disability (Montero, 2002: 122).

The specific services offered by European universities mainly revolve around providing specific support and supplying the universities with the equipment needed by the students to whom their programmes are targeted (Abad, Álvarez and Castro, 2008: 135). However, despite the fact that at first glance we might believe that the services for students with disabilities at Spanish universities display a kind of paternalistic attitude towards this group, the fact is that these services end up offering support that offsets the shortcomings of Spain's social policies.

Generally speaking, the Spanish university services aimed at catering to students with disabilities provide the following kinds of support (Royal Board on Disability, 2007: 78): guidance, monitoring and assistance; note-taking; sign language interpreters; personal assistance; elimination of barriers (urbanistic, architectural, communicative, technological - accessible learning materials); provision of alternative and/or augmentative communication services; technical and material support and equipment to adapt the study area; access to communication and information in the classroom; accessible transport; accessible housing; promotion of volunteerism; job placement programmes.

Even though students who suffer from one of the disorders or disabilities mentioned above may benefit from the disabled university student services, in Spain not all of them, such as those with learning disabilities, are granted the disabled accreditation issued

by the Spanish healthcare services, unlike students with these disabilities in the other European countries analysed.

4. Tutorial action for disabled university students: Key junctures

During the course of university studies there are different key junctures when students have to define their academic project and take the actions needed to bring it to fruition. The studies by Gallego (2004), Delaney (2004) and Lim (2002) confirm the need to develop guidance and orientation activities prior to entry into the university. Abad, Álvarez and Castro (2008: 138 and 140) also suggest that a tutorial action plan for disabled university students cannot begin when the students enter the university classrooms but should get underway during secondary school and should continue throughout the job search process and the transition to the working world. In fact, the studies by Arias *et al.* (2005) and Fita and Álvarez (2005) note the significance of the benefits of tutorial and guidance actions for students during their time at the university, while González and Martín (2004) and Bethencourt *et al.* (2008) concentrate on job orientation for university students.

As revealed in the aforementioned studies, any tutorial action plan conducted at the university should include the measures needed at four key junctures: a) the transition from the different avenues leading to the university (baccalaureate, higher-level vocational programmes, students over the age of 25, 40 and 45, the job market, etc.) to the university itself; b) the orientation along the studies, which is precisely when the student reaches the university, has to enrol and engage in the different services offered by the university, and informs about specific educational needs so that the faculty can be aware of any adaptations that must be made; c) as they study, since academic guidance is needed at times when the student must take decisions on their future, such as choosing certain specialisations, or when they require assistance in handling learning difficulties, along with advice on more personal issues; and d) the transition from the university to the job market, when students with disabilities can do internships in institutions and/or companies and it is useful for them to have information on job profiles, job possibilities and other issues that can guide their professional career, as well as securing agreements with organisations that promote the hiring of disabled persons.

Below we provide further detail on the actions that can be performed at each of these key junctures in order to better serve university students with special needs.

4.1. Promotion

Promotional actions consist primarily of informative actions that strive to spread awareness of the universities' disabled student services. These services are generally open to providing pre-university training to any organisation, individual or group seeking admission to the university.

The ways Spanish universities can be accessed include baccalaureate, higher-level vocational training programmes, individuals over the ages of 25, 40 and 45, and the job market. In order to promote their programmes to different groups, universities organise a range of activities, including participation in educational fairs and salons, visits to secondary schools to offer informative talks on the different programmes they offer, information dissemination in town halls, and agreements to conduct baccalaureate research projects in conjunction with the university.

In this kind of activity, it is imperative to provide academic information on the structure of the different programmes, the relevant laws, electives, specialities, the real length of the degree programmes, scholarships, job opportunities, training to adapt the programmes and information on the services (sports, culture, healthcare, support, etc.) offered by the university, and to specifically target them at disabled persons. However, this information is rarely targeted at disabled persons.

For our analysis, we have divided promotional actions into:

- Informative and dissemination actions, namely those through which the university provides information on its programmes outside its campus, such as at town halls or special student services run by the regional governments. The purpose is to present the university's full range of academic programmes and services and to provide information and guidance so that secondary school students can choose the programmes in which they wish to enrol.
- At educational fairs and salons, students receive information and personalised guidance on the post-compulsory academic programmes and job opportunities. At these events, universities and centres offering vocational training courses have an exhibitor to whom they can direct students to receive information on the programmes that best fit their interests and skills.
- Sometimes the disabled student support unit begins its preparatory work while the student is still in compulsory secondary school. To do this, they have to coordinate with the secondary school teachers in order to identify the disabled student's needs early on. This enables them to ascertain the most important adaptations and support that the students have received at secondary school.

- Talks at secondary schools help universities to get in closer contact with students without the latter having to travel, and to inform them about the university's different academic programmes and services so that they can choose the ones that best match their potential.
- Pre-university orientation refers to academic orientation sessions that cover both the curricula in the degree programmes in which the students wish to enrol and information on the documentation needed to pre-register, cut-off marks, etc.
- Visits to universities serve the same purpose as the talks at secondary schools, except that this time the students are the ones who travel to the university. On these visits, not only are talks held on the academic programmes available to them, but campus tours are also organised. The purpose of these visits is to show students the entire range of programmes and services that the university offers and to provide information and guidance on choosing majors for individuals seeking admission to the university through any of the possible avenues. Visits to faculties are organised by field of study. Likewise, Family Days are targeted at the families of students in their last year of baccalaureate and higher-level vocational training programmes, and their goal is to familiarise the families of future students with the university campus, academic programmes and services.

4.2. Orientation

Orientation activities tend to consist of providing information and guidance that is of interest to students with disabilities as a group when they arrive at the university. The training and counselling of faculty, families and administrative staff is gradually becoming more widespread; sometimes guidance and study support guides are even written for these three stakeholders and for students with disabilities. Still, very few institutions organise and manage orientation and tutorial programmes for the initial enrolment of students with disabilities at the university in which they are informed about which courses to register for. This juncture should also be used to identify and assess the specific educational needs that students have or may have because of their disability.

The orientation actions we analysed include:

- Open houses and informative sessions, which consist of talks providing direct information on the campus and counselling students and their families on the university's adaptations and services targeted at catering to the specific needs arising from disability. The services that students with disabilities may find at the university include computers with more innovative technological resources to ensure access to infor-

- mation, including software, voice recognition or character enlargement programmes, and adapted peripherals (mouses and keyboards). Universities may also offer adapted housing for persons with reduced mobility, accessible transport, additional courses and free-time activities. Another service made available to students with disabilities is the choice of having a study support student who can take notes or provide support in laboratory experiments or in library searches.
- Tutoring for enrolment. Students with disabilities receive guidance on the enrolment procedure or the courses and study plans they may pursue, and they may even be accompanied on registration day.
 - Orientation programme. Each department tends to organise a series of informative activities held during the first week of class. The purpose of these sessions is to integrate students into university life and into their programme as quickly as possible. During the orientation sessions, students are shown the tools with which they can work, such as the virtual campus and library and the computer resources available to them.
 - Guidance service. This consists of help and guidance on study techniques. The primary mission of an educational-psychological guidance service is to provide a personalised response to certain needs of the university community (students, professors and administrative staff) with difficulties in decision-making, learning and adaptation in order to improve their choices and the personal planning of their degree programme, their overall performance and their personal wellbeing. This service fulfils its mission through an academic and personal guidance process, assistance and educational-psychological help.
 - The guide to professional and family orientation, which is used to provide brief information on job possibilities for students and to inform the family about the resources available to their children.
 - Study training and help. The educational-psychological advisement unit offers training on study techniques and learning targeted at all university students so that they can get the most from their university degree.

4.3. Retention

The actions to be performed during students with disabilities' stay at the university are directly related to the evolution of their academic programme and their need for support, as well as to the goals of lowering drop-out rates and encouraging retention. This is precisely the juncture when students with disabilities ask for support in order to seek information, communication and participation in the university setting. Partnership mechanisms among the different educational stakeholders (faculty, students, specific support services, etc.) should also be put into place during students with disabilities' stay at the university. In short, the goal is to guide students both academically and personally.

To facilitate an analysis of the actions carried out during students with disabilities' time at the university, we can list the following kinds of actions:

- Academic guidance and monitoring. This is unquestionably one of the most important actions during this period. It includes actions aimed at guiding students with disabilities as they acquire the academic competences needed in the programmes in which they are enrolled and to monitor their learning process. This may entail reviewing the contents of each course or planning the subjects to be taken in a given time period.
- Personal/life counselling. The students' stay at the university means that the counselling processes will go beyond the strictly academic and encourage the development of inclusion within the university setting. This could include access to housing, transport or free-time venues to share with their classmates.
- Study techniques and support. Throughout their time at the university, students with disabilities may be offered a variety of study techniques and support that provide not only access to information but also understanding and mastery of this information. In this case, the information and communication technologies may be crucial for them to attain the objectives set forth in their academic programmes.
- Curricular flexibility. This action refers to any adaptations that may be made to either the curricular objectives or the timeframe of these objectives as part of the modifications in the evaluation and activities in the academic programme.
- Development of social skills. It is important to accept the need to develop social skills in students with disabilities so that they can achieve their utmost in the process of educational inclusion since this not only benefits the disabled student but can also generate more positive attitudes towards disability in their classmates. This can entail both creating heterogeneous work teams and participating in social events within the university community, for example.
- Peer support and cooperation network. This last action refers to creating support mechanisms through the different bodies within the university: specific support services university-wide, in the department or among the faculty. It also includes the role that classmates can play through the figure of the support student who can perform jobs like taking notes, searching for materials, etc.

4.4. Graduation

The activities related to graduation encompass any action that strives to provide students with disabilities access to the job market or advanced training activities related to their professional profile (post-graduate courses, Master's, doctorates, professional training courses, etc.). This also includes the planning of digital actions to develop the social and

workplace skills that provide access to job searches. It is vitally important to establish agreements between the university and work centres, especially through professional internships.

The actions we have analysed can be divided as follows:

- Information on professional profiles. It is essential for students with disabilities to be aware of the professional profiles for which their academic programme prepares them. This can happen either through informative leaflets or through talks throughout the students' academic career.
- Job orientation. This action aims to match employability to the specific needs of students with disabilities. Students with disabilities must be aware of the range of options in the job market, along with the ones that best fit their needs. They should also be aware of the laws on disability applicable in the business world.
- Academic guidance. The option of pursuing further university studies at the post-graduate level should also be considered, not only professional training programmes but also programmes that strive to promote research within their field of study. It is also important for students to be aware of other kinds of training aimed at enhancing their professional and workplace performance.
- Development of social-workplace skills. This refers to training actions whose goal is to improve the social and workplace skills intrinsic to the particular job being sought or inherent to the professional profile of the academic programme.
- Job searches. This entails the existence of specific services that provide assistance finding jobs related to the academic programme completed.
- University-workplace agreements. Establishing agreements between the university and the business community in the region can help students with disabilities find work. It is important to study the real possibilities of securing jobs through supported work.

5. Analysis of tutorial actions for students with disabilities at the university

In this section we shall discuss the map of orientation and tutorial actions conducted the most often at universities. We shall particularly focus on the practices conducted by the university-wide services for students with disabilities at an array of 40 Spanish universities and 12 European universities. Consequently, we have not included the specific orientation and tutorial actions promoted by specific faculties, centres and/or degree programmes targeted at university students as a whole.

The analysis performed consisted of reviewing the documents and websites of the services for university students with disabilities at the universities analysed. All the actions analysed were categorised according to the four stages that we believe are essential in all students' university experience, and specifically in the university experience of students with disabilities: promotion, orientation, retention and graduation.

5.1. Methodology

The methodology used in this study is qualitative and primarily descriptive. The sources of information which enabled us to gather data using a variety of instruments and techniques were the following:

1. Document review: bibliographic review of the databases ERIC and WHO from 2007 to 2011 and review of each university's website.
2. Heads of specific university services through ad hoc interviews. Some of the interviews were conducted in person while others were conducted via email.

Finally, we should note that the information search was performed bearing in mind the indicators mentioned above on the four junctures in the tutorial action plan and the actions implicit in each stage.

Selection of sample

With regard to the Spanish universities, we chose them according to: (1) territorial representation, (2) number of students enrolled in those geographical areas, (3) the existence of a service for students with disabilities, and (4) public universities.

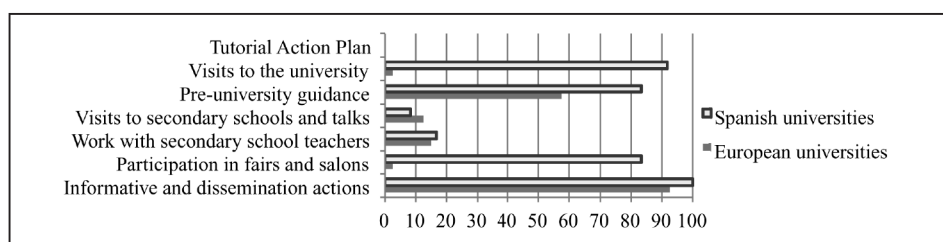
The European universities analysed below were chosen based on the following criteria: (1) universities in European Union countries, (2) the existence of a service for students with disabilities, (3) universities that engage in exchanges with the Universidad Autònoma de Barcelona, (4) territorial representation and (5) the universities' ranking in the *Academic Ranking of World Universities of Shanghai*. We selected the 100 top universities, from which only 24 were in the European Union. From these 24, we took into account those having exchange programs with Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona and their territorial representation in Europe.

5.2. Results

To perform the analysis, we took into account the four basic junctures in any tutorial action plan and classified the information into these four junctures. The analysis of the actions that cater to students with disabilities at Spanish and European universities revealed certain differences between the Spanish and European universities. In this vein, we should note that the goal is thus not to compare Spain and Europe but to detect the areas for improvement that will bring Spanish universities closer to their European counterparts that are renowned in this sphere.

Promotion

With regard to promotional actions, as shown in the Graph 1, we discovered that 92% of the Spanish universities and 100% of the European universities conduct information and dissemination actions. The number of joint efforts between the university and secondary school teachers was virtually equal in Spanish universities (15%) and European universities (16.67%), although it was relatively low in both cases. The same holds true of visits and talks at secondary schools, with 12.5% at Spanish universities and 8.33% at European universities. With regard to pre-university orientation, 57.5% of the Spanish universities organise this kind of activity, while 83.33% of European universities do. Finally, the main difference is that only 2.5% of the Spanish universities offer students with disabilities visits to the university, whereas 91.67% of European universities do. What is also striking is that only 2.5% of Spanish universities participate in fairs and salons, whereas 83.33% of European universities do.

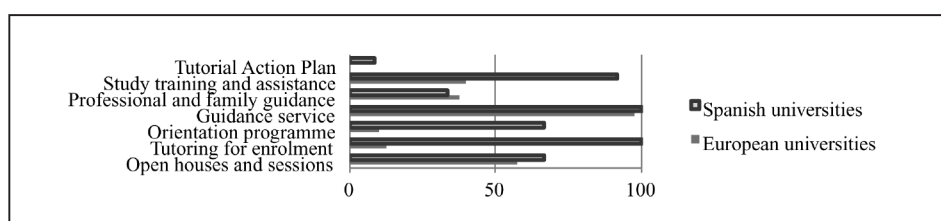


Graph 1. Promotional actions

Orientation

With regard to the orientation actions conducted by the universities (Graph 2), even though we identified certain similarities between Spanish and European universities in terms of open houses, orientation services and informative sessions, which stand at around 60% in

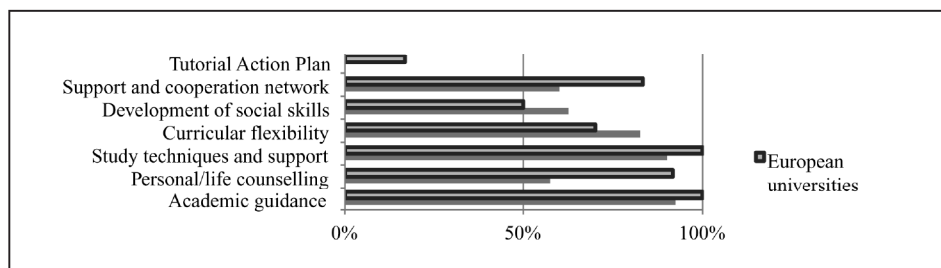
both cases, in orientation services, which are offered at 100% of the universities, and in professional and family orientation, which can be found at approximately 35% of both Spanish and European universities, we also noted vast differences in other respects. To wit, 100% of the European universities accompany students during enrolment, while this percentage drops to only 12.5% in Spanish universities. Likewise, only 10% of Spanish universities have a specific orientation programme for students with disabilities, whereas almost 70% of European universities do. Finally, 40% of Spanish universities offer study training and assistance services for students with disabilities, in contrast to 92% of the European universities.



Graph 2. Orientation actions

Retention

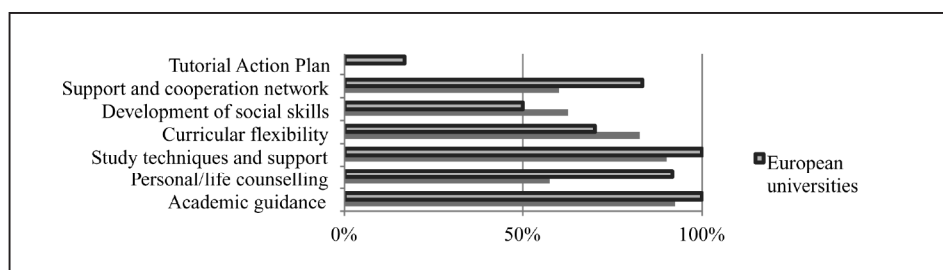
The results related to actions conducted during students with disabilities' time at the university show that both Spanish and European universities make the greatest effort and emphasis in this stage so that students feel guided during their educational process (Graph 3). Most of these actions can be found in more than 50% of the universities, and some of them are conducted at almost 100% of the institutions, such as academic guidance and monitoring and the implementation of study techniques and support for these students. We should note that as reflected in the graph, the Spanish universities place a greater emphasis on actions that promote curricular flexibility and the development of students' social skills, while the European universities stress peer cooperation and the establishment of support networks that provide advice on more personal than academic issues.



Graph 3. Retention

Graduation

Graduation from the university is precisely where we noted the most striking differences between the Spanish and European universities (Graph 4). In the majority of Spanish universities, the only major actions conducted at graduation are related to job orientation (72.5%), providing information on professional profiles (42.5%) and developing social skills (40%). In contrast, all the European universities provide job orientation programmes, assistance with job searches and academic guidance. Likewise, quite a significant percentage of them also provide information on professional profiles (83.3%) and are in direct contact with the business world through agreements (75%). There is no question that the effort made by European universities to forge ties with the job market is much higher than the corresponding effort made by Spanish universities.



Graph 4. Graduation actions

6. Conclusions

Judging from the results gathered and analysed, there is no question that the process of including students with disabilities at universities requires a sweeping analysis of the positive and negative aspects of this inclusion which extends beyond the boundaries of the institution to include the educational system as a whole (early childhood-primary-second) and society at large. Bearing this premise in mind, we can highlight the following conclusions:

- We have detected an effort on the part of all universities to welcome students with disabilities into their classrooms. This effort is not solely limited to the professor teaching the class but also includes the institution itself, which is striving to put into place the mechanisms needed for students to earn a university education under quality conditions.
- The actions catering to students with disabilities are mainly focused on the period during which they are at the university, while the promotional actions are the least developed

by the disabled student services units at the different universities. Promotional actions carried out by Spanish universities in secondary education centres are relatively recent; however, actions have been addressed to all students in general. Although follow-up of disabled secondary school students during the transition to university stage is something incipient, in our opinion it is key to increasing the number of disabled students arriving at university. Therefore, secondary schools must be included when establishing transitional plans for students by including associations through the social networks.

- Global tutorial action plans targeted at students with disabilities have not been exhaustively developed by the services, units or offices analysed, nor do they have tutorial action plans for each of the different junctures, including the promotion, orientation, retention and/or graduation of these students. Consequently, the guidance and tutorial actions that they do offer correspond to more specific junctures and situations, such as enrolment. In our opinion, the success of disabled students at the university will depend on the existence of a tutorial action plan specifically designed for this collective. The ideal would be to have a global action plan, but if this is not possible, at least there should be a specific plan for each of the key stages: promotion, orientation, retention and graduation. However, the tutorial action plan for students with disabilities should be designed by government institutions in order to guarantee that all students at any university enjoy the same services, independently of the centre at which they are enrolled.
- During the retention period, academic monitoring and guidance for students with disabilities is the most common action provided by the disabled student services. This is closely followed by more personal and life counselling and guidance, although the latter requires a stepped up effort at Spanish universities. Much of the efforts made by these services entail providing study support for students with disabilities. To do this, they make available technical and human resources that enable students to remain at the university and pursue their studies towards academic success. Likewise, flexibility and curricular adaptations are prominent among universities' actions to foster inclusion and normalisation. More than half the disabled student services analysed implement peer support and cooperation programmes through a network of volunteers. They also implement activities aimed at developing the social skills of students with disabilities. However, we believe that teachers at the university should have some training in how to adapt their teaching methodologies and the learning materials for students with disabilities.
- At graduation time, the services, units and offices catering to students with disabilities commonly offer job orientation before students leave the university. Very few provide academic guidance so that students with disabilities can pursue further education. The information provided tends to refer to issues related to professional profiles, the acquisition and development of social and workplace skills and job searches, although Spanish universities need

to further emphasise these issues. There is still only a handful of universities that reach partnership agreements with work centres to place their disabled graduates. We need to bear in mind that the success of the employability of disabled students is not circumscribed by the university but depends on socio-political factors. The importance of arriving at the university is precisely the opportunity to enter the job market; therefore, it is essential that universities enter into more partnership agreements with work centres for disabled graduates.

- Other common actions implemented at Spanish universities are related to improving overall accessibility (eliminating architectural barriers, adapting spaces, eliminating communicative barriers); social, sports and free-time activities; adapted services (libraries, accommodations); and raising the community's awareness of a more integrative, inclusive university.

As we have already mentioned, our goal is not to compare Spanish and European universities but to detect the type of actions that take place at each stage (promotion, orientation, retention and graduation) in which the unit of attention to disabled students intervenes. Hence, the sample did not include those universities that do not have this kind of unit. However, we believe it would be an interesting future line of research to determine the kind of services these universities offer to students with disabilities.

Furthermore, we believe that the lack of balance in the sample between the Spanish and European universities, although it is a limitation of the study, defines the path to be followed by Spanish universities in order to improve the services offered to students with disabilities. Hence European universities were chosen among the top 100 universities in the Shanghai ranking to find out what actions they are carrying out.

We should stress that any tutorial action plan for university students with disabilities should be flexible and offer regular actions for students with a higher level of dependency which, however, minimally affect the more autonomous disabled students. A tutorial action plan which would only be activated when strictly needed would avoid a paternalistic attitude by the university and would promote students' autonomy so that they are the ones who negotiate with the professors, the coordinator of their degree programme or the university's own services for students with disabilities.

In any event, as Novo-Corti, Muñoz-Cantero and Calvo-Porrà (2011: 18) stress, we can still note a certain lack of sensitivity towards students with disabilities' need for support in the university setting. Inclusive university policies are in place, but the institutional leaders must ensure their compliance and foster awareness of the defence of the rights of persons with disabilities in line with the principle of equal opportunity. Equal opportunity and universal accessibility will not only have repercussions on our overall social welfare but will also

improve the quality of education and the academic success of both students with special educational needs and the entire university community.

7. Bibliographical References

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Attachment 1. Universities analysed

Spanish universities	European universities
1. Universidad Autónoma de Madrid	1. Ghent University
2. Universidad Complutense de Madrid.	2. Karolinska Institutet
3. Universidad de A Coruña	3. Pierre and Marie Curie University
4. Universidad de Alcalá	4. Universidad de Limerick
5. Universidad de Alicante	5. Universidad de Oporto
6. Universidad de Barcelona	6. Universidad de Padua
7. Universidad de Burgos	7. University of Cambridge
8. Universidad de Cádiz	8. University of Copenhagen
9. Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha	9. University of Helsinki
10. Universidad de Córdoba	10. University of Munich
11. Universidad de Extremadura	11. University of Oxford
12. Universidad de Girona	12. Utrecht University
13. Universidad de Granada.	
14. Universidad de Huelva	
15. Universidad de La Laguna	
16. Universidad de La Rioja	
17. Universidad de Las Palmas	
18. Universidad de León	
19. Universidad de Les Illes Balears	
20. Universidad de Lleida	
21. Universidad de Málaga	
22. Universidad de Murcia	
23. Universidad de Oviedo	
24. Universidad de Salamanca	
25. Universidad de Santiago de Compostela	
26. Universidad de Sevilla	
27. Universidad de Valencia	
28. Universidad de Valladolid	
29. Universidad de Vigo	
30. Universidad de Zaragoza	
31. Universidad del País Vasco	
32. Universidad Jaume I	
33. Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia	
34. Universidad Politécnica de Cataluña	
35. Universidad Politécnica de Madrid	
36. Universidad Politécnica de Valencia	
37. Universidad Pompeu Fabra	
38. Universidad Pública de Navarra	
39. Universidad Rovira i Virgili	
40. Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona	