

**REPORT ON
ACCESS AND INCLUSION
FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES
IN THE JAMAICAN EDUCATION SYSTEM**

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Executive Summary

The UWI is the premier educational institution in the English-Speaking Caribbean. In 1995, UWI Mona adopted a progressive policy which was designed to increase access for persons with disabilities in Jamaica and by extension, the wider Caribbean. The policy states: “The University of the West Indies [hereafter UWI] is consciously seeking to facilitate the efforts of persons with disabilities to acquire university education.

The university’s goal is that as far as possible the number of students with disabilities at the institution be increasingly brought in line with the number of disabled persons in the relevant age cohorts in the wider society. It is the aim that no student whose academic qualifications are good enough to qualify for competitive entry be unable to accept a place at the UWI because of a disability” (F&GPC, 1995)

The policy was adopted amidst the growing demand of persons with disabilities to gain access to education as a means of improving their marketability and professionalism. Since the adoption of this policy, over 100 persons with disabilities have graduated from the institution. However, the UWI is nowhere near achieving its stated policy objectives. This is largely attributed to the lower levels of the education system in Jamaica and the wider Caribbean. At these levels, the educational institutions are not inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities, thus making it extremely difficult for persons with disabilities to matriculate in large numbers for the UWI. But the UWI has no control over what takes place at the lower levels of the education system. The most that it can do is to engage in a scientific analysis of access and inclusion of the education system with the aim of providing policy makers with credible data which will lead to

tangible changes in the infrastructure and general school environment for persons with disabilities.

The study which was conducted amongst 100 primary and high schools (approximately 10% of schools in Jamaica) between January and March 2001 has provided us with some interesting results. These results should serve as a guide to policy makers in improving the general education system for persons with disabilities. The results have shown amongst other things, the following:

- High levels of respondents believing that education is a right to all Jamaicans (98.8% agree).
- Significant numbers of schools believe that children with disabilities should be included in the general education system (98.8%).
- Poor levels of access for children with disabilities in the general education system (23.8%) have ramps and 83.3% reporting no bathroom facilities for the disabled.
- Positive attitude towards the inclusion of students with disabilities in extra-curricula activities (approximately 80%).
- High percentages of schools believe that students should be taught how to relate to students with disabilities (84.5%).
- Respectable levels of awareness of institutions catering to the needs of persons with disabilities: Jamaica Council for Persons with Disabilities (JCPD) 89.1%; Early Stimulation Program (ESP) 53% and the Special Education Unit 77.9%.

These findings in the survey are substantiated from focus group discussions that took place amongst some 16 schools that were consulted for a special project that is being developed to

make 1 primary school in each parish accessible for children with disabilities. It is our hope that the MOE will use these findings to their advantage and make more schools in the education system accessible for persons with disabilities.

Introduction

It is the mantra of the Ministry of Education in Jamaica that “Every child can learn and every child must learn.” Such a statement is a profound and deep mission for any education system. It captures and gives recognition to the innate ability of every living human being to seek and discover knowledge. A desire that is not confined to “able-bodied” individuals, but also includes persons with disabilities. The mission of the MOE is therefore inclusive. But the fundamental question that is being asked is if the institutional mechanism is inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities.

Most individuals suspect that the cause for the high levels of poverty amongst persons with disabilities in Jamaica is the low levels of access and inclusion in the education system. Data from a recent survey on Broadband Access in the Caribbean by Hopeton Dunn, indicated that only a mere 5% of respondents, who had a disability were employed and only 4% of those who indicated that they had a disability, had access to the Internet (Dunn 2011). Whilst the information on this cohort of Jamaicans is limited, the information garnered from the survey is confirming experiences amongst members of this vulnerable community which points to the high levels of poverty.

Scientific data on the issue of access and inclusion in the education system is therefore woefully lacking in the context of Jamaica. For credible policy to be formulated and effective program developed, scientific analysis must be brought to the fore. This research was therefore designed to measure the issue of accessibility and inclusivity of the Jamaican education system to persons with disabilities, by conducting a survey of 100 government run schools, namely, primary and high schools. This constitutes approximately 10% of the total schools in the island.

Instruments contained in this research were geared towards measuring:

1. The accessibility of schools.
2. The inclusivity of schools.
3. The awareness of school administrators as it relates to the issue of disabilities.
4. The views of school administration where this topic is concerned.

The following was the methodological approach for this research:

In order to execute this project, a survey was conducted amongst 100 government schools across the island. These schools were randomly selected from the Ministry of Education (MOE) Directory of Schools. This Directory has a listing of all the schools in Jamaica (1998) and their locations. The schools were selected in such a way that it reflected a mix of rural and urban schools. This enabled us to capture data from all 14 parishes in the island and to give greater generalisability and credibility to the findings.

A total of 84 schools (41 primary and 43 high) completed and returned the questionnaires making it an 84% response from the schools. This level of responsiveness to a survey of this nature is acceptable by international standards.

The questionnaire, designed to capture information on accessibility, inclusion and awareness, was developed. The variables highlighted in the questionnaire are quintessential for the development of an education system that is responsive to the needs of persons with disabilities.

In conducting this survey, there was stakeholders support. The Ministry of Education, through the Permanent Secretary, endorsed the project. Also, the Combine Disabilities Association (CDA) was contacted for their endorsement. Upon completing the design of the questionnaire

and the stakeholder support, the questionnaires were distributed to the different educational institutions that were selected to participate in the study. The questionnaires were sent to the principals of the educational institutions.

Upon completing the questionnaires, the forms were collected by the agents in the field and handed to the Research Assistant who was charged with the responsibility of monitoring the process. Once the questionnaires were collected, we commenced the process of analyzing the data.

In analyzing the data, the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was utilized. This gives a truly scientific analysis of the data and made it much easier for the writing of the report.

Upon completing the analysis of the data, we commence the writing of the report; the findings of which are now being published in this document for public consumption. The facts as extracted from the questionnaires are clearly stated. However, they are followed by observations from the chief researcher, Floyd Morris, based on his experience and knowledge of the subject under analysis.

Main Findings

Education is an established right for all in Jamaica

As it relates to education is an established right for all in Jamaica, 86.9% of the respondents strongly agree, while approximately 11.9% agree and 1.2 % disagree. The response from respondents corresponds with the high value that Jamaicans place on education. This has been established by scholars such as Steven Rodriquez and others who have done extensive work on values and attitudes towards institutions of socialization in Jamaica.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly agree	73	86.9	86.9	86.9
	agree	10	11.9	11.9	98.8
	disagree	1	1.2	1.2	100.0
	Total	84	100.0	100.0	

Education should be inclusive and accessible to all in Jamaica

As it relates to education should be inclusive and accessible for all in Jamaica, 85.7% of the respondents strongly agree, while approximately 13.1% agree and 1.2 % of the respondents were undecided.

This finding is indicating that the vast majority of respondents accept inclusion and access as the way to go for the development of the education system. It further suggests that there is a great acceptance of the mantra of the MOE which states “Every child can learn and every child must learn.”

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly agree	72	85.7	85.7	85.7
	agree	11	13.1	13.1	98.8
	undecided	1	1.2	1.2	100.0
	Total	84	100.0	100.0	

Have your, school, in the past or present registered a student with disability?

Approximately 63.1% of the respondents have registered a student with disability in the past or present, while approximately 25% have not registered a student with disability in the past or present and 11.9% did not respond to the question.

The high levels of schools that have accepted students with disabilities in the past and present, indicates that administrators in the education system, understand what is meant by the term “disability.” Disability covers a wide variety of impairments such as hearing, physical, mental/intellectual and visual and some of these disabilities would be manifested in the schools whether they are in mild or severe forms.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes	53	63.1	63.1	63.1
	no	21	25.0	25.0	88.1
	99.00	10	11.9	11.9	100.0
	Total	84	100.0	100.0	

Is your school equipped with ramps to accommodate students with physical disabilities?

70.2 % of the respondents' schools have not been equipped with ramps to accommodate students with physical disabilities, while approximately 23.8% of the respondents' schools have been equipped with ramps to accommodate students with physical disabilities and 6% did not respond to the question.

This finding confirms a view that has been held amongst the community of persons with disabilities that the vast majority of schools in the island are indeed inaccessible. It therefore points to the possible reason why a vast majority of persons with disabilities are not accessing tertiary education as they lack the basic qualification which will cause them to matriculate for these higher level educational institutions.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes	20	23.8	23.8	23.8
	no	59	70.2	70.2	94.0
	99.00	5	6.0	6.0	100.0
	Total	84	100.0	100.0	

Are bathroom facilities at your school designed to accommodate children with physical disabilities?

Approximately 83.3% of the respondents' schools do not have the proper bathroom facilities at their school designed to accommodate students with physical disabilities, while 10.7% of the respondents schools have the proper bathroom facilities at their school designed to accommodate students with physical disabilities and 6% did not respond to the question.

The absence of proper bathroom facilities in the schools is indeed a major contributing factor for the exclusion of children with physical disabilities from the general education system. It would be extremely difficult for school administrators to admit children with physical disabilities in such an environment.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	9	10.7	10.7	10.7
	No	70	83.3	83.3	94.0
	99.00	5	6.0	6.0	100.0
	Total	84	100.0	100.0	

Is your school equipped with adaptive technologies such as Job Access with Speech to accommodate students with visual impairment?

Approximately 96.4% of the schools are not equipped with adaptive technologies such as Job Access with Speech to accommodate students with visual impairment, while 2.4% of the schools are equipped with adaptive technologies such as Job Access with Speech to accommodate students with visual impairment and the remaining 1.2% did not respond.

Again, the absence of the requisite technology from the schools to give support to students with disabilities is a major factor for exclusion. JAWS is the software that enables a blind person to interact with the computer in a normal manner. The absence of such technology from the school system would make it extremely difficult for students who are blind to function effectively.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	2	2.4	2.4	2.4
	no	81	96.4	96.4	98.8
	99.00	1	1.2	1.2	100.0
	Total	84	100.0	100.0	

Are there any members of staff who is trained with the skill of sign language?

48.8% of schools have members of staff who is trained with the skill of sign language, while 44% of schools do not have members of staff who is trained with the skill of sign language and 7.1 % did not respond to the question.

Of all the results, this is most surprising. A high level of schools is indicating that they have members of staff who are equipped with the skill of sign language. A possible reason for this is related to a number of groups that have been establishing sign language as a means of cultural expressions in social organizations such as the church. This skill however, might just be very basic or at the beginner level.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	41	48.8	48.8	48.8
	no	37	44.0	44.0	92.9
	99.00	6	7.1	7.1	100.0
	Total	84	100.0	100.0	

Are students with disabilities provided with reading and examination materials in an accessible format such as Braille in your institution?

Approximately 83.3 % of the schools do not provided for students with disabilities with reading and examination materials in an accessible format such as Braille in their institution while approximately 6 % of the schools do not provide for students with disabilities with reading and examination materials in an accessible format such as Braille in their institution and 10.7% did not respond.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	5	6.0	6.0	6.0
	No	70	83.3	83.3	89.3
	99.00	9	10.7	10.7	100.0
	Total	84	100.0	100.0	

Are there any teachers at your school trained to teach children with disabilities?

27.4% of the respondents said yes that there are teachers at their school trained to teach children with disabilities, while 66.7% of the respondents said no, that there are not any teachers at their school trained to teach children with disabilities and 6 % did not respond.

This finding speaks to a major challenge confronting the education system in Jamaica. With most of the schools reporting that they have no member of staff that is trained to deal with students with disabilities, this reflects a major short-coming in the training program in the tertiary institutions charged with the responsibility for preparing teachers. This situation has to be addressed urgently especially within the context of the Charter of Rights which has been adopted

by the Jamaican Parliament in 2011 and gives the right to every citizen to have a primary education.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes	23	27.4	27.4	27.4
	no	56	66.7	66.7	94.0
	99.00	5	6.0	6.0	100.0
	Total	84	100.0	100.0	

If your answer to the above is yes, how many?

Of the schools that had teachers trained to teach children with disabilities 16.7% had approximately 1 - 2, while 4.8% had a visible 3 - 4 trained teachers, 2.4% had a noticeable amount of 5 - 6 and 1.2% had a marginal amount of 7 - 8 trained teachers to teach children with disabilities.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1-2	14	16.7	16.7	16.7
	3-4	4	4.8	4.8	21.4
	5-6	2	2.4	2.4	23.8
	7-8	1	1.2	1.2	25.0
	99.00	63	75.0	75.0	100.0
	Total	84	100.0	100.0	

Are teachers at your school exposed to regular training seminars on how to relate to students with disabilities?

10.7% of teachers are exposed to regular training seminars on how to relate to students with disabilities, while 88.1% of teachers are not exposed to regular training seminars on how to relate to students with disabilities and 1.2% did not respond.

The high levels of institutions indicating that their staff has not been exposed to regular training on how to relate to students with disabilities (88%), indicates a major challenge for the education system. The MOE has to establish a mechanism to constantly expose teachers how to successfully relate to students with disabilities.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes	9	10.7	10.7	10.7
	no	74	88.1	88.1	98.8
	99.00	1	1.2	1.2	100.0
	Total	84	100.0	100.0	

Has your school, in the past or present employed a teacher with disability?

14.3% of the school have employed a teacher with disability in the past or present while 65.5% of the school have not employed a teacher with disability in the past or present and 20.2% did not respond.

The employment of trained persons with disabilities in the education system has also been a major challenge. This is despite the fact that there are qualified teachers who have a disability. If

the negative attitudes towards persons with disabilities in the education system are to be permanently eradicated, more trained and qualified persons with disabilities must be employed and placed in the classroom.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes	12	14.3	14.3	14.3
	no	55	65.5	65.5	79.8
	99.00	17	20.2	20.2	100.0
	Total	84	100.0	100.0	

If yes, how many?

14.3% of the schools that have employed a teacher with a disability either in the past or present have only employed 1 - 2 teachers.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1-2	12	14.3	14.3	14.3
	99.00	72	85.7	85.7	100.0
	Total	84	100.0	100.0	

Students with disabilities should be allowed to participate in physical education activities at school?

Approximately 36.9% of the respondents strongly agree that students with disabilities should be allowed to participate in physical education at school, while 42.9% agree that students with

disabilities should be allowed to participate in physical education, while a noticeable 2.4% strongly disagreed, 15.5% of the respondents were undecided and 2.4% did not respond.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly agree	31	36.9	36.9	36.9
	Agree	36	42.9	42.9	79.8
	strongly disagree	2	2.4	2.4	82.1
	Undecided	13	15.5	15.5	97.6
	99.00	2	2.4	2.4	100.0
	Total	84	100.0	100.0	

Students with disabilities should be allowed to participate in all extra-curricular activities?

42.9 % of the schools strongly agree that students with disabilities should be allowed to participate in all extra-curricular activities, 32.1 % of the schools agree that students with disabilities should be allowed to participate in all extra-curricular activities, 1.2 % of the schools strongly disagree that students with disabilities should be allowed to participate in all extra-curricular activities, 3.6 % of the schools disagree that students with disabilities should be allowed to participate in all extra-curricular activities, 16.7% of the schools were undecided that students with disabilities should be allowed to participate in all extra-curricular activities and 3.6% did not respond.

A cumulative 75% of respondents have a positive view towards the inclusion of persons with disabilities in extra-curricular activities in the education system. This is consistent with the views posited by these respondents as it relates to the general inclusion of students with disabilities in the regular schools and in physical activities.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly agree	36	42.9	42.9	42.9
	agree	27	32.1	32.1	75.0
	strongly disagree	1	1.2	1.2	76.2
	disagree	3	3.6	3.6	79.8
	undecided	14	16.7	16.7	96.4
	99.00	3	3.6	3.6	100.0
	Total	84	100.0	100.0	

Students within the education system should be taught how to relate to persons with disabilities
 84.5% of the schools strongly agree that students within the education system should be taught how to relate to persons with disabilities, while 13.1% of the schools agree that students within the education system should not be taught how to relate to persons with disabilities and 2.4% did not respond.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly agree	71	84.5	84.5	84.5
	agree	11	13.1	13.1	97.6
	99.00	2	2.4	2.4	100.0
	Total	84	100.0	100.0	

Are you aware of the Jamaica Council for Persons with Disabilities (JCPD) which is established by the government to provide services to persons with disabilities?

89.3 % of the schools are aware of the Jamaica Council for Persons with Disabilities (JCPD) which is established by the government to provide services to persons with disabilities while 6 % of the schools are not aware of the Jamaica Council for Persons with Disabilities (JCPD) which is established by the government to provide services to persons with disabilities and 4.8% did not respond.

There is a high level of awareness as it relates to the JCPD amongst respondents and this is a positive development. The JCPD over the years has been engaging schools with various sensitization seminars on the subject of disability and it seems as if this work has had some positive impact.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes	75	89.3	89.3	89.3
	no	5	6.0	6.0	95.2
	99.00	4	4.8	4.8	100.0
		84	100.0	100.0	

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Total				

Are you aware of the Early Stimulation Program which has been established by the government to assist in the early stimulation of children with disabilities?

53.6 % of the schools are aware of the Early Stimulation Program which has been established by the government to assist in the early stimulation of children with disabilities, while 41.7 % of the schools are not aware of the Early Stimulation Program which has been established by the government to assist in the early stimulation of children with disabilities and 4.8% did not respond.

The 53% of respondents who indicated an awareness of the ESP is an average one. The ESP provides a critical function in stimulating children with disabilities in their early lives so that they can function normally in the society. However, more work needs to be done to expand its reach across the island and to promote its work.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid yes	45	53.6	53.6	53.6
no	35	41.7	41.7	95.2
99.00	4	4.8	4.8	100.0
Total	84	100.0	100.0	

Are you aware of the Special Education Unit in the Ministry of Education, which was established to give support to educational institutions that have children with disabilities?

77.4% of the schools are aware of the Special Education Unit in the Ministry of Education, which was established to give support to educational institutions that have children with disabilities while 19% are not aware of the Special Education Unit in the Ministry of Education, which was established to give support to educational institutions that have children with disabilities and 3.6% did not respond.

The 77% of respondents who have indicated an awareness of the Special Education Unit in the Ministry of Education is high. However, it is lower than the 89% that have indicated an awareness of the JCPD which is not a part of the “family” of the MOE. It therefore means that the Special Education Unit has to intensify its sensitization program amongst the various education institutions in the island.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes	65	77.4	77.4	77.4
	no	16	19.0	19.0	96.4
	99.00	3	3.6	3.6	100.0
	Total	84	100.0	100.0	

Are you aware of the National Policy for Persons with Disabilities?

63.1 % of schools are aware of the National Policy for Persons with Disabilities, while 33.3% of schools are not aware of the National Policy for Persons with Disabilities and 3.6% did not respond.

The 63% of respondents indicating an awareness of the National Policy for the Disabled is commendable and is indicative of some of the work of the JCPD. The JCPD must ensure that issues relating to the national policy are intensified in their public education efforts in the schools.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes	53	63.1	63.1	63.1
	no	28	33.3	33.3	96.4
	99.00	3	3.6	3.6	100.0
	Total	84	100.0	100.0	

Recommendations

The research conducted by the UWI Centre for Disability Studies constitutes a major effort to scientifically assess the levels of access and inclusion of the disabled in the Jamaican education system. Some interesting results have been uncovered and confirmed. Policy makers must therefore move to make the necessary adjustments to make the education system more responsive to the needs of persons with disabilities. The CDS would like to make the following recommendations:

1. For the Government to enforce the policy of all new schools to be built with the necessary access features for persons with disabilities.
2. For the Government to move to ensure that every constituency in the island has at least 1 primary and 1 high school that is fully accessible to persons with disabilities.
3. For the Government to establish a mechanism whereby individuals with a disability pursuing their education can receive a one-off assistance with the requisite adaptive technology to aid in their educational development.
4. For the Government to establish a policy that individuals attending teacher training institutions be exposed to training on how to relate with persons with disabilities in the classroom.
5. For all state agencies that have responsibilities for persons with disabilities to intensify their public education on the subject of disability to eradicate the negative attitudes towards these individuals.
6. For the Ministry of Education to make available to all schools, a list of the various government agencies that provide services to persons with disabilities.

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