

## The Developmental Education Model in the United Kingdom: Access Programs

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The field of developmental education is undergoing more change and stress than at any other time in its long history (Arendale, 2002). There are many causes for an increasing number of public four-year institutions to curtail or eliminate their developmental education credit courses. Rather than being placed in a purely defensive or reactive mode, it is important for the professionals in this field to carefully consider successful models that others have developed for serving similar students. This examination requires examining successful models in other countries. This article is an extension of a recent publication that examined the language used to describe this field (Arendale, 2005) which included examining higher education in the United Kingdom (U.K.) regarding their approach.

A review of programs with similarities to developmental education in the U.K. provides a different perspective which they call access programs. Higher education in the U.K. is coordinated, funded, and evaluated by the national government. Two organizations that are resources in the field of access programs are the European Access Network (2004) and the Institute for Access Studies (2003). Rather than using the U.S. term of developmental education, the U.K. approach of access program focuses on widening participation in higher education by historically-underrepresented student groups. In addition to similar concern for academically-underprepared students, the U.K. access program scope includes older students, students returning to education, displaced workers, and other demographic groups who whom college has not been common.

An important difference between the U.S. and the U.K. in this area concerns remedial or developmental courses. The responsibility within U.S. colleges is very unequal since each institution has freedom to choose to what extent to offer these curriculum offerings. Public institutions, especially two-year colleges, bear the increasing responsibility for such course offerings. There are significant differences among policies among the states regarding developmental education. A few states have created state-funded access and equal opportunity programs to extend similar programs provided by the federal government (e.g., CA, NJ, NY, PA).

The U.K. has taken a different approach by organizing these courses into an institutional unit called an Access Program. These programs may be located within a postsecondary institution or an adult education center operating independently in the local community. Successful completion of the one year program results in receiving a certificate of completion and eligibility to enter a degree program at a college or university. An important difference between the U.S. and the U.K. is that U.S. colleges are more likely to admit students who have less academic preparation than U.K. institutions which have higher admission standards. U.S. institutions are more often willing to admit students to determine whether they can benefit from the college experience than U.K. institutions that demand a higher level of likelihood of academic success before admission to the institution (A. Policicchio, personal communication, February 18, 2005).

Access programs were first initiated by the U.K. national government in 1978. In addition to this proactive stance by the national government, there are several distinctive features of access programs: (a) officially recognized as a route into further higher education; (b) meet minimum standards by the national government before they are

permitted to begin; (c) targeted for under-represented students in U.K. higher education such as disabled learners, the unemployed, female returners, minority ethnic groups, and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds; and (d) rigorously evaluated by the Quality Assurance Agency, a national government agency similar to the U.S. Government Accounting Office (UCAS, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c).

There are several lessons that could be drawn from the U.K. model. First, clearly coordinate efforts for developmental education services among secondary schools, adult education centers (i.e., ABE, GED preparation) and college developmental education units. In the U.K., the access programs do not attempt to duplicate the efforts of their community-based adult education centers. A national plan must be developed by leaders in all three of these areas to both coordinate efforts and secure adequate funding in all three sectors for service to the students in need.

Second, implement a unified, consistent, rigorous, and comprehensive evaluation system for developmental education programs. The U.K. access programs are highly regulated and evaluated by standards established by the national government's education department. The U.S. system is a patchwork of voluntary compliance with standards of uneven levels established by professional associations. One set of protocols need to be established by leaders of the professional associations along with the involvement of the U.S. Department of Education. The U.S. government involvement can both provide access to critical information as well as gain their approval of the final evaluation protocol.

Developmental education in the U.S. must universally gain the respect that the U.K. access programs have achieved as a rigorous entry path to higher education. This is

essential for supporting the aspirations of today's and tomorrow's generation of college students.

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