

ASID Position Statement

Addressing the shortcomings of Dedifferentiation

Recent international policy has prioritised 'dedifferentiation', which means inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities within the broader group of people with any disability. Enabling people with intellectual disability to articulate their aspirations, spell out their needs, and claim necessary resources requires specialist skills. Policy, service systems and professionals should:

- Design different types of services for different types of people. Treat people with intellectual disability as members of the broad disability group wherever possible, and protect and develop differentiated opportunities, services and research whenever necessary.
- Ensure that all services recognise and respond appropriately to the unique needs of people with intellectual disability and staff have the necessary knowledge and skills to do so.
- Provide specialist opportunities and services in segregated settings only when necessary. These should be valued, well-resourced and tailored for the unique talents of particular sub groups of people with intellectual disability.
- Attend to service user perspectives while also acknowledging the diversity of people with intellectual disability. Input from individuals needs to be critically appraised and considered alongside other forms of knowledge to ensure that the decisions reached are sensible for all.
- Consider the very high proportion of people with intellectual disability who also experience complex physical and/or mental health problems, and who very often live in the most disadvantaged localities. New policies and support services that address health needs and social deprivation need to be developed and examined.
- Tackle the social isolation of people with intellectual disability by emphasizing the creation and maintenance of satisfactory relationships, both in support services and through community initiatives that build connections and a sense of belonging.
- Negotiate a definition of a meaningful adult life so that people with intellectual disability can be supported to live a life of dignity without having to battle against other vulnerable groups for resource.
- Gather data that make the case for allocating resource to those with complex needs.

Background

This position paper is informed by a literature review available on open access [[Clegg & Bigby, 2017](#)]. Dedifferentiated policy, service provision and professional practices have corrected many shortcomings of previous policies, but in a changing world could never be the final word. Efforts to make services and systems accessible and responsive to people with intellectual disability have made little progress, and in countries facing austerity financing some services for this group have worsened.

Advantages of Dedifferentiation (ignoring 'intellectual' aspects of disability)

- **Choice** - many people with mild intellectual disabilities prefer to avoid this label.
- **Advocacy** - strengthens the collective voice of people with disability to change oppressive structures and attitudes.
- **Inclusion**. This has worked best in primary schools and child mental health services.
- **Avoids focussing on impairments and deficits**

Advantages of Differentiation (attending to 'intellectual' aspects of disability)

- **Recognises diversity and group-specific needs** - recognises breadth of specialist knowledge and skills required to provide quality support.
- **Acknowledges the difficulties and limited success of staff training** to people in mainstream or generic disability services.
- **Avoids inaccurate or absent representations** – avoids the tendency to use people with mild intellectual disability as proxies for the whole group.
- **Recognises impairment-specific barriers** – broadens the idea of accessibility, counteracting the view that 'access' only concerns visible and physical barriers.
- **Enables quality alternatives to mainstream services**
- **Avoids compounding disadvantage**
- **Enables more specific advocacy**
- **Identifies need for specific resources**

Reference Clegg, J., & Bigby, C., (2017). Debates about dedifferentiation. *Research and Practice in Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*. 4, 80-97
<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23297018.2017.1309987>