

## **Mind the Gap: The Role of Special Education in Higher Education Outcomes**

Following the implementation of the 1981 Education Act, a law that mandated that children should be taught in mainstream schools whenever possible, the UK saw an increase in the number of students with disabilities enrolled in mainstream school. This paper looks at the current implementation of special education in England and Wales, evaluating whether it works to the benefit or detriment of students with disabilities in their pursuit of higher education. Due to the lack of reliable data demonstrating which students from special education programs enter into higher education or the subsequent retention of said students at the higher education level, inferences were made from available secondary school curricula. Learning outcomes of current special and standard education curricula from various UK secondary schools were compared and assessed based on the quality of university preparedness taught, this included BTEC and/or A-Level preparedness. Additionally, it was noted as to whether or not special education curricula accounted for other minoritised identities of students that make it harder to access higher education, namely race/ethnicity, gender and socioeconomic status. From these observations, general recommendations were made to both school practises and government policy. These observations also lend themselves to broader conversations on special and inclusive education practices.