

## INCLUSION OF PEOPLE WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES IN UNIVERSITY. RESULTS OF THE PROMENTOR PROGRAM (UAM-PRODIS, SPAIN)

### *Inclusión de personas con discapacidad intelectual en la universidad. Resultados del Programa Promentor (UAM-PRODIS, España)*

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RESUMEN: En varios países, se han desarrollado programas de inclusión educativa en la universidad para personas con discapacidad intelectual. En España, varias iniciativas tratan de impulsar la inclusión en el ámbito universitario. En este artículo, se presenta la primera de ellas, el Programa Promentor (UAM-PRODIS). Se realiza una descripción de los resultados de investigación más significativos. La experiencia del Programa Promentor demuestra que la inclusión de personas con discapacidad intelectual en la universidad es posible y deseable, tanto para las propias personas que tienen la oportunidad como para la universidad y el mundo laboral.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Programa Promentor; inclusión; discapacidad intelectual; educación; educación universitaria; atención a la diversidad.

ABSTRACT: In a number of countries, a diversity of inclusive educational programmes have been developed at universities for people with intellectual disabilities. In Spain,

several initiatives are under way at various universities to address this situation. In this article, we present the first of these, the Promentor Program (UAM-PRODIS). A description of the most significant research results are given herein. The Promentor Program experience shows that the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities at university level is both possible and desirable, both for the individuals themselves and for the university and business community.

KEYWORDS: Promentor Program; inclusion; intellectual disability; education; university education; attention to diversity.

## 1. Introduction

FULLY DEMOCRATIC SOCIETIES ARE CHARACTERIZED by the active participation of each and every one of their citizens. This demands that society must address the question of whether every person, regardless of their personal characteristics, disability, origin, culture, beliefs, etc., shall have equal opportunities to access the various social environments. Therefore, the concept of inclusion is inherent to democratic society.

In the educational environment, the right to be included and to participate in building a better society translates into developing institutions that are open to students in all their diversity, and into understanding this diversity as an opportunity for social enrichment. We agree with M. A. Casanova (2009), in that the consolidation of a democratic and plural society will only be possible through the impulse of educational inclusion.

Aware that inclusion is no longer a guiding principle but has become a fundamental right (Echeita and Ainscow, 2010), in recent years university institutions have developed inclusion policies and practices for people with intellectual disabilities (onwards PWID). The European Higher Education Area (EHEA) defines the context in which students with disabilities access to university should be promoted. As an example, the Agencia Nacional de Evaluación de la Calidad y Acreditación [National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation], in its assessment protocol for the authentication of official academic qualifications, includes many aspects related to equal opportunities for PWID (ANECA, 2008). In this line, several works have been published providing quality indicators for inclusion of PWID at university level (Ferreira, Vieira and Vidal, 2014).

Inclusion in higher education for PWID is not merely the result of a normative regulation. It is an ethical imperative incumbent on society. And, over the last few years, greater efforts are being made to improve accessibility to university for PWID. However, PWID encounter more barriers and difficulties than other groups (Izuzquiza, 2012; Plotner and Marshall, 2015), owing to the nature of their disability.

In Spain, accession to university is governed by Royal Decree 1982/2008. This regulation established an accession examination requiring academic skills that are difficult to attain by PWID. Therefore, in the Spanish context at present, accession to university for PWID can only be achieved through in-house courses or diplomas and not official qualifications.

In the past, little importance was given to post-compulsory education for PWID, despite this being a fundamental right (Izuzquiza and Ruiz Incera, 2005) that contributes to standing them in better stead vis-à-vis the labour market and their own personal and social development.

This article sets out to give an exhaustive review of the Promentor Program, conducted by the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (UAM) and Fundación Prodis, within the framework of a Sponsored Chair. Established in 2004, this is the first university certificate for PWID in Spain, and one of the pioneers in Europe.

The research presented in this article, has the next main objectives:

- 1) Describe the results of the Promentor Program.
- 2) Interpret results according to the existing models and future challenges.

## 2. Background

An analysis of previous experiences of higher education for PWID shows that English-speaking countries are the most advanced (Egido, 2010).

Below are the major initiatives that provide the scientific grounding for the Promentor Program (Izuzquiza, 2012).

### 2.1. *Australia*

The policy based on “A fair chance for all” maintained by the Department of Education and Training since 1990 favours the implementation of support services and inclusion projects for PWID at Australian universities. In practical terms, the Australian regulation has given rise to numerous initiatives targeting PWID. However, owing to the difficulties involved in achieving the inclusion of PWID, this group has only benefited to a lesser extent. An exception is the experimental program “Up the hill” conducted at Flinders University. In this program, students with intellectual disabilities have access to their choice of university studies, with the support of a mentor.

### 2.2. *Canada*

Canada is among the foremost countries offering inclusion in higher education for PWID, through the project Inclusive Post-Secondary Education (IPSE). In 1987, the “On campus” program was launched at the University of Alberta. In this program, 11 students are accepted to follow a regular course of study of their choice for four years. The most outstanding feature in the assessment of the results of this program was its contributions both to students’ training and to improving the teaching quality at the university (McDonald *et al.*, 1997).

### 2.3. *The United States of America*

Within the framework of the Think College project of the Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI), the Consortium for Postsecondary Education for Individuals with Developmental Disabilities has been set up, bringing together projects for higher education inclusion conducted across the country. The USA currently has a widely diverse range of initiatives under way in this field, with over 60 experimental projects in different states.

### 2.4. *Ireland*

At Trinity College, Dublin, the two-year educational program “Certificate in Contemporary Living” (CCL) has been in place since 2005 for people with intellectual disability (O’Connor *et al.*, 2012). The aim of this program is to promote inclusion for PWID through a syllabus of ten subjects, of which two are optional.

### 2.5. *Finland*

The Canadian “On Campus” program led to similar experiences being implemented in other countries, such as Finland (Saloviita, 2000), where the Kampus Program was launched in 1995. Through planning processes focused on the person, students are given assistance in becoming aware of their educational interests and needs, enabling them to select which studies to take. Volunteers are sought at the participating universities to support students with intellectual disabilities in the classroom.

From the above we can see that different experiences address different higher education inclusion models. Following the typology defined by Hart *et al.* (2006), we distinguish three distinct models:

- a) Mixed model: students take part in activities with people without disability, and in others with fellow PWID.
- b) Separation model: students participate only in activities with other students with disabilities.
- c) Individual inclusive support model: students receive individualised support while taking part in educational activities with other students who are not disabled.

In the case of the Promentor Program, the mixed model of higher education inclusion applies, as students study subjects with their reference group, while participating in university life and education with students without disability through learning-service experiences. The main reason for choosing this model in designing the program stems from contextual factors: the commitment of the UAM Department of Didactics and Theory of Education, and the initial difficulty of achieving

the involvement of the entire university, or the need to create an in-house diploma in view of the barriers hindering accession to official courses of study in the Spanish educational system.

At all events, research on these programmes has highlighted certain common traits and contributions: the programmes are a source of enrichment for the university community (Ryan and Struths, 2004), they generate profound changes in the personal and social identity of people with intellectual disability (Borland and James, 1999), they contribute to developing personal maturity (Uditsky and Hughson, 2012), they improve social relations and ties of friendship (Carroll, Herman and Wickizer, 2012; Sheppard-Jones *et al.*, 2015) and they increase employability rates (Grigal and Dwyre, 2010).

These favourable findings confirm that the university is an appropriate context for young people with intellectual disabilities to receive training after completing their compulsory education.

### 3. The Promentor Program

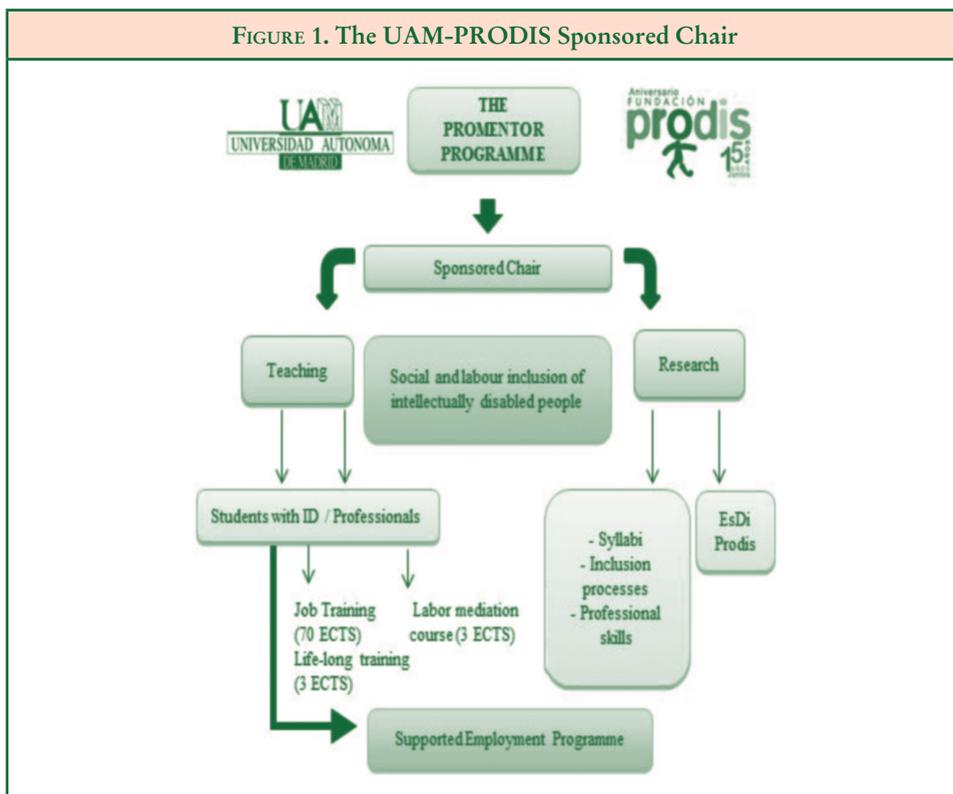
#### 3.1. *Framework of reference*

The Promentor Program began in the year 2004, when Fundación Prodis and a group of lecturers in the Department of Didactics and Theory of Education of the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (UAM) shared their interest in setting in motion a higher education inclusion program aimed at PWID. During the first academic year a pilot experience was conducted with 8 students.

In February 2009, the university granted a Sponsored Chair jointly to the UAM and Fundación Prodis. This chair was the first in Spain with the primary aim of providing higher education to PWID and promoting employment among this group in ordinary labour scenarios (Izuzquiza, Egido and Cerrillo, 2013). As in the case of other university chairs, teaching practice interests are upheld while promoting high-quality research:

Within the framework of the UAM-PRODIS sponsored chair, the course of study leading to the in-house certificate “Training for Labour Inclusion” (Promentor) is offered, as well as the continuing education course “Updating and enhancing social and labour skills” aimed at graduates from the program employed in regular companies with support from the Labour Inclusion Service provided by Fundación Prodis.

Concerning research activity, the research group “PR-005 Social and labour inclusion for young people with intellectual disability” has been established and recognised by the university. Among its primary lines of research are syllabus analysis, research on inclusive processes and professional skills, and new technologies (through the ESdi Prodis, established within the framework of the Proyecto Singular y Estratégico [Singular and Strategic Project] CISVI in 2008, and the Fundación Prodis ProTic Program).



### 3.2. Objectives

The Promentor Program strives for the following objectives:

1. To work together with PWID in designing their life projects through individual plans based on Person-Centred Planning (PCP).
2. To provide job-oriented training, adjusted to each individual, in preparation for labour inclusion in the ordinary labour market.
3. To provide a Supported Employment service that encourages equal opportunities to access, preserve and be promoted from a post of employment.
4. To offer life-long continuing education for workers who exercise their right to work in the ordinary labour market.
5. To provide the necessary support for workers with intellectual disabilities enjoy their leisure time participating as community members with full rights.
6. To be aware of the university's cultural offer and to learn to enjoy these services in an inclusive and responsible manner.

### 3.3. *Syllabus*

Students in the Promentor Program follow a two-year syllabus (70 ECTS credits) at the UAM Faculty of Teacher Training and Education. Each group consists of 15 students with intellectual disabilities. In their admission procedure, students undergo psycho-pedagogical assessment with the purpose of determining whether they meet the minimum requirements to enter the program: in general terms, to be capable of travelling to the campus and not suffer from severe mental health problems. These requirements are mandatory in an inclusive environment such as a university.

The syllabus is structured following two fundamental premises. On the one hand, to strengthen students' labour inclusion through learning professional skills, and on the other hand, complementing the above, to contribute to students' personal and social development by means of humanistic studies focusing on values, emotional education and the acquisition of social skills.

In designing the syllabus, the six research studies were taken into consideration. The findings of these studies indicate that, to achieve adequate labour inclusion, it is important to provide education that includes complementary professional and socio-emotional skills.

In any case, all subjects aim to enhance the acquisition of the following transversal skills:

1. To apply the concepts, theories and principles acquired to problem-solving and decision-making in the labour environment.
2. To acquire social and labour commitments that contribute to their growth as citizens with full rights.
3. To acquire and exercise the necessary social and emotional skills to interact successfully in their environment, and to work satisfactorily in a team.
4. To acquire the information and communications technologies (ICT) skills that will enable them to resolve tasks related to their jobs efficiently.
5. To acquire flexibility, as a capacity for adapting to change, and as a first step in self-appraisal capability to analyse their own work.
6. To retain the enthusiasm for life-long learning.

The acquisition of the above transversal skills is assessed through learning indicators for each subject and other assessment techniques: projects, classroom observation, written and oral tests, etc.

The Promentor Program faculty is made up of lecturers in the UAM Department of Didactics and Theory of Education and of Specific Didactics, as well as professionals of renowned prestige in the field of intellectual disability, members of Fundación Prodis.

The table below lists the subjects in the syllabus:

**TABLE 1. The Promentor Program Syllabus**

<i>First year</i>	<i>Credits ECTS</i>	<i>Second year</i>	<i>Credits ECTS</i>
Interpersonal relations in the workplace	4	Archiving and organisation	4
Development of emotional skills I	3	Banking and documentation	2
Specific professional skills	4	Labour relations	3
Use of community services	3	Development of emotional skills II	2
Thought strategies	3	Culture and society	2
Logic and accountancy	4	English II	3
Developing values	3	Technology in the workplace II	2
Technology in the workplace I	2	Fundamentals of learning II	2
Basic English I	2	Practicum	14
Fundamentals of learning I	3	Total	34
Organisation and planning	2		
Quality of life	2		
Total	35		

Despite occupying their assigned space, a number of the subjects in the syllabus are also proposed on a transversal layout. Principally, these are subjects linked to developing emotional skills, new technologies or values. Such transversal proposals are arranged through weekly faculty meetings to establish their inclusion in the lessons.

## 4. Method

### 4.1. Sample

The following sample has participated through the different phases of the research:

- 173 PWID.
- 10 lecturers (7 lecturers in the UAM Department of Didactics and Theory of Education, and 3 Fundación Prodis professionals of renowned prestige).
- 6 labour mediators from the Fundación Prodis Labour Inclusion Services.
- 25 Teacher Training students participating in the Promentor Program cooperative learning groups.
- 117 students not directly related to the course.
- 30 parents of students in the Promentor Program.
- 25 UAM administrative and services professionals.
- 16 managerial staff and directors of public and private bodies in the community of Madrid, and 18 co-workers in companies and public bodies in the Community of Madrid.

#### 4.2. *Research design*

The research has been carried out through a mixed design, which integrates both the use of quantitative and qualitative techniques. A longitudinal panel study has been made, taking qualitative data using observation, deep interview, self-report and focus group techniques with a representative sample and quantitative data obtained through Likert type questionnaire. The data has been triangulated using different types of experts and final users and different methods using an analytic data convergence view.

In this paper we comment descriptive data and we provide central tendency indicators.

#### 4.3. *Categories of analysis*

The data has been taken according to four main axes: (1) firstly, collected data relating to the education quality, in order with the subjects, the social skills development, and the progressive adaptation to the ordinary environment. (2) Secondly, training and level of teacher education and their adaptability to the students. (3) Thirdly, is attended to the increase of programs like Promentor among other Spanish Universities, the growth of PWID and ordinary students participation, and the social innovation products originated by the program. (4) Besides, data is being taken according to current PWID work and the businessmen perception about that reality.

### 5. **Research**

As mentioned above, research is a fundamental component of the Sponsored Chair's activity. This is geared toward the continuous improvement of training processes and supporting social and labour inclusion, and therefore fully harmonised with teaching activities.

To date, six competitive research projects have been conducted (Izuzquiza, Egido and Cerrillo, 2013), financed by the Community of Madrid:

- Presence of PWID in the labour market within the Community of Madrid, and attitudes of employers toward their integration in the workplace.
- Qualitative investigation of workers with intellectual disabilities' labour skills in the Community of Madrid.
- Higher education training oriented toward employment for young PWID. First year syllabus.
- Higher education training for labour insertion of PWID. Second year syllabus.
- Skills assessment and identification of quality procedures in labour insertion of young PWID graduated from the Promentor Program.
- Quality standards favouring inclusion of PWID in higher education.

Additionally, the research project “Evaluation of the Methodology for Supported Employment within the Promentor Program. Competence adjustment” is ongoing currently, with the objective of identifying the factors that influence job preservation. Some of the more significant findings in this research are given in the following section.

## 6. Results of the Promentor Program

### 6.1. *Graduation classes and participants*

Including the current Promentor Program students, 173 young PWID have attended the course of study leading to an in-house degree.

In June 2016, students in the 10 class celebrated their graduation. In total, there are now 145 graduates of the Promentor Program.

These data alone reflect the trajectory of the Promentor Program and its impact on access to higher education for PWID.

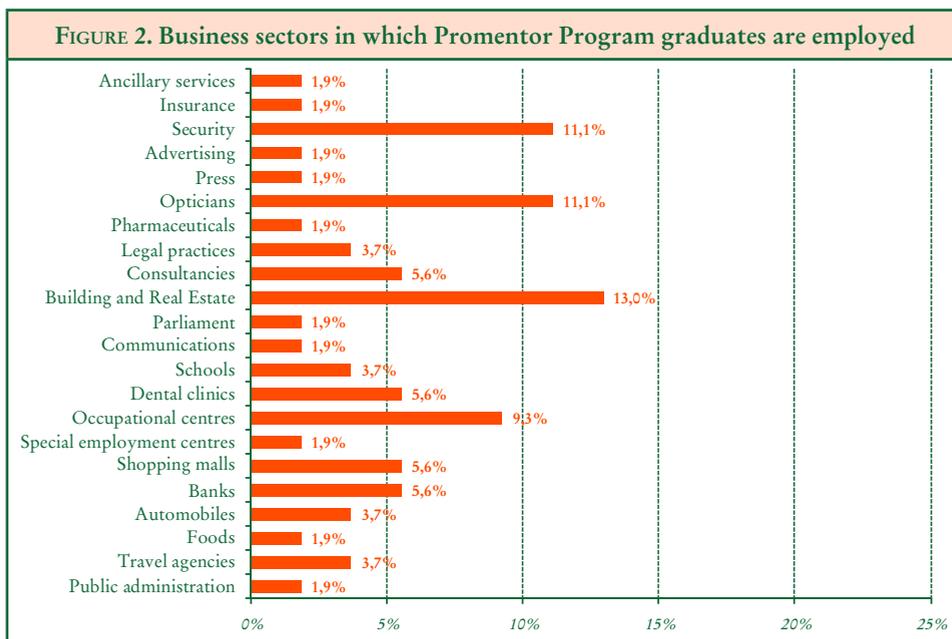
### 6.2. *Improved labour inclusion*

During academic year 2014/2015, with the aim of improving job training, Fundación Prodis has created a post-university qualification course for Promentor Program graduates: “The Business Program. Expert Business Services Provider”. This is a pioneer program in Spain, adding value to the professional training of PWID. It spans one academic year, and features the active participation of management staff and prestigious professionals from Fundación Prodis partners.

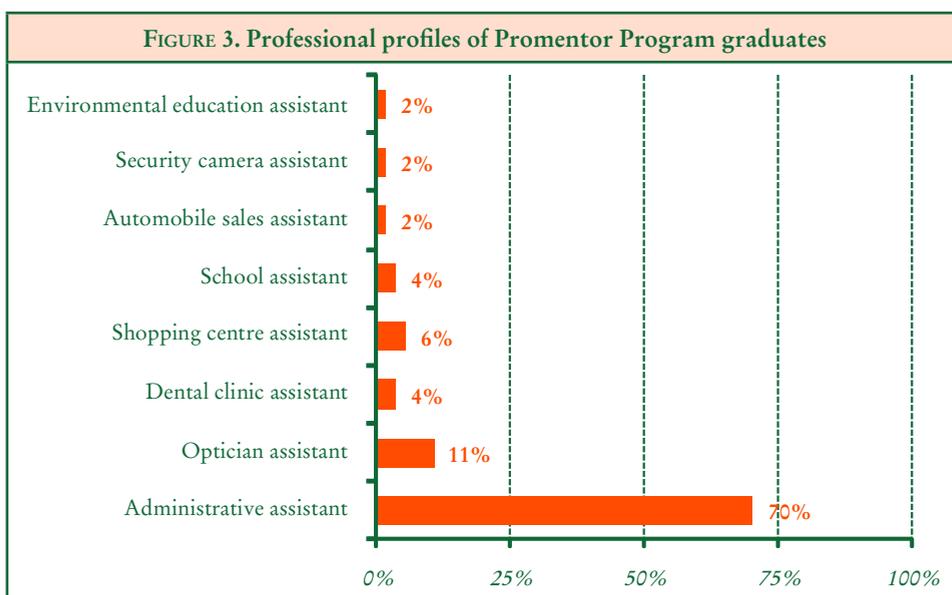
For Promentor Program graduates taking the Business Program, Fundación Prodis provides a Labour Inclusion Service based on the premise of Supported Employment. Very important to graduates’ insertion in the job market is the role of the labour mediator, who acts as the “the PWID’s main ‘buddy’ and undertakes to select, together with the student in his charge, the best job itinerary” (Arenas and González, 2010: 47). Hence, the labour mediator provides fundamental support both to companies and to the PWID employee throughout his working life (Égido, Cerrillo and Camina, 2009; Izuzquiza and Herrán, 2010).

Of the 145 graduates of the Promentor Program, 75% work in ordinary companies on a labour contract. This item of data confirms that the Promentor Program contributes effectively to raising the employability of PWID. Bearing in mind that labour inclusion is a key factor to integration, we can state that the Promentor Program improves the social inclusion and quality of life of its students. 25% of graduates who do not hold a job at regular companies are employed in other services for PWID, such as special employment centres or occupational centres.

The education received by the young people enrolled in the Promentor Program includes general professional skills that prepare students for a number of different business sectors. This translates into the diversity of sectors in which Promentor Program graduates are employed, as appreciated in Figure II:



With regard to the professional profiles of these employees, the most common is administrative:



A recent study (Izuzquiza, 2012) has analysed employers' perceptions of labour inclusion of PWID graduated at Promentor Program. The most significant findings are shown below:



The most highly valued aspects by employers of graduates of the Promentor Program are punctuality and the positive image they bestow on the company.

### 6.3. *Impact on the university community*

In the research mentioned above, the impact of educational inclusion for PWID on the university community has been analysed.

Analysis of the impact on the university community was conducted using combined methodologies. The techniques used in the research include surveys through structured questionnaires, in-depth interviews, student diaries logging their experience and discussion groups. These techniques have given us information on the perceptions and opinions of participants in the Promentor Program and the different groups related to said program. Data were collected during the period between 2005 and 2010. In an initial stage, a study was conducted to determine the presence of young Promentor Program graduates in the labour market and employers' perception of their labour inclusion. In a second stage, information was gathered on the education program to examine the quality standards in place to favour the inclusion of PWID in the university environment.

All the participants in the study were informed of its aims, and signed their consent to participate in the research. An easy-to-read version of this statement of consent was provided in the case of PWID.

Below are some of the most significant results from the initial stage:

- 9% of private companies or public bodies surveyed employed, or had recently employed, a person with intellectual disabilities.
- Employers' level of satisfaction evidenced their high esteem for the performance of workers with intellectual disabilities trained under the Promentor Program. Similarly, a very favourable attitude was found among their colleagues and direct superiors.
- With regard to the possibility of hiring a person with intellectual disabilities, between 50% and 83% of the companies and public bodies in the survey had more than post liable to be covered by a worker of these characteristics.

The results of this research (Izuzquiza, 2012) show that Promentor Program students are highly valued by members across the university community. Certain statements found on analysing the content are clear examples of this: "the presence of PWID is enriching to the university community", said one participant, while another stated "universities should take a more active part in offering educational programmes to this collective". In this sense, universities offering inclusive programmes for PWID become a reference in best practices with regard to social responsibility.

These results have allowed us to generate a SWOT Matrix with an analysis of strengths and weaknesses of the Promentor Program (Table 2):

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TABLE 2. SWOT Matrix of the Promentor Program		
	<i>Success factors</i>	<i>Risk factors</i>
	<i>Strengths</i>	<i>Weaknesses</i>
<b>INTERNAL ORGANIZATION</b>	The human and professional team	Waiting list
	Level of satisfaction among users and their families	Lack of space to increase the number of students in each class
	Level of satisfaction among professionals	
	Level of satisfaction of the university	
	Syllabus design based on identifying needs	
	Students with intellectual disabilities effort and drive	
	Personalised educational interventions	
	Research and dissemination of results	
	Recognition of the course as a Universidad Autónoma de Madrid in-house qualification	
	The UAM-Prodis Sponsored Chair	
	Permanent adaptation of subjects to students' needs and labour market demands	
	Highly qualified faculty responsible for developing the syllabus	
	Humanistic orientation of the course	
	Teacher training	
	Teacher training students' implication in leisure activities	
	The importance of inclusion as a driver in the teaching process	
	Classroom location within the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education	
Funding by a foundation		
Personal, formal and material resources		
Participation in university activities		
	<i>Opportunities</i>	<i>Threats</i>
<b>ENVIRONMENT</b>	Education of a group at risk of social exclusion	Decreasing job offers
	Access to jobs	Obstacles to promotion at the workplace
	Inclusion in the university environment	
	Labour inclusion	
	Greater levels of satisfaction among students and their families	
	Greater levels of satisfaction among professionals	
	Development of inclusive values	
	University excellence	

## 7. Conclusions

The Promentor Program is the result of the efforts made by many people, without whose contributions the program would not have been possible. However, the leading role is played by the students themselves, who have endeavoured to demonstrate their capacity to learn in university, breaking down barriers, fears, preconceptions, etc. There is still much to be done, and further progress needs to be made in developing a more accessible university for PWID. Nevertheless, the Promentor Program, and other initiatives at the national and international level, has demonstrated that it is possible for PWID to train at university.

As shown throughout this article, inclusion in higher education contributes to raising PWID's quality of life and employability. Through active participation at university, students in the Promentor Program benefit from the opportunity to mix with other students of their age and feel valued and respected, thereby improving their self-image and self-esteem. Moreover, it has been proved that the Promentor Program university course raises young people's employability rates. This data is highly significant, considering the conditions of the labour market in recent years. The results after conducting the Promentor Program for more than 10 years coincide with those obtained in other international studies (Borland and James, 1999; Carroll, Herman and Wickizer, 2012; Grigal and Dwyre, 2010; Ryan and Struths, 2004; Shepard-Jones *et al.*, 2015; Uditsky and Hughson, 2012). This confirms that the inclusion of PWID in higher education is not only possible, but desirable; and even imperative from the viewpoint of social justice.

However, the impact of inclusion at university does not only affect the students and their families. It also serves to endow the university with greater social value, encouraging it to respond to the essential needs of the society in which it is included. Such inclusion causes us to re-examine an old aspiration: to orient our universities toward universality, both regarding population and knowledge. The Universidad Autónoma de Madrid has pledged its confidence in the Promentor Program in its commitment to building a better society. This article presents an analysis of results in which to cover the full range of findings from the Promentor Program. This analysis may be helpful in the assessment of the experience from multiple points of view, but is limited at present by the fact that not all the results have been described in depth. Therefore, in future publications it may be appropriate to examine some of the findings described in this article more fully.

The Promentor Program is the first Spanish experience of inclusive higher education for PWID (Sharon and Izuzquiza, 2015). Other initiatives have followed, such as the Capacitas Program at the Catholic University of Murcia (through the Montoro Alemán Sponsored Chair for the Social and Labour Inclusion of PWID, and with support from Fundación GMP), or the Demos Program at the Universidad Pontificia Comillas ICAI-ICADE (under the auspices of the Family and Disability Chair: Telefónica-Fundación Repsol-Down Madrid). The implementation of these experiences following in the steps of the Promentor Program represents a huge advance for PWID, who have gained opportunities to access higher education. Nevertheless, it is

still necessary to pursue this path, developing new programmes for inclusive higher education for PWID.

The Promentor Program is not a static initiative. It needs to be reviewed with each new academic year, to refine its approach and add improvements that will lead to the overall enhancement of the quality of the program. In this sense, it will be possible in the future to develop support models that may be individualised (Hart *et al.*, 2006) for certain students, enabling them to fit in to the regular functioning of the university. The development of this model is borne out by the experiences of universities in other countries (McDonald *et al.*, 1997; Saloviita, 2000). Likewise, it is important to research the prior preparation that students with intellectual disabilities need to gain access to inclusive education at university (Wintle, 2015).

Some innovative experiences, especially in the United States of America through Think College, show that it is possible to promote more inclusive models, where PWID, with the required supports, can study together with students without disability. Teaching methodologies such as learning communities can foster this type of experience.

The permanent quest for improving the quality of education provided to PWID stems for their rights as citizens to receive the best possible education in a standard and inclusive environment. The Promentor Program has opened the doors to higher education for PWID. On the horizon of a few years from now, we envisage the widespread active participation of PWID at university as a regular occurrence and not solely through experimental initiatives.

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