Guide to Inclusive Practice in Teaching and Learning, Assessment and Admissions

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Guide to Inclusive Practice in Teaching and Learning, Assessment and Admissions

Introduction

The University of Reading operates an inclusive environment to ensure that admissions, learning, teaching and assessment practices, in addition to support services, are both wide-ranging and non-discriminatory. In addition, The Equality Act 2010 places obligations on public bodies in connection with a range of protected characteristics: one category of student covered by the Act is disabled students. This Guide is designed to assist staff in ensuring we provide the inclusive environment all our students can legitimately expect and which we are legally obliged to provide.

The University approach is to embed inclusive practice into its policies, procedures and curriculum design and also to work in partnership with individual students to tailor its provision to meet specific, individual requirements.

Who is disabled?

The most widely cited definition in higher education under current legislation is that which is outlined in the Equality Act. The Act identifies a disabled person as someone with,

‘a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long term adverse effect on his ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities’.

This definition includes students with a wide range of conditions, including those: with physical or mobility difficulties, who are blind or partially sighted, have hearing loss, have debilitating medical conditions such as heart conditions, cancer or HIV, have specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia, dyspraxia, ADHD or Asperger’s Syndrome or mental health difficulties, including depression and Anxiety Disorder.

Please contact the Disability Advisory Service (DAS) if you have any questions about whether your student is covered by this document, or how support and adjustments can best be provided. In addition, DAS provides help and support for students who are temporarily incapacitated but not covered by the Act, for example a student with a broken wrist.

Admission and Induction

The University of Reading’s Admissions policy outlines our commitment to equality of opportunity. Individuals are selected, developed and otherwise treated on the basis of his or her relevant merits and abilities and are given equal opportunities within the University.
The Disability Advisory Service is normally the first port of call for advice and guidance to students with disabilities, from pre-applicant level to graduation. DAS liaises with school and departmental Disability Representatives regularly and particularly at the beginning of the academic year and throughout the autumn and spring terms. Liaison is also achieved through the Community of Practice of Disability Representatives’ termly meeting.

Course information should be clear and explicit to help inform applicant choice and should indicate that alternative formats are available on request. Entry requirements must be non-discriminatory and clearly indicate competence standards (see ‘Curriculum design’ section).

Where a student has declared their disability on the application form, Admissions staff must input this detail into RISIS, so that the Disability Advisory Service and departmental Disability Representatives can ensure appropriate communications and support are implemented.

Where interviews are held, all students must be provided with an equal opportunity to demonstrate their suitability for the programme. For example, a sign language interpreter may need to be provided for a deaf student. Please contact DAS for advice on interpreters and funding.

Induction events should be inclusive and take account of disabled students’ requirements. Students should also be encouraged to disclose disabilities, specific learning difficulties or serious and chronic medical conditions to the Disability Advisory Service, so that appropriate support can be implemented from the outset. However, students should be made aware of their right to confidentiality, and this must be respected if the student requests it. Disclosures made in confidence should be kept in a sealed envelope with ‘Only to be opened by . . .’ (yours and the students name on the outside). The student should sign that they have told you about their disability, but do not want this information passed on, even if this limits support. Forms are available from DAS for such disclosures.

DAS will seek to ensure that students with declared disabilities are aware of support available, appropriate support packages put in place and that all other relevant members of staff are informed (with the student’s consent). Students whose disabilities make their transition particularly difficult are welcome to meet with a Disability Adviser before entry, to assist with planning for entry, enrolment and registration in a clear, structured and supportive way. A centralised Induction day for students with disabilities, is provided in the summer, to facilitate this, providing information about funding, provision of support workers and academic writing at university level and students can also meet individually with a Disability Adviser so they can discuss their support in a private and confidential
environment. Opportunities for early registration with the University of Reading Medical Practice and early receipt of University Campus Cards may also be available at the Induction Day.

**Curriculum Design**

Schools and Departments are responsible for ensuring that their programme design provides equality of opportunity for all students to demonstrate achievement of the appropriate learning outcomes. Inclusivity from the outset means that fewer adjustments may be needed to tailor the course to meet individual requirements once a student has commenced the programme.

In order to ensure an inclusive environment and avoid unlawful discrimination, learning outcomes and assessment methods must be justifiable. Offering a range of assessment methods from the outset can ensure that students with a particular disability are not unintentionally discriminated against. Some departments have incorporated individual adjustments into curriculum design to make the courses themselves more accessible; for example, always providing an alternative method of assessment to group work, presentations or dissertations.

Programme handbooks for students should offer advice on academic and professional standards (where appropriate). It is particularly important that indications should be given of the capacity to make adjustments, and, in the few instances where it is legally justifiable, where adjustments cannot be made (for example, parts of language courses may be exempt from the general policy that dyslexic students will not be penalized for poor spelling and grammar). Provision of reading lists in advance helps many students, particularly those whose disabilities make accessing reading materials difficult; those who are blind or have dyslexia or specific learning difficulties for example.

**Lectures**

It is university policy that students can audio record lectures, as long as this is for their own purposes - [http://www.reading.ac.uk/internal/student/OnlineStudentHandbook/](http://www.reading.ac.uk/internal/student/OnlineStudentHandbook/) (see ‘Recording Lectures’). Students with relevant disabilities, as specified in their Assessment for Specific Learning Difficulties or equivalent report, have the right to make a visual recording of lectures or teaching sessions; such students are required to inform the lecturer in advance that they intend to record visually the lecture or teaching session.

Tutors and lecturers should make simple adaptations to their teaching methods to ensure that students with disabilities are not disadvantaged. If you adapt the following into your normal teaching practice, you will provide a more inclusive learning experience for all students and there will be less of a need to adjust your practice for individual students. For
example advance provision of handouts or putting slides and handouts on Blackboard at least 24 hours in advance allows students with a variety of disabilities to access the materials (a blind student could read them with the appropriate software, a partially sighted student could enlarge handouts, a dyspraxic student can make fewer notes, a dyslexic student has the time they need to read the materials). Blind students will need significantly longer if they are to convert handouts to Braille – contact the Disability Advisory Service for advice.

Facing students when speaking will ensure that students who are deaf or hard of hearing are able to lip read; verbal descriptions of diagrams, tables or videos will enable blind or partially sighted students to conceptualise what they cannot see. Diagrams or formulae should also be displayed for as long as possible.

CSTD offer courses on making your teaching more accessible generally, and also on helping students with particular disabilities.

Personal tutors should allow all students the opportunity to disclose a disability and remind their students about the support services available, and how they can be accessed. This is particularly important during Freshers Week.

**Group Work and Presentations**

Staff are encouraged to ensure that group work is a positive learning experience for all students. However, modifications may be necessary to ensure that disabled students are able to benefit from and contribute to group work, and for some students, group work may not be a useful learning experience and alternative methods of demonstrating the appropriate learning outcome may need to be provided.

Particular regard should be given to students with Asperger’s Syndrome or mental health difficulties, especially in relation to eliminating opportunities for harassment of disabled students. For example, a student with AS would need to be given very clear parameters on expected outcomes and appropriate modes of working. Clear marking schemes provided in advance, with information and preparation may help all students. Careful organization of groups may also be required.

Helpful adjustments for presentations include allowing a presentation to a selective smaller audience, or just the lecturer; giving a presentation to video or, depending on the disability, just writing or just delivering the presentation.
Where difficulties are insurmountable, consideration should be given to the essential learning outcomes and how else these might be achieved (for example by giving an additional essay).

**Field Trips, Work Placements and Study Abroad**

Field trips, work placements and student exchanges should be planned and arranged with the potential and actual requirements of disabled students in mind to ensure that all students have the opportunity to meet the learning outcomes of any placement. Students studying or working abroad as part of their course are also covered by the Equality Act.

Where a field trip, work placement or student exchange poses difficulties for a particular disabled student, consideration of appropriate adjustments to make this a positive learning experience must be made. For example, if a route on a field trip would be difficult for students with mobility difficulties, consider whether the location could be changed so that it is accessible for all students. Other options may include provision of transport, an alternative study location or provision of an assistant or buddy to allow the student to travel at a different pace or have bags and equipment carried for them.

Health and safety assessments should be made for work placements and also for potentially dangerous locations for field trips, such as archaeological digs, to ensure students with disabilities can access them safely. For example, using fluorescent tape on tent pegs at the dig, steps or around large drops or steps for partially sighted students may be appropriate.

Please contact the Disability Advisory Service for assistance with finding workable solutions, assistants or funding.

Where the possibility of reasonable adjustments has been given full consideration and it is simply not possible for a student to participate for reasons relating to their disability, alternative methods of learning and assessment which allow the student to demonstrate their theoretical and technical knowledge and that they meet the learning outcomes of the programme should be developed.

**Laboratory Based and Practical Sessions**

Practical and/or Laboratory sessions should be developed to include disabled students wherever possible.

Staff are encouraged to consider ways that a disabled student may be able to participate in practical or laboratory based sessions. Particular regard could be given to anticipating the needs of disabled students when buying specialist equipment and how simple adaptations may be made to equipment (for example, adding rubber grips to equipment for students...
with difficulties with fine motor control). Consideration of the need for assistive software should be given if planning computer based practicals. Staff are advised to discuss possible ways forward with the Disability Advisory Service and the individual student.

Where the possibility of reasonable adjustments has been given full consideration and it is simply not possible for a student to participate in a practical session for reasons relating to their disability, alternative methods of learning and assessment which allow the student to demonstrate their theoretical and technical knowledge and that they meet the learning outcomes of the programme should be developed.

For example, a student who is blind or partially sighted student or has reduced dexterity may have a laboratory assistant provided, who will conduct the experiment according to the student’s instructions. A student with Asperger’s Syndrome or who is deaf or hard of hearing may need a laboratory assistant to check full comprehension of instructions before the student conducts their own experiment.

Where reports need to be submitted within the practical session, entitlements to extra time in examinations should be taken into account (particularly for students with dyspraxia, manual dexterity difficulties and Asperger’s Syndrome). Where possible, space should be timetabled after these sessions to allow for this. Where for timetabling reasons, extra time is not possible within the practical session, alternatives will need to be considered. Workable alternatives include asking the student to return their report the following day.

**Examinations and Assessments**

The University of Reading has well established examination arrangements which aim to facilitate fair outcomes. The Disability Advisory Service and the Examinations office (EO) work collaboratively in order to support disabled students appropriately. Examinations and assessments should provide students with an equal opportunity to demonstrate their academic ability. This may require appropriate adjustments to assessments and examinations without compromising academic standards.

Teaching staff responsible for developing assessment methods are encouraged to:

- Use a range of methods of assessing academic ability, providing a choice of method for all students where possible. (For example, group work, essay, video etc). This reduces the need for individual adjustments and allows equality of opportunity for disabled students without the need to disclose their disability.
- Consider changing the method of assessment where this presents particular barriers for disabled students (whilst maintaining academic standards). See other relevant sections for specific advice (For example ‘Group Work and Presentations’)
Consider differential weighting of examinations and coursework. For example, assessing students primarily on examinations where their medical condition means they cannot physically sustain their effort over a year (e.g., Chronic Fatigue Syndrome) or primarily on coursework where anxiety levels triggered by examinations substantially affect performance.

Consider carefully the wording of examinations to avoid unnecessary ambiguity, which can cause particular difficulties for students with Asperger’s Syndrome or dyslexia. Use of double negatives in particular should be avoided. Peer review of exam questions can ensure clarity.

A wide variety of adjustments to examinations will be made, as required. The following is an indicative, but far from exhaustive list of adjustments which may be applied. Application of these adjustments will depend upon individual circumstances.

- Differential marking arrangements. For example, not penalising dyslexic students for poor spelling and grammar. There may be exceptions where this would compromise academic integrity, for example language courses where spelling and grammar are the very things being tested, but these are justified and warnings in course publicity given.

- Extra time will be provided for a range of students with disabilities automatically. For example, students with specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia, dyspraxia, ADHD or Asperger’s Syndrome are usually permitted 25% extra time. A blind student may be allowed up to 100% extra time.

- Separate rooms or rooms accommodating fewer people may be provided for certain students; for example, those students with anxiety disorders or particular medical conditions whereby they need rest breaks.

- Amanuenses can be provided for students whose disability makes it difficult for to write their own examination scripts. Use of computer for some students – for example students who are blind or have dyspraxia.

- Alternative formats can be provided for examination papers or students may be able to take their examinations on a computer with appropriate software

- Timings of examinations may be arranged to avoid undue disadvantage. For example, ensuring examinations for a student with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome are not taken on consecutive days or that examinations take place only in the afternoon.

**Conclusion/In Summary**

Please contact the Disability Advisory Service for further guidance on what may be done to facilitate equality of opportunity for disabled students.
Useful resources/Where else to get information and support

The University of Reading Disability Advisory Service 0118 378 8921
disability@reading.ac.uk or  http://www.reading.ac.uk/disability/

Centre for Staff Training and development  www.reading.ac.uk/internal/cstd/

Counselling and Wellbeing Service - www.reading.ac.uk/internal/counselling

Departmental Disability Representative – contact DAS if you are not sure of your contact

University Study Advisers – www.reading.ac.uk/studyadvice

Information on technologies for inclusion - http://www.jisctechdis.ac.uk/

Strategies for Creating Inclusive Programmes of Study - http://www.scips.worc.ac.uk/

Accessible Assessments – Staff Guide to Inclusive Practice -
http://www.shu.ac.uk/services/lti/accessibleassessments/

Accessible Curriculum for Students with Disabilities - http://www.teachability.strath.ac.uk/

Design Issues for Assessing Disabled Students -
http://www.shu.ac.uk/services/lti/accessibleassessments/content/section_2/2.3.html

General information regarding equality can be found on the following websites

Human Resources website www.reading.ac.uk/internal/humanresources/equility/humres-schemes


The Equality Challenge Unit (ECU): www.ecu.ac.uk/publiciations

The Equality Act 2010 can be found at : www.opso.gov.uk/acts/acts2010/pdf/ukpga

Quality Assurance Agency Code of Practice on Disability
http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Code-of-practice-Section-3.aspx