Disability and Academic Skills Team: 
Guidance Notes on Work Placements for 
Students with Disabilities

Definition of Disability and Legal Requirements 
The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 gives a legal definition of disability. A 
disabled person is someone who has a physical or mental impairment, which 
has an adverse effect on his or her ability to carry out normal day-to-day 
activities. That effect must be:
  • Substantial (more than minor or trivial); and
  • Long-term (has lasted for between twelve months and the rest of the 
life of the disabled person).
This definition covers a wide range of disabilities, impairments, medical 
conditions and unseen disabilities (eg. Dyslexia, mental health conditions etc). 
This is a wider definition of disability than might be commonly thought.

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 Part 4, amended by the Special 
Educational Needs and Disability Act, 2001, requires universities to make 
reasonable adjustments to meet the needs of students with disabilities. These 
adjustments include all aspects of teaching and learning, including work 
placements. In 2004 the DDA was extended to qualifications bodies, including 
the General Social Care Council and the Teacher Training Agency, now 
Training and Development Agency. The act was also extended to providers of 
work experience placements. The University and any placement providers 
used, therefore, have a joint responsibility in law to ensure that students with 
a disability are not discriminated against. They are also jointly responsible for 
making reasonable adjustments.

Disclosure of disability 
Under the DDA 1995, and SENDA, 2001, universities are required to give 
students opportunities to disclose their disability at any point in their studies. 
Many students will make a disclosure on their application form and may have 
already made contact with the Disability and Academic Skills Service prior to 
commencing the course. Where this is the case, some information will already 
have been passed to the department about reasonable academic adjustments. 
This might also include some information regarding the student’s needs on 
work placement. It is advisable that the Placement Co-ordinator checks both 
SITS, for lists of students with disabilities, and the confidential file of 
individuals’ support needs, kept in the school office.

However, some students either choose not to disclose disability in advance, 
because they believe they may be discriminated against, or are not aware that 
their difficulties might be classified as a disability. In this case, students need 
to be given the opportunity to declare their disability at any point, including in 
the build up to work placements. It is therefore advisable that Course 
Handbooks and Work Experience Handbooks have a section describing how 
a student should declare their disability through contacting the Disability and
Academic Skills Service. School Offices also have individual referral forms for tutors to refer students to the Disability Service.

When a student does make a disclosure of disability the Disability Advisor will discuss with the student who will need to be informed of the disability and will seek the student’s signed agreement to this. Where a student has a work experience placement as part of the course there will need to be an additional conversation between the student, Placement Co-ordinator and Placement Mentor as to who at the placement will be informed of the disability.

**Process for Supporting Students with Disabilities on Work Placement**

1. **Assessing the needs of students with disabilities:**
   1.1. The student should meet with the Disability Advisor well in advance of the placement process. In some cases this meeting may take place during the course application process and before Registration. The Disability Advisor will discuss potential impact of the student’s disability and adjustments needed.
   1.2. The student may be required to provide medical evidence, or evidence from an appropriate authority, verifying the disability. This information should be forwarded to the Disability and Academic Skills Team.
   1.3. Where the student requires additional funding for reasonable adjustments on the placement, the Disability Advisor may contact the relevant funding body for the student’s Disabled Student Allowance (DSA).
   1.4. Where the student has an Assessment of Need appointment at an Access Centre, the student should discuss the placement requirements with the assessor.

2. **Making recommendations on adjustments:**
   2.1. The Disability Advisor and student will draft an outline of reasonable adjustments which a student requires. The student needs to be closely involved in identifying necessary adjustments.
   2.2. The Disability Advisor will complete the Recommendations for Reasonable Adjustments on Work Experience form (appendix 1). This will be signed by the student and verified by the Disability Advisor.
   2.3. In the case of all teaching programmes, this form will be forwarded to the School Partnership Office for forwarding to the individual Head of School Partnership. In the case of other programmes, this form will be forwarded to the Programme Co-ordinator or Head of Department and the Placement Co-ordinator. At this stage the student’s programme will need to consider whether there is any conflict between the adjustments recommended and the requirements of the course or awarding body.

3. **Considering the adjustments:**
   3.1. In some cases it may be necessary for the student, placement co-ordinator and Disability Advisor to meet and discuss the adjustments.
   3.2. Where there is felt to be a conflict between the recommended adjustments and the course requirements, the academic staff will need to consider carefully whether the course requirements are
discriminatory. At this point academic staff may need to clarify the matter with the Disability Advisor and, possibly, the qualification body (eg. TDA, GSCC etc). It is advisable that serious consideration is given before adjustment recommendations are rejected.

3.3. Once agreement is reached between the individual student, the Disability Advisor and the Academic personnel, all parties should sign the Recommendations for Reasonable Adjustments on Work Experience form.

4. Involving the Placement:
4.1. It is good practice for the University Placement Co-ordinators, or Head of School Partnership, to consider the placement of students with disabilities early in the process as it may take time to plan and secure funding or equipment for adjustments.
4.2. In some cases the reasonable adjustments required by the student may affect the choice of placement. Some students may need to minimise travel time, for example. In other cases the reasonable adjustments may not be possible in certain placements, although all placements are expected to make reasonable adjustments to accommodate the needs of students. It is also worth noting at this point that a work placement could be acting illegally if they refuse to accept a student with a disability.
4.3. There should be a clearly defined Disclosure Policy. The University’s Placement Co-ordinator, or Head of School Partnership, and student will need to agree what information is to be released to the placement and who, at the placement, will have access to that information.
4.4. The placement contact will need to be involved early in the process to ensure adequate planning time for adjustments.
4.5. In some cases it may be necessary for the student and the University’s Placement Co-ordinator, or Head of School Partnership, to arrange a pre-placement visit to look at access issues and to allow the student to familiarise themselves with the placement.
4.6. Additional necessary adjustments may be identified at this stage.

5. Formalising Reasonable Adjustments:
5.1. At this point the student, University’s Placement Co-ordinator/Head of School Partnership, and Placement Contact/ITT Co-ordinator/Professional Tutor, should document the agreed adjustments.
5.1.1. On some courses (eg. Social Work, Youth and Community Studies etc) it may be possible to write the agreed adjustments into the Individual Placement Agreements that each student has.
5.1.2. On courses which do not have such agreements such as the teaching courses, the Recommendations for Reasonable Adjustments on Work Experience form will be used as the agreement.
5.2. It is important that at this stage everyone involved is clear about:
5.2.1. Exactly what adjustments are to be made.
5.2.2. How any adjustments are to be funded if costs are involved.
5.2.3. What action is to be taken if adjustments do not happen.
5.2.4. Who will be informed about the disability at the placement.
5.2.5. What systems are in place for maintaining communication between Practice Assessor, student, placement supervisor and Disability Advisor.

6. Reviewing Adjustments
6.1. Adjustments need to be open to continual review.
6.2. The student has a responsibility to alert the placement mentor and/or the University Link Tutor, or Placement Co-ordinator, at the earliest opportunity if adjustments are not working or not being carried out.
6.3. Informal reviews of the adjustments can and should take place regularly.
6.4. A more formal review of adjustments should take place during any formal review visits by the University staff. This review should note any further necessary adjustments and identify who will be responsible for actions.

7. Issues of competence.
7.1. Practice Assessors need to raise any queries where there is confusion over whether concerns over performance are due to lack of competence or the effects of the disability.
7.2. Disability and Academic staff need to provide advice where placement staff have difficulties with assessing students’ competence.
7.3. With questions on fitness to practice it is essential all reasonable adjustments have been made.
7.4. Where Disability Staff, Academic Staff and the Placement are unable to reach agreement on the competence of students, it may be necessary to seek further advice from an Occupational Health Advisor or the qualifications body (TDA, GSCC etc).

Examples of reasonable adjustments

There is no definitive list as to what might be considered a reasonable adjustment for a particular type of disability or condition. The adjustments needed by an individual will vary, depending on the nature of the work placement, the type and extent of disability, and the individual’s response to it.

Possible adjustments to work placements might include some of the following:

- Choosing placements with reduced travelling load on student (where student has issues around transport or tiredness due to medical condition).
- Pre-placement visits to familiarise student with physical environment, people etc. (useful for mobility difficulties, sensory impairments and some mental health conditions where there is increased levels of anxiety).
- Identifying placements with accessible environments.
- Identifying placements with minimal movement around building required.
Timetabled flexible days (coming in later, working shorter days, making up time during academic holidays to ensure full placement is achieved).

Timetabling classes to minimise movement between classes (teaching).

Break in working week for rest/study (with days added on to end of placement to make up time).

Access to regular breaks with agreement of practice supervisor and as appropriate to work load (useful for some medical and mental health conditions).

Time off for medical visits (planned as much as possible around needs of workplace).

Use of digital recorders to record meetings etc (Possibly used after meeting to create immediate record. Agreement of all parties needed and no names to be used. Recordings wiped after notes written up).

Additional time to write up notes (Social Work).

Use of student’s own lap-top with specialist software (would need forms and workplace software etc used to be loaded onto lap-top. Also need agreement that no data on clients taken home and other safeguards on confidentiality) (Social Work).

Loading of work-related software onto student’s lap-top for duration of placement.

Suitable chairs/desks/workstations etc (for some medical/health conditions).

Practice assessor/admin support to proofread letters going out (Social Work).

Support worker/interpreter/mobility assistant to attend with student.

This should by no means be seen as a prescriptive list of possible adjustments, but should be considered as examples of the range of adjustments that might be considered. Further examples and information can be found in the following:

Adjustments in Social Work placements in Best Practice Guide: disabled social work students and placements available from www.hull.ac.uk/peds

Adjustments in teaching in Able to Teach: Guidance for providers of initial teacher training on disability discrimination and fitness to teach, Teacher Training Agency, April 2004. available from the TDA.

Adjustments for all placements in Providing Work Placements for Disabled Students: a good practice guide for further and higher education institutions. DFES, available from info@dfes.gsi.gov.uk.

Advice on any aspect of reasonable adjustment is available from The Disability Rights Commission, www.drc.org.uk.

Stephen C. O’Melia,
Disability and Academic Skills Co-ordinator
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Guidance for students with disabilities on work experience

Before applying for a course:
Students with disabilities are advised to research courses and Universities prior to making an application. Students will wish to discuss the support mechanisms within the university. They may also wish to visit the University to investigate access. Skill (the National Bureau for Students with Disabilities, tel. 0800 328 5050, www.skill.org.uk) provide advice and information about the sorts of questions an applicant might wish to ask.

Where a course has a work placement component the student should ask questions about the department’s experience of supporting students with disabilities on placements. This might involve contacting the University’s Disability Advisor to discuss your needs.

Disability Advice at the University of Chichester
The University of Chichester has a Disability Service which provides advice and assistance with the needs of existing students and applicants with disabilities. The Service can be contacted on 01243 812076, or via e-mail: disabilityacademicskills@chi.ac.uk. Advice is confidential, and no information is released to any parts of the University without the student’s written permission.

Disclosure
Disclosure of disability is a matter of personal choice. However, if the University or work placement is not aware of your disability they will be unable to make reasonable adjustments. It is therefore your responsibility to contact the University’s Disability and Academic Skills Service to begin the process of disclosure. The Disability Advisor can discuss with you who will be informed of your disability and what reasonable adjustments might be made.

Process
- If you think you may need adjustments to your work placement you should alert your tutor and/or the Disability and Academic Skills Service as early as possible. The Disability Advisor will discuss your needs with you and make recommendations to the Placement Co-ordinator or, in the case of Education, the Head of School Partnership.
- The Placement Co-ordinator/Head of School Partnership should then consider the recommendations made. They may need to meet with you to discuss them further and agree what information will be released to the placement.
- In some cases the student may need to visit the placement with the Placement Co-ordinator/Head of School Partnership to view the premises and discuss reasonable adjustments.
- The adjustments may need to be reviewed and adjusted further. Reviews will take place informally on a regular basis with the placement mentor/ITT Co-ordinator/Professional Tutor, visiting tutor,
and Placement Co-ordinator/Head of School Partnership. A formal review of adjustments should take place during any Placement Review.

- N.B. It is the student’s responsibility to alert the placement and/or the University if there are difficulties with the placement or the adjustments. Students should alert the Placement Mentor, or the University Tutor or Placement Co-ordinator/Head of School Partnership where the adjustments are not working, or where any agreed adjustments are not taking place.

- The Placement Co-ordinator/Head of School Partnership may involve the University Disability Advisor where there are major issues with adjustments.

- For students on professional courses, such as teaching and Social Work, you are required to take responsibility for informing the appropriate authority if there are any personal difficulties that might affect your ability to do your job competently and safely.

**Disabled Student Allowance**
The Disabled Student Allowance (DSA) can fund a wide range of support for students with disabilities at university. The DSA can also cover extra expenditure and equipment needed to accommodate a student’s disability on work placement. The student should discuss possible needs with the assessor during the Assessment of Need. Further information on the DSA can be obtained from the University Disability and Academic Skills Service on 01243 812076, or online at [www.dfes.goc.uk/studentsupport/formsandguides](http://www.dfes.goc.uk/studentsupport/formsandguides) and also at [www.studentfinancedirect.co.uk](http://www.studentfinancedirect.co.uk).

**Further useful contacts**

University of Chichester, Disability and Academic Skills Team, tel: 01243 812076. e-mail disabilityacademicskills@chi.ac.uk.


Skill: the National Bureau for Students with Disabilities. Helpline: 0800 3285050. [www.skill.org.uk](http://www.skill.org.uk). E-mail info@skill.org.uk.

The British Dyslexia Association. Helpline: 0118 9668271. [www.bdaweb.co.uk](http://www.bdaweb.co.uk).

The Dyslexic Teachers Association for teachers who are dyslexic. Contact through: http://thedta.tripod.com/

Stephen C. O'Melia,
Disability and Academic Skills Co-ordinator
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