

# Disability Rights UK

## Adjustments for disabled students

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## Student Information Service

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# 1 Introduction

If you have a disability, health condition or specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia, you may need certain facilities, assistive technology or support services to enable you to make the most of your studies. This can include alternative exam or assessment arrangements. The Equality Act 2010 (building on the Disability Discrimination Act) calls the arrangements that your education provider makes to meet these needs 'reasonable adjustments'. For more information about the Equality Act please see section 7.

This factsheet provides suggestions on the adjustments you may need while studying. It is not a definitive or comprehensive list and the adjustments are not listed in any order of priority.

Suggestions are listed under various impairment headings as students and education providers often say this is a useful way of seeing examples. However it should be borne in mind that 'disability' only arises when students have to interact with inaccessible courses and education institutions. The focus should be on removing disabling barriers rather than thinking that the 'problem' is caused by the student's condition. Discriminatory attitudes are also one of the barriers to disabled people accessing education opportunities and colleges and universities should take steps to address this.

What is considered a 'reasonable adjustment' depends on individual circumstances.

**Disability Rights UK is not able to give a legal opinion on what is and is not a reasonable adjustment.**

## 2 General adjustments

- Access to relevant college documents in your preferred format. For example, equal opportunities policy, students' handbook, evacuation and safety procedures
- Disability equality and impairment specific awareness training for staff
- Staff and students who know about your impairment should have sufficient information and awareness about the adjustments you need
- Staff should act as role models for students in treating you with respect and implementing the equal opportunities policy
- Adequate financial support to cover any extra costs
- Access to all college and campus facilities
- Support and information before and during the admissions process
- Additional time to complete coursework and possibly the entire course
- Study skills support
- Specific accommodation arrangements
- Support using the learning resource centre or library, e.g. extended book loans, or help with locating and retrieving books and articles
- Access to the Disabled Students representative in the Students' Union

### **3 General access arrangements**

Adjustments to exams are called access arrangements. Listed below are some examples of the access arrangements you may need when you're taking internal or external exams or assessments. Most education providers and examining bodies will have made exam arrangements for individual students before. But they may not have come across all possible arrangements as support needs vary from person to person.

- You may need extra time or opportunities to take rest breaks during exams
- You may need exam papers in your preferred format
- If you use assistive technology on your course, you should be able to use it for your exams e.g. computer equipment, specialist software, a reader or a scribe. It's important that technical support on hand in case there are any problems with equipment
- You may need to use a separate room so that you're not disturbed by other candidates, and they are not disturbed by you
- You may need assistance from another person as a prompter, a scribe (amanuensis) or as a reader
- Your assistant should have time before the exam to get used to their role, the style and format of the test and any subject-related issues.

## **4 Impairment-specific adjustments**

### **Autism or Asperger syndrome**

- Immediate access to pastoral support, e.g. particular staff member you can go to with any concern
- Dedicated support worker
- Staff to have awareness training
- Specialist tuition support, e.g. language skills or structuring work
- Materials in literal language, including exam papers
- Special photocopying arrangements
- Digital recorder for recording lectures, notes, etc
- Extra time immediately after group sessions to check understanding
- Extra time to read, understand, and produce answers in exams
- Alternative ways of completing team work
- Support worker to act as a mediator for team work
- To have the same information conveyed in more than one way, e.g. verbally and in writing
- Time to get used to the campus or site
- Preparation for changes of routine, e.g. around deadlines and exam time
- Use of a separate room with an invigilator
- Exam paper written on plain paper in one colour
- Use of a prompter to keep you focused during exams
- Word processing facilities if motor control is impaired

### **Blind or visual impairments**

- Time to get used to the campus or site
- Support teacher or worker, or a sighted guide
- Personal reader to read course material and exam questions
- Scribes, amanuenses or notetakers to take notes in lectures and dictate answers in exams

- Large print, tape or Braille transcription services
- Handouts and booklists in advance for transcription
- Course material in Braille or in large print, audio format, or via email and exam papers in your preferred format
- Digital recorder for recording lectures, notes, etc
- Audio description of visual props used in lectures (or alternative methods of teaching)
- Arrangements for practical and field work
- Assistive technology, e.g. closed-circuit television, computers with speech synthesisers and magnification, Braille notetakers, text scanners, etc
- Use of assistive technology in exams
- Private study area in the library, longer book loans and special arrangements for photocopying
- Exercise area for your guide dog
- Good lighting, adequate signs and good colour contrasts on signs and buildings
- Taking exams in a separate room with an invigilator
- Extra time to read, understand, and produce answers in exams
- All exam invigilators to be aware of your impairment so they can give time warnings and tell you when to stop writing.

## **Deaf or hearing impairments**

- Human aid to communicate, e.g. sign language interpreter or lip-speaker and signing of exam questions
- Qualified support teacher or tutor, e.g. for language tuition and concept support
- Notetakers
- Remote captioning e.g. using Skype to access a palantypist
- Changing the language of exam papers if you're pre-lingually deaf
- Induction loop system in lecture halls and seminar rooms
- Radio or infrared microphone system

- Textphone (e.g. minicom) at home, in the Students' Union and/or somewhere easily accessible at the college
- For college staff to receive deaf awareness training
- All exam invigilators to be aware of your impairment so they can give time warnings and tell you when to stop writing
- For people you have a lot of contact with to take British Sign Language (BSL) classes
- Digital recorder and/or copytypist to record lectures
- Covering the cost of photocopying course materials
- Software to help with English, particularly grammar
- Flashing light or vibrating pad for the fire alarm (a flashing bell for hall of residence room)
- Local Authority support services for D/deaf or hearing impaired people
- Video materials to have subtitles
- Use of a separate room, with an invigilator
- Extra time to read, understand, and produce answers in exams.

## **Learning difficulties**

- To be treated with respect as an individual, without staff being directive, patronising or making assumptions about what you know and what you can do
- Course materials in plain English or with symbols
- Extra time to put together responses
- Independent advocacy services
- Support worker
- Clear explanation of specific tasks and any changes of routine.

## **Medical conditions**

You may not consider yourself to be disabled if you have a medical condition, but you may need additional support or special arrangements while studying. Medical conditions might include

epilepsy, diabetes, ME, eczema, sickle cell anaemia, cystic fibrosis or asthma.

- Alternative arrangements for work and deadlines if fatigue, stress and effects of medication are an issue
- Timetable planning to avoid fatigue and problem environments
- Digital recorder for recording lectures, notes, etc
- Arrangements to meet specific dietary needs, e.g. use of a fridge
- Rest room on campus or site
- Medical support and emergency arrangements
- Place of privacy to take medication and assistance if required
- Ongoing dialogue with staff if you have a hidden and/or fluctuating condition
- Contact from staff during any periods of time away from studies
- Flexibility in attendance and punctuality if treatments or therapies are tightly scheduled
- Designated parking space
- Awareness among staff of your condition
- Maintenance of confidentiality regarding your condition
- Specialist or adapted computer equipment, e.g. a screen filter or monitor without flicker if you have photosensitive epilepsy
- Provision of snacks during exams
- All exam invigilators to be aware of your impairment so they know what to do in a medical emergency
- Supervised rest breaks during exams.

## **Mental health condition**

- Timetable planning and help with your work programme to deal with stress. This may include limiting the number of exams in a day or week
- Extra support and help with planning before or during exam and assessment periods

- Exam officers to be aware that problems may arise during exam periods
- Support from welfare and counselling staff
- Named contact to go to for support when necessary
- Academic staff to be clear about what they expect from you
- Flexibility in attendance and punctuality if treatments or therapies are tightly scheduled or during times when difficulties are worse than usual
- Computer equipment to enable you to study at home
- Quiet room to rest in
- Contact from staff during any periods of time away from studies
- Maintenance of confidentiality about your mental health condition
- Sufficient information and awareness among staff who do know about your difficulties, to prevent major misconceptions
- Supervised rest breaks during exams
- Prompter to keep you focused in exams

## **Physical impairments**

- Physically accessible classrooms, exam rooms, study spaces, toilets, catering and leisure facilities and telephones
- Personal assistants or mobility helpers
- Adapted furniture for studying at home or college and use of these in exams
- Powered wheelchair and facilities for charging it
- Assistive technology such as a switch-operated or voice-activated computer.
- Use of assistive technology in exams
- Scanner
- Typing or transcription services
- Digital recorder for recording lectures, notes, etc
- Scribes, amanuenses or notetakers for lectures and exams
- Support for practical and field work
- Particular travel arrangements

- Parking space on campus
- Timetable planning to ensure accessibility and avoid long distances
- Additional time at mealtimes for medical needs
- Rest room on campus
- Well-ventilated classrooms if heat leads to discomfort
- Accessible accommodation, possibly on campus, if studying away from home
- Extra time for course work and exams, depending on your method of communication and working
- Use of a separate room, with an invigilator, if using equipment or taking frequent rests because of fatigue
- Supervised rest breaks during exams

## **Specific learning difficulties**

### **(for example, dyslexia, dyspraxia, dyscalculia)**

- Specialist tuition support, e.g. language skills or structuring work
- Support with identifying the most relevant books and chapters to read
- Assistive technology such as a computer with dictionary explanations software or a screen reader
- Use of assistive technology in exams
- Use of a separate exam room, with an invigilator
- Digital recorder
- Use of a scanner
- Handouts and booklists in advance of classes
- Handouts and exam papers in preferred format, e.g. on tape or on different coloured paper
- Special photocopying arrangements
- Scribes, amanuenses or notetakers, proof-reader, support worker, and use of amanuenses in exams
- Extra time to read, understand and prepare answers

- Use of literal language and keeping oral instructions simple and concise
- Extra time after tutorials to check understanding
- Exam papers printed on coloured paper or printed in ink other than blue or black
- Use of coloured filters or overlays
- Use of coloured pens (other than blue or black)
- Oral examinations instead of, or in addition to, the written examination.

### **Speech, language and communication impairments**

- Modified assessment arrangements for any oral exams and presentations or group work
- Timetables to include longer tutorial and seminar sessions
- Advice and guidance from a speech and language therapist
- Textphone at home, in the Students' Union and/or somewhere easily accessible at the college
- Communication aid or interpreter
- Communication board or computer with a speech synthesiser

## 5 Funding arrangements

Some of the support arrangements mentioned above have financial implications for both students and education providers. Disability Rights UK produces a range of factsheets and publications that look at the funding arrangements for disabled students.

- **Funding further education for disabled students**
- **Funding higher education for disabled students**
- **Postgraduate education for disabled students**
- **Funding from charitable trusts**

## 6 Receiving appropriate adjustments

### **Advance planning**

It's important to let your education provider know if you need any adjustments to make the course accessible to you. The earlier they know, the sooner they can make changes or provide support.

You can discuss particular adjustments you need and how to arrange them with the staff member responsible for supporting disabled students at the place where you study or plan to study. They might be called the Disability Adviser, Additional Learning Support Co-ordinator or something similar.

You can search for the contact details of disability advisers at colleges and universities throughout the UK at **[www.dsa-qag.org.uk/search.asp?f=10](http://www.dsa-qag.org.uk/search.asp?f=10)**.

To make sure you get the right support, you may be asked to have an assessment of your needs. There are organisations that specialise in assessments for education, assistive technology or

needs related to specific impairments. Refer to the Further Information section on page 16 for more information.

It's also important to let the education provider know about any access arrangements you may need for exams or assessments. If you're doing an exam validated by an external examining body, for example City and Guilds, the education provider will need to contact them to make the access arrangements. **If you don't give enough notice, you may be refused the arrangements you request.**

If you're using assistive technology or human support, you need to plan how to use this support most effectively, particularly when you use it under examination conditions. For example, before the exam you will need to negotiate with the scribe how you will work together (e.g. will you dictate every punctuation mark or leave this to the scribe?). If using assistive technology, make sure technical support has been arranged.

## **Previous adjustments**

The adjustments and access arrangements that have been made for you in the past may be a good guide to support you need on your current course. However, if you feel previous arrangements were unhelpful and better arrangements could be made, you should discuss other possible adjustments with your disability adviser.

## **Never assume that adjustments will be made**

Education providers have a duty under the Equality Act 2010 to anticipate the adjustments that disabled students may need. For example, they need to ensure that the student handbook is available in alternative formats and that there are accessible lecture theatres with induction loops.

To provide you with the best support, the education provider usually needs to be aware of your impairment and the adjustments you need to make the most of your studies. Even if they're aware of your disability or learning difficulty, never assume the education provider will automatically know the most appropriate adjustments or access arrangements for you.

You should check what adjustments and access arrangements will be made for you with the right members of staff (department tutor, personal tutor, exams office, disability adviser) as soon as possible so the adjustments can be made. If possible ask staff to provide a written list of the adjustments and access arrangements they are going to provide so you can check them.

## **Policies and guidelines**

The way in which each education provider puts in place reasonable adjustments and how each examining body makes access arrangements will be written down in their own policies and guidelines

**Education providers may have a number of relevant policies, for example;**

- Public Sector Equality Duty
- Disability statement
- Student Charter
- Equal opportunities policy
- Examination arrangements policy

It may be useful to ask the education provider about their policies before you arrange the adjustments that you require. You may need to follow certain procedures or provide evidence of your impairment, for example an educational psychologist's report. You should ask the appropriate member of staff, for example the

disability adviser or exams officer, for a copy of these documents in your preferred format.

### **Examining bodies have access arrangement guidelines**

City and Guilds who run vocational qualifications (NVQ, SVQ and HLQs) publish **Access to assessment and qualifications** which is available at [www.cityandguilds.com](http://www.cityandguilds.com) or tel: 020 7294 2850.

The Joint Council for Qualifications produces detailed regulations and guidance in a booklet called **Access Arrangements, Reasonable Adjustments and Special Consideration**. This is available at [www.jcq.org.uk](http://www.jcq.org.uk).

The Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), who set most Scottish national, higher and vocational qualifications, produces **Guidance on Assessment Arrangements for Candidates with Disabilities and/or Additional Support Needs**. This is available online at [www.sqa.org.uk](http://www.sqa.org.uk) or tel: 0845 279 1000.

### **If adjustments are not provided**

If you have any problems receiving the appropriate adjustments or access arrangements, contact your disability adviser who should be able to give you information on how to resolve the issue. If this is unsuccessful you should follow the internal complaints procedure.

If your issue is not resolved by the internal complaints procedure you should contact Disability Rights UK's Student Information Service Helpline (see contact details on the front page) for information on the appropriate organisation to take your complaint to. Alternatively, read Disability Rights UK's factsheet **Making a Complaint**.

## **7 Equality Act 2010**

Under the Equality Act 2010, education and training providers and other related services have a duty to make reasonable adjustments for disabled people so they are not placed at a substantial disadvantage compared to non-disabled students

### **Internal exams**

The Equality Act covers exams set by education providers. This means they will be expected to make 'reasonable adjustments' to exams in order to make them more accessible to students with impairments or learning difficulties. This could include, for example, provision of a scribe or allowing extra time.

### **External exams**

Sometimes exams, such as A levels, are set by external examining bodies. Examining bodies are covered by the Equality Act and are therefore required to make reasonable adjustments to examinations in order to make them accessible to disabled students. Adjustments might include providing exam papers in alternative formats or allowing the use of assistive technology. However the regulator (for example Ofqual) might determine that part of the qualification should not be subject to an adjustment. This is designed to protect the 'integrity of the qualification.' In doing this, the regulator must consult with organisations representing disabled people and publish their reasoning.

### **Professional exams**

There are also examining bodies that set examinations directly relating to a particular profession, such as law and medicine. These examining bodies should also make reasonable adjustments for disabled students and they are covered by the Equality Act.

## 8 Further Information

### Disability Rights UK information

#### Information factsheets

Disability Rights UK's factsheets are available from the website [www.disabilityrightsuk.org](http://www.disabilityrightsuk.org).

- Funding higher education for disabled students
- Applying for Disabled Students' Allowances
- Funding further education for disabled students
- Understanding the Equality Act: information for disabled students
- Funding from charitable trusts

#### Into Higher Education

Detailed information on higher education and the process of choosing and applying is available in the Disability Rights UK publication **Into Higher Education 2013**. This full-colour guide includes six inspiring profiles of disabled students writing about their experiences. It is highly recommended to any disabled person considering applying to courses starting from September 2013, especially bearing in mind tuition fee increases and other funding changes. **Into Higher Education 2013** is available free to disabled students, their parents and key advisers.

#### DSA-QAG

[www.dsa-qag.org.uk](http://www.dsa-qag.org.uk)

Independent body set up to provide a quality assurance service to students applying for Disabled Students' Allowances (DSAs).

#### Direct.gov.uk information for disabled people

[www.direct.gov.uk/en/DisabledPeople](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/DisabledPeople)

This website has a wide range of information on financial and practical support available to disabled people while they are in education and in their day to day lives.

### **National Network of Assessment Centres (NNAC)**

[www.nnac.org](http://www.nnac.org)

A UK-wide network of specialist services that work together to facilitate access to education, training, employment and personal development for disabled people. Assessment Centre services include quality assessment and support in the use of assistive technology and/or specialised learning strategies. Students in higher education in the UK are often referred to an Assessment Centre for a 'needs assessment' funded out of their Disabled Students' Allowances (DSAs).

### **AbilityNet**

[www.abilitynet.org.uk](http://www.abilitynet.org.uk)

Advises on assistive technology for disabled people.

### **Sharing ideas**

The college staff member responsible for services to disabled students can find out about possible exam arrangements used by other colleges. 'Dis-forum', an email forum for professionals, is a good way to find out about possible arrangements for individuals with specific needs. You can join the forum for free by sending an email to [dis-forum@jiscmail.ac.uk](mailto:dis-forum@jiscmail.ac.uk), leave the 'subject' box blank and type the message: 'join dis-forum[first name][last name]'.