

Glossary

An overview of key disability terms

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Accessibility

The term accessibility relates to whether all people are able to use, participate in or benefit from a particular resource, service or environment regardless of any disabilities or other needs. This would include, for example, buildings and premises, products and services and sources of information such as websites and printed material. Direct access means that no adjustments or alternative means of access need to be provided

and every person is able to gain access in the same way. Indirect access is where auxiliary aids, additional services or alternative formats need to be used in order to achieve accessibility. Direct access should be facilitated wherever possible.

Accessible Communication and Alternative Formats

Accessible communication is an umbrella term to describe communication that is clear, direct, easy to understand and that can be made available in multiple formats so that all users have equal access. It takes into consideration the various barriers to accessing information, and removes these or provides alternative formats for the communication to take place. Communication happens in a variety of ways, including in person, through printed materials, and via online spaces such as websites and social media.

Accessible communication ensures everyone has the same access and opportunity to read publications, use websites, and attend events. To do this well, you need to be aware of the diverse range of needs users have and how to plan your communications with accessibility in mind.

An **accessible format** is one which can be read by 'assistive' or 'enabling' technologies (screen reader programs, screen magnification programs and voice input programs). It is searchable, selectable and screen readable, and provides flexibility over how the text is read (e.g. the formatting can be changed by the user to enable easier reading, or the text can be converted into electronic Braille, or text-to-speech software used). Word documents, accessible pdfs and html files can have this functionality. To learn how to get the most out of [accessibility in Word and to create accessible pdfs, read the available guidance](#).

An **alternative format** is where the original format used for communication is inaccessible to a user, so a different format is created instead which they can access. Examples of alternative formats are:

- large print (16 pt+);
- Braille;
- a document printed on coloured paper;
- a paper copy of an electronic resource or vice versa;
- an electronic resource in an alternative format eg: Word document instead of a PDF;
- audio recording, e.g. DAISY format;
- tactile graphics.

Alternative formats may be needed by:

- people with visual impairments;
- those with dyslexia, dyspraxia or other neurodiverse conditions;
- those who cannot hold publications or turn pages because of a physical disability;
- people who have difficulties watching or hearing video presentations.

Those who find it difficult or impossible to read conventionally printed materials are described as having a **print disability**. By following [accessibility guidelines](#) in the creation of electronic and physical documents, the need for alternative formats is reduced and direct access to materials enabled (e.g. if a handout for a lecture is provided in advance in electronic format a visually impaired student can access it themselves by using text-to-speech software).

Anticipatory Adjustments

The duty to make reasonable adjustments is anticipatory. It requires the consideration of, and action in relation to, barriers that may impede disabled people before any particular individual requires access to that benefit, facility or service. This means that no part of the University should wait until it is asked to consider what adjustments should be made, but should be ready where feasible with solutions to overcome potential barriers for disabled students.

This is a more strategic approach in the long-term because it will reduce the need to make individual adjustments which can be required at short notice or at significant cost. For instance, if a college which has steps up to its entrance admits a student with mobility difficulties, it will need to provide a step-free alternative route. Where this does not already exist, the college may need to invest additional human and financial resources into the issue – seeking planning permission, carrying out work at short notice – in order to ensure there is a step-free entrance in time for the new academic year. The additional resource implications of this work is avoided when a college anticipates that disabled people will need a step-free entrance and incorporate this requirement into a broader programme of work.

This principle applies to all areas of the University's services and infrastructure for students, including all teaching and learning activities. Most importantly, this approach is likely to reduce the extent to which disabled students experience barriers to teaching and learning during their time at the University, thereby promoting equality and a sense of belonging. The disability lead in each unit has a responsibility to ensure

that accessibility, inclusivity and the need to make anticipatory adjustments is properly incorporated into the planning cycle.

See the [Supporting the Student Journey](#) section for more information about inclusive teaching practice and anticipatory adjustments. More information in carrying out anticipatory adjustments can be found in the [Equality Challenge Unit's Guidance on managing reasonable adjustments in higher education](#), and Chapter 7 of the [Equality Act 2010 Technical Guidance on Further and Higher Education](#). [Disability Leads](#) in Departments and Colleges, along with the leadership team, have a key role in identifying and implementing anticipatory adjustments.

Assistive Technology

Assistive technology refers to any piece of equipment or software that is used to increase, maintain, or improve functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities. We also often use the terminology alternative and adaptive technology.

Alternative technology is equipment or software which performs the same function as the standard option. It will not have been explicitly designed or modified with accessibility for disabled users in mind, but through its design it can better accommodate an individual need. An example would be a compact keyboard, or mind-mapping software.

Adaptive technology is equipment or software that has been designed, created or modified, specifically to meet the needs of an individual with a disability. An example would be a keyguard for a keyboard, a joystick mouse, or a voice output communication aid (VOCA).

Many products which were initially designed to aid the lives of disabled people have gone on to be used primarily by the non-disabled (voice recognition software is an example of this).

[Read more about Assistive technology.](#)

Competence Standards

Competence standards are the 'academic, medical or other standards applied for the purpose of determining whether or not a person has a particular level of competence or ability' in their course. There is no obligation to make adjustments to competence standards.

A competence standard must not itself be unlawfully discriminatory, therefore it must not be applied only to a disabled student and must be:

- Genuinely relevant to the course;
- Applied equally to all students, whether with or without a disability; and
- A proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim

The proportionate means requires that:

- There is a pressing need that supports the standard's purpose;
- The application of the standard will achieve that aim; and
- There is no other way of achieving the aim that is less detrimental to disabled people

Not all competences or assessment criteria which students might be expected to fulfil on a particular course can necessarily be considered competence standards. Competence standards cannot be used to justify direct discrimination against a disabled person. For example, a blanket refusal to allow a student to participate in any assessed experimental work merely because they are physically disabled would clearly be direct discrimination.

Competence standards include:

- Admissions criteria – such as having studied a modern foreign language – where these are valid requirements for the course;
- In the sciences, students may be required to undertake laboratory practicals or complete manual clinical tasks in order to achieve the learning outcomes for an award;
- A time limit may be imposed on the assessment of a fundamental skill where this is genuinely relevant and necessary, e.g. a clinical measurement or task. In some examinations, for example those assessing knowledge of and application of quantitative techniques, the format of the assessment may be restricted by the nature of the test. A timed, invigilated assessment may be most appropriate when candidates are being tested on their crystallised knowledge and ability to select and apply relevant techniques and skills;
- Where candidates are expected to demonstrate competence in a variety of modes of assessment, it would be reasonable to state that, for example, submission of a research project or extended piece of writing formed one of the competence standards for the course.

An example of reasonable adjustments to the assessment of a competence standard are adjustments to the conditions under which timed examinations are taken, including:

- the use of word processing and other assistive technology;
- ergonomic furniture;

- an adapted laboratory environment, permitted the use of assistive technology, or allowed extra time to complete non-time critical elements of the task.

When a candidate's disability-related needs cannot be met by such adjustments, it is necessary to consider more significant adjustments that may require dispensation from the regulations. Infrequently, these might include a course supervisory body devising an alternative assessment format which will test the same competence standards as the original assessment, e.g. a take-home paper. Students undertaking laboratory work or extended research projects may be given extra time and additional access to resources (e.g. over the vacation) to complete their work to the required level.

Disability

A disability is defined as a condition which has a long-term (has lasted for 12 months or is likely to do so), substantial (not minor or trivial) and adversely impacts on an individual's capacity to undertake normal day-to-day activities. Disability covers a wide variety of conditions, encompassing long-term illness (often from the point of diagnosis) as well as physical or psychological problems, e.g.:

- Vision or hearing impairments.
- Physical impairments such as paraplegia, cerebral palsy, repetitive strain injury (RSI) and arthritis.
- Mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety and eating disorders.
- Specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia, dyspraxia and Attention Deficit (Hyperactivity) Disorder. These conditions do not need to be shown to have a substantial adverse effect on normal day-to-day activities as it is accepted that they will in all cases significantly affect students in higher education.
- Long-term health conditions such as HIV, diabetes, epilepsy, inflammatory bowel disease/Crohn's disease, Chronic Fatigue Syndrome/ME, multiple sclerosis and cancer. A person with such a condition continues to be regarded as disabled despite fluctuations in the severity of their condition or, in the case of cancer, after recovery.

Case law has indicated that undertaking examinations is considered to be a day-to-day rather than specialised activity.

Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA)

DSA is a Student Finance grant that pays for the assistive technology and specialist tutor support that a student may need as a direct result of being disabled. To be eligible for Disabled Students' Allowance, the student must:

- meet the definition of disability under the Equality Act (2010);
- be eligible for funding from Student Finance England or the equivalent funding body;
- be on a course with at least 25% 'intensity' (25% of a full-time course).

The student's needs are then assessed in order to determine the level of support available through DSA. For more information see [Disabled Students' Allowance](#).

Equality Act 2010

The Equality Act protects identified groups from discrimination, harassment or victimisation. Disability is one of the protected characteristics identified in the Act.

In relation to disability, the Equality Act means that the University must:

- take account of disabled people's needs;
- not discriminate against disabled people by treating them less favourably than other people;
- make reasonable adjustments, both anticipatory and individual; and
- promote equality of opportunity between disabled people and others.

It is permissible to treat disabled people 'more favourably' than others, where to do so would not breach a competence standard.

Full information about the Equality Act can be found on [Government webpages](#).

Guidance on the application of the Equality Act for Further and Higher Education providers is available on the [Equality and Human Rights Commission website](#).

Inclusive teaching practice

Inclusive teaching has the aim of providing equal access to learning for all students from the outset, and encouraging a sense of belonging for all. Inclusive approaches value individual differences, where different learning

needs are anticipated. All students have their own preferences for learning, at different paces and using different methods, so everyone can potentially benefit from the adoption of inclusive teaching practices, which give students greater choice and control over their learning. Many of the teaching approaches that we think of as inclusive are simply

good teaching practice. In the context of disability provision, inclusive teaching reduces the need for individual adjustments because many of the barriers that disabled students may face have been anticipated and removed. It recognises that many of the adjustments made for disabled students could benefit many other students if made available to all.

The term 'inclusive teaching' is broad-ranging and encompasses various ideas and strategies. Examples of inclusive teaching include:

- making materials available to students in advance of teaching sessions so they have time to read and prepare;
- encouraging group work so students can learn from each other and encounter different perspectives and approaches;
- creating a range of opportunities for students to contribute and demonstrate their learning;
- designing reading lists that reflect a diversity of authors and contributors to the field so that students can learn from a variety of critical approaches;
- providing prioritised reading lists to help students manage their time and focus their reading;
- setting aside time to clarify aims and expectations so students know what they should expect to learn and work towards;
- taking into account possible differences in students' prior knowledge when designing your teaching and consider different ways to approach material based on this diversity.
- designing teaching content and activities to align with the other lectures, classes or tutorials students are attending so they can build on knowledge and skills as they progress;
- using tutorials to support students to develop their individual interests and strengths whilst also providing specific interventions to address individual weaknesses.

Inclusive Education

An inclusive approach to education values individual differences, and recognises the benefits that diverse students and staff bring to the University of Oxford. Inclusive education aims to improve the educational experience of all students, and so enables achievement at equal rates. An inclusive approach goes beyond supporting specific groups through a

discrete set of policies and interventions. Instead, teaching, learning and assessment take into account students' varied learning needs from the outset.

Universal Design for Learning

Universal design for learning (UDL) is an educational principle in which, rather than removing the barriers students face on an ad hoc, one-to-one basis, barriers are recognised and removed in advance in the design and planning of teaching. This reduces the need for individual students to request adjustments and means that students do not encounter the barrier in the first place.

Neurodiversity

Neurodiversity means that different people think differently - not just because of differences in culture or life experience, but because their brains function differently. This includes variation in the brain regarding sociability, learning, attention, mood and other mental functions. The term first emerged as a challenge to prevailing views that certain neurodevelopmental conditions are inherently pathological (a medical condition that needs to be treated or cured) and instead adopts the social model of disability, in which societal barriers are the main contributing factor that disables neurodiverse people. In this view, Neurological differences are to be recognized and respected as any other human variation. These differences can include those labelled with Dyspraxia, Dyslexia, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Dyscalculia, Autistic Spectrum Condition, Tourette Syndrome.

Neurodiversity advocates promote support systems (such as inclusion-focused services, accommodations, communication and assistive technologies, occupational training, and independent living support) that allow those who are neuro-divergent to live their lives as they are, rather than being made to feel that they need to conform to uncritically accepted ideas of normality, or to a clinical ideal.

Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan (PEEP)

A Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan (PEEP) is used to document how people will be evacuated when they have difficulty responding to a fire alarm or escaping from a building unaided, in the event of an emergency.

Each PEEP should be unique to the individual, considering what issues they face, how they can be helped to get to a place of safety (what procedures, equipment or human support are needed) and how to communicate the plan to other relevant parties. Not all risk can be completely mitigated, but it can be managed by identifying areas where evacuation might be problematic, and providing the student with information, instructions and helpful points of contact; [please see the PEEP guidance](#). The individuals who need to take action to enable a person's evacuation from the building must be aware of their role and have relevant training (e.g. in the use of evacuation stair chairs).

Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED)

The Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED), enacted under the Equality Act 2010 requires public organisations to consider the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between different people across nine 'protected' characteristics:

- age,
- disability,
- gender reassignment,
- pregnancy and maternity,
- race,
- religion or belief,
- sex,
- sexual orientation.

Marriage and civil partnership are also protected characteristics under the Equality Act but it is not covered by the public sector equality duty. When any decisions are made by public organisations about how they provide their services and implement policies, they must consider how these decisions will impact on this duty. [More detailed information about PSED is available from the Equality and Human Right Commission.](#)

Reasonable Adjustments

Reasonable adjustments are central to the concept of disability equality. Where a disabled student suffers, or would suffer, a substantial disadvantage, the University is under a duty to make reasonable adjustments to overcome that disadvantage. The intention is that the adjustments should level the playing field for the disabled student. It is important that adjustments meet the needs of the individual disabled student rather than providing a generic response to a class or type of

disability. Once implemented, adjustments do not provide automatic precedents for other students, but may be taken into account when considering what would be appropriate in a different case. The duty is anticipatory which means that the University should not wait until it is asked to consider what adjustments might be made, but should be ready where feasible with solutions to overcome disadvantages. The failure to make reasonable adjustments cannot be legally justified and if an adjustment is deemed to be reasonable then it must be made.

All parts of the University share the duty to take positive steps to ensure that disabled students can fully participate in education and enjoy the benefits, facilities and services Equality Act requires that, so far as is reasonably practicable, disabled students' access to education is approximately the same as that enjoyed by the rest of the student body.

Social model of disability (note on Medical model/Deficit Perspective)

The social model of disability is based on a distinction between the terms *impairment* and *disability*. In this model, the word *impairment* is used to refer to the attributes that affect a person, such as the inability to walk independently. The word *disability* is used to refer to the restrictions caused by society when it does not give equivalent attention and accommodation to the needs of individuals with impairments as for those without impairments. For those with impairments, they are disabled only in those situations where environmental or social barriers exclude or disadvantage them because of their impairment.

The medical model focusses on the disability diagnosis and supposes that this disability may reduce the individual's quality of life and the aim is, with medical intervention, to diminish or correct the disability.

In the context of education, an inclusive approach is based on a social model of difference and disadvantage. This model recognises that the educational environment itself can pose particular barriers to students, rather than seeing the barrier as the problem of the individual student. The aim of inclusive teaching is to address and reduce these barriers first, rather than intervening with particular student groups or individuals. Interventions aimed at certain groups or individuals can lead to students feeling that they are being targeted for additional support because of their identity and the belief that they are lacking in particular skills or abilities. This is a deficit model of difference.

For students just arriving at Oxford, interventions which reflect a deficit perspective could lead students to feel they are behind before they have

even started, and they may question whether they belong. Instead, inclusive teaching recognizes the complexity of student identity and experience, and that any 'extra' tools or resources (e.g. lecture capture, teaching materials in advance, accessible handouts) that are offered to particular students and which could benefit all students, are made available to all and embedded into normal day-to-day teaching.

Student Support Plan

The Student Support Plan (SSP) is a short, summary document which identifies recommended reasonable adjustments to meet Equality Act duties. It is prepared by a member of the Disability Advisory Service (DAS) team in collaboration with the student, involving staff in colleges and departments if needed.

The SSP:

- confirms student registration with DAS, receipt of suitable evidence of the disability and provision of student consent to share information;
- lists recommendations for study support relating to teaching and learning, including examinations and provides information, where possible, about any Disabled Students Allowance application
- directs staff to sources of general advice about the nature of a particular disability and describes, if necessary, any features or particular experiences individual to the student which might help understanding of the disability.

Read more about the SSP:

[The Student Support Plan: What is the student support plan and how is it prepared?](#)

[Implementing a Student Support Plan](#)