

Study abroad, field trips and placements

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Study Abroad

Study abroad is an exciting and positive experience, and there is evidence to show that students who have an international study experience achieve better academic and employment outcomes, through fostering their personal development and understanding of the wider world. Study abroad also represents a very significant undertaking that requires detailed pre-planning and careful thought by all students about what opportunity will be most suitable for them.

Living and studying abroad for a period of time represents a significant transition for students. Disabled students face the same challenges, and also need to plan ahead to ensure that their needs and requirements relating to their disability will be met by their hosts. Staff can support students by providing information about how to plan for study abroad, and also (if required) to liaise with the host institution to ensure that reasonable adjustments are put in place.

Support required for study abroad planning and reasonable adjustments

Undergraduate students considering study abroad opportunities should consult the Disability Coordinator in their college at an early stage, whose role it is, alongside their personal tutor, to provide support in planning study abroad.

The Disability Advisory Service can provide advice and support as a student plans their study abroad, especially in terms of recommending the study support and reasonable adjustments that will be needed, and provide information on this for the prospective host.

Those taking up an opportunity to study or work abroad should contact their prospective hosts/employers well ahead of an application deadline to discuss what adjustments and support may be needed, and whether these can be provided.

ERASMUS+

For those planning for a mandatory year abroad as part of their degree, planning should begin early in the academic year before (so early in year 2 for those who will be studying abroad in year 3). Those travelling as part of the ERASMUS+ scheme should notify their departmental Erasmus Coordinator about the need for reasonable adjustments as soon as possible, so there is time for liaison with the partner institution department to ensure needs will be met.

In exceptional cases a student may require dispensation from a mandatory overseas placement on disability grounds, but all efforts will be made to make a study abroad opportunity possible. In those circumstances, students may pursue alternative arrangements, such as study or a placement in a context where the relevant language is used in the UK.

Those undertaking an ERASMUS+ opportunity may be able to apply for additional funding to support the extra costs of living abroad associated with the disability, e.g. extra travel costs. They should contact the [University of Oxford ERASMUS Coordinator](#) for further details. If applying for other funding, students should check at an early stage what costs relating to their disability will be eligible for funding.

Choosing a study/work abroad opportunity

In deciding on a study or work abroad opportunity, students should be guided to consider:

- What is the impact of your condition on your life and studies? Will the impact be different in different contexts?
- What are environmental or life triggers which could exacerbate your symptoms?
- What is important for you to have in terms of support arrangements? Think about your existing coping strategies/the existing support you have on offer to you and ask whether these could be agreed at the potential hosting institution.

Practical factors to consider about different options

Some issues that the student might particularly want to consider when choosing an opportunity:

- Would a city placement be better than a rural one?

- Is the placement a university or a completely different organisation/setting (work placement; residential setting; language course,). Will this impact on what support (academic, pastoral) is available? Students should be aware that the Oxford University Counselling Service can provide [appointments via Skype](#).
- What are the accommodation options - will there be access to a supportive community, and is a private/ensuite room a necessity? Will there be a commute each day?
- What are the transport links like, and how straightforward would it be to travel home or to go to a hospital quickly if you needed to?
- In-country disability support provision – what are your rights to disability support in the country you are considering?
- Healthcare – consider the health care system and the costs involved. Does the UK have a reciprocal health agreement with the country to be visited? All students studying abroad need to take out travel insurance and the University has [travel insurance arrangement](#) that it recommends, but students with existing health conditions may need to have additional insurance in place.

Students should prepare themselves for cultural differences – depending on where they go, they may encounter cultural differences around diversity issues, including disability, in terms of the level of understanding, awareness, attitudes, acceptance and the provision of support. It is worth remembering that students have already experienced a significant life transition in coming to University and integrating into student life at Oxford. Students should be guided to think about what worked well about managing this transition and what they would do differently next time.

Communication whilst abroad

- Students should maintain regular contact with their personal tutor whilst abroad.
- Students should be aware that they need to plan ahead for their return and maintain contact with those who can help put in place arrangements (see below): their Disability Coordinator, Disability Advisor, the relevant accommodation office and others.
- The Oxford University Counselling Service can provide [appointments via Skype](#).

Returning to Oxford

Planning will need to begin whilst students are still abroad:

- Returning students may need to re-apply for Disabled Students' Allowance depending on the length of their trip. The application should be made at least 14 weeks prior to the start of term.
- Students should make accommodation arrangements well ahead of returning, especially if there are disability-specific requirements.
- It also may be necessary to contact your Disability Coordinator in college and the relevant department/faculty well ahead of your return to ensure that plans are in place to reinstate study support and reasonable adjustments.

Useful information for students planning their study/work abroad

- The [Abroad With Disabilities](#) website has lots of useful resources for students.
- [Exchangeability.eu](#) is an EU initiative designed to encourage international mobility for disabled students.
- [MappED!](#) provides students with information on accessibility of not only university facilities, but also many other related places and services across Europe.
- The Faculty of Medieval and Modern Languages has [a Weblearn page to support planning for the mandatory year abroad](#) for their students, but which may have useful advice on planning and welfare support for students from other departments.
- The Counselling Service has produced a [podcast for international students](#) which is also a useful resource for outgoing students.
- There is [information on the additional funding for Erasmus students](#) that may be available to support the disability related costs of studying abroad.
- [Mobility International USA](#) works on advancing disability rights and leadership globally. Whilst the website is for US students, it has useful resources for disabled students who are considering study abroad and those supporting them.

Useful Information for staff

[Widening participation in outward student mobility](#) – This toolkit may be useful for disability leads in planning how to ensure students who are underrepresented in study abroad schemes can be supported to take up these opportunities.

The Faculty of Medieval and Modern Languages has a [Weblearn page to support planning for the year abroad](#), which may have useful information for staff who are beginning to put in place support for study abroad in other departments.

Field trips and fieldwork

Staff involved in arranging field trips and fieldwork should anticipate the needs of disabled students to ensure that these activities are accessible, or, if there are no reasonable adjustments that can make the activity feasible, that an appropriate alternative activity is offered. Accessibility extends not only to the practical tasks undertaken, but to wider aspects such as accommodation and transportation during the activity. The University needs to satisfy itself that appropriate provision can be made to support disabled students working away from the University.

Field trips

Field trips are often an important part of many programmes of study, and it is important that organisers think carefully about how all students can be given an equal opportunity to get the most out of these activities.

Examples of inclusive measures to ensure equal access to field trips

- When planning, think about the likely needs of those with disabilities or medical conditions in the cohort, so that possible barriers to participation can be identified and removed at the planning stage.
- Consider a choice of field trip destinations and activities if possible, so students can opt for the trip/activity that is most suitable.
- Prepare an information checklist outlining what the student needs to do to prepare for the trip and the items they need to bring. Clear information should be given about key locations and the timetable for the trip, especially who they should go to for support or if problems arise on the trip.
- Field trips can be demanding and it may be useful to identify key pre-reading, as well as providing a glossary and clear objectives

beforehand, to give students the opportunity to prepare and to develop an understanding of academic context for the trip.

- A briefing session on arrival, and a de-brief at the end of the trip will be useful to ensure that relevant information has been understood (and also enabling written information provided prior to the trip to be reinforced verbally).

Reasonable adjustments

In addition, adjustments should be put in place for individual students depending on their needs. It is important that the field trip organiser works with the student and the relevant disability coordinator well ahead of the trip to ensure that appropriate adjustments will be put in place. Some examples are adjustments are:

- Extra time may be needed to complete notebooks and/or other tasks—consider ensuring that ‘free-time’ or flexibility is built into the timetable for the trip so that students can take extra time without missing out on other activities.
- Room-sharing may be difficult because of a student’s specific needs and separate and/or ensuite accommodation may be needed.
- Personal organisers, electronic notebooks or talking calculators may be helpful.
- Specialist equipment may be needed depending on the activity and the student’s individual needs. It is important that the field trip organiser works with the student and the relevant disability coordinator well ahead of the trip to ensure that appropriate equipment will be available and/or adapted activities are put in place.
- Some students may be accompanied by a Learning Support Assistant—prior planning is important to ensure the availability of staff. Funding may be available as part of the Disabled Students’ Allowance (DSA), depending on the student’s needs, e.g. to pay for a note taker or for additional transport costs.

Fieldwork

The University has [a policy on safety in fieldwork](#).

In summary, organisers of fieldwork:

- Must give careful consideration to the maintenance of the health of participants and, where necessary, the advice of the University Occupational Health Service should be sought.
- Participants should be asked to declare whether they knowingly suffer from any disability or any medical condition (e.g. asthma or lung disease, diabetes, epilepsy, heart disease, mental health conditions, vertigo, or the taking of certain drugs) that could compromise their health and safety, or that of others.
- When on field trips, it may be useful for individuals with pre-existing conditions to carry with them written details of their condition, treatment, and medical contacts.
- A risk assessment should be carried out where a potential issue is identified. Consider the activities to be undertaken, the work environment, the nature of the condition (e.g. its severity, degree of control and functional impact), and the remoteness of the fieldwork activity (including access to medical assistance).
- Ideally, an individual's treating practitioner is best placed to provide guidance on their medical condition or disability, but they may not be fully aware of the demands of the fieldwork.

Every effort should be made to enable those with specified medical conditions or disabilities to participate fully in fieldwork, through following inclusive work practices and via individual reasonable adjustments. However, it may sometimes be necessary (after discussion with the Disability Advisory Service, and college tutors) to make exclusions or to provide an alternative activity.

Placements

Staff involved in arranging placements that take place away from the University should anticipate the needs of disabled students to ensure that the placement is accessible, and that reasonable adjustments are provided.

Accessibility extends not only to the practical tasks undertaken but to wider aspects such as accommodation and transportation during the placement. The University needs to satisfy itself that appropriate provision can be made to support disabled students working away from the University on placements.

There is [guidance on competence standards and making adjustments for disabled students on teaching placements](#) on the Advance HE website. If

a PGCE student is likely to require non-medical help (human support) whilst on placement, it is particularly important this is considered well in advance as support workers would need DBS checks in place, which can take a number of weeks.

There is a wealth of guidance and resources available on the [General Medical Council's Welcomed and Valued webpages](#), on supporting disabled learners in medical training. This is also available as [a downloadable pdf](#). In addition the GMC has also produced [guidance on supporting medical students with a mental health condition](#).

Student perspectives are invaluable for those planning ahead to provide anticipatory adjustments for students. The GMC has also put together [disabled student stories](#) relating to their experiences of placements.