

# **Roles and responsibilities of academic staff in relation to disabled students**

## **Introduction**

The University has a duty (see [Public Sector Equality Duty - PSED](#) in the Glossary section) to advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic, including those with a disability, and people who do not. Academic staff play an important role in ensuring that the University fulfils this duty. In their teaching, academic staff facilitate all students' intellectual formation and study paths through the individual attention possible through the tutorial system, and impart key subject knowledge and access to the latest research through lectures ('Policy and Guidance on Undergraduate Teaching', p.5.). Academic staff must deliver teaching in a way that promotes equal access to teaching and learning for all students, and an equal opportunity to meet their academic potential, irrespective of a disability or other protected characteristic.

## **The Equality Act**

Universities are also under a legal obligation under the Equality Act (2010) to make reasonable adjustments for disabled students to ensure that they are not put at a substantial disadvantage in comparison with students who are not disabled. If reasonable adjustments are not put in place, this is unlawful discrimination.

## **Anticipatory adjustments**

The University has an equality duty to not just respond to student needs, but to anticipate them where possible. We must think ahead about the common barriers to study disabled people with a range of impairments might experience, and remove them, without waiting for a specific student to need an adjustment. Approximately 10-15% of all students require some form of adjustment to teaching due to a disability. Examples of anticipatory adjustments might include: ensuring that all teaching materials from a lecture series are available in advance of each session in electronic format; making explicit the objectives for each session at the beginning; communicating key points using multiple methods/formats; structuring the timetable and selecting venues to take account of students

who have difficulty moving between sites due to a physical impairment or who tire easily due to a chronic health condition.

The University has committed to providing 'exemplary inclusive practice' in its [Common Framework for Supporting Disabled Students](#). 'This extends to the design and delivery of the curriculum, and departments are expected to bear this in mind in reviewing the teaching and assessment methods, as well as the physical space, via which their courses are delivered.' [Policy and guidance on undergraduate learning and teaching, p.14.]

## Responsibilities of academic staff

Specifically with respect to provision for disabled students, it is the responsibility of academic staff to:

1. Implement reasonable adjustments to teaching in accordance with a Student Support Plan (SSP). Where an SSP is shared with academic staff, this should be read and careful consideration given to how the student's needs can be catered for within lectures, classes and/or tutorials.
2. Where adjustments recommended are not proving effective or cannot be implemented, work with the student and disability coordinator to identify and deliver any reasonable alternative adjustments that mitigate the barriers the student is experiencing as a result of their disability.
3. Treat information shared with them about a student's disability sensitively, securely and in line with the University's requirements for the handling of 'special category' data (formerly known as 'sensitive personal data').
4. Directors of study in colleges and course convenors in departments should share information about the need for reasonable adjustments on a need to know basis with colleagues teaching in the subject or paper that they are overseeing. When information is shared effectively, students will not have to keep on explaining the impact of their impairment on study and the importance of a particular adjustment. Students can choose to share information about their disability with tutors, but this should not be necessary to secure necessary adjustments. See the [Confidentiality and Sharing Information chapter](#) for further information.
5. Reflect on their teaching methods and routines around teaching with the purpose of ensuring that students are included equally from the outset, reducing the need for individual adjustments. All students have their own preferences for learning, at different paces and using different methods. Inclusive teaching practices give

students greater choice and control over their learning. All students can potentially benefit from the adoption of [inclusive teaching practices](#) or from [anticipatory adjustments](#).

6. Consider using digital technologies to support teaching and learning. There are now digital platforms available at Oxford to ensure that the most common adjustments to teaching can be delivered effectively and efficiently, and extended to benefit all students. The Canvas virtual learning environment can be used to provide teaching materials in advance in electronic format and to provide feedback and course discussions in alternative forms; the Replay Service provides lecture capture for those departments or lecturers who opt-in; and the new ORLO service enables reading lists to be digitised, making it straightforward to find the full electronic text online or physical text in Oxford libraries.