

ENABLING ACCESS TO LEARNING AND LIVING AT DMU: A code of practice for learning and teaching support for disabled students.

Introduction

This paper constitutes the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences' code of practice for the approaches to learning and teaching support for disabled students. It is aligned with the University and Faculty Learning, Teaching and Assessment strategy 2007 and is informed by the principles contained within the strategy. It is also designed to ensure the Faculty's compliance with the DDA part IV and undertaken with consideration to the *Guidelines for assessing and marking the work of students with specific learning differences such as dyslexia*, Appendix two from the 'Assessment at DMU: policy, practice and protocols, September 2005. The purpose of this code is to ensure that we are including the requirements of disabled students at all levels of teaching and learning. The principles in this code can be used as a guideline for staff to avoid treating disabled students less favourably than their peers.

The code of practice should be viewed as a way of levelling the playing field for disabled students and not giving an unfair advantage. It has been specifically designed with the Faculty in mind to ensure that all programmes are able to comply. Consideration has been given to the professional bodies that regulate some of our programmes and the relative codes of practice that must be adhered to. This code should work alongside these and is not in conflict with pre-existing guidelines.

Discrimination

Discrimination includes the following when referring to a student with a disability:

- Treating the disabled student 'less favourably' than their peers
- Failing to make a 'reasonable adjustment' that leaves the disabled student at a 'substantial disadvantage'.

The act in its application to Higher Education has been in place since September 2002. The provision of 'auxiliary aids and services' (note takers, lip readers etc.) has been a requirement since 2003 and adjustments to physical features a requirement since September 2005.

Individuals may be held responsible if they knowingly discriminate against a student with a disability.

Whilst complying with the law the need to maintain academic standards, health and safety and the relevant interests of other students is also identified.

Academic Standards

Programmes leaders and developers need to be very precise on what is and what is not an 'essential learning outcome' for their programmes. This precise identification makes it easier to assess where adjustments may be made. Vague overviews make a decision about an appropriate adjustment very difficult.

For example:

A programme specifies that a student must be able to demonstrate 'an understanding of essential theory by completing a 2000 word essay'. This may be a barrier to students who find essay writing particularly difficult. If the programme were to specify

that students must be able to demonstrate 'an understanding of essential theory and present this appropriately' it paves the way for investigating alternative methods of assessment.

If for a particular programme there is a specification that is an essential learning outcome then this should be clearly noted.

For example:

'Nursing students must be able to demonstrate competence in administering an injection.' This ensures transparency and clear and defined objectives.

Programmes should aim to be as accessible as possible from the outset so that any adjustments that need to be made for individuals are minimal. We should be aiming to be anticipatory.

- All staff should be clear as to the essential learning outcomes of their course. This should include any specifications from regulatory bodies.
- These learning outcomes should be reviewed to ensure that they are precise and necessary. Any potential barriers to disabled students should be looked at carefully.

Staff Support

Staff should feel confident in delivering an accessible programme. They should be clear of any expectations that are placed on them. Staff are advised that guidelines on accessible learning are available on the University web pages and also via the public folders. Staff who have particular concerns are encouraged to approach their Disability Co-ordinator or the Disability Unit for advice and guidance in accessible learning.

Staff are advised that all policies and guidelines relating to disability within the Faculty are available via the public folders.

Admissions

There is a separate policy that states the University and Faculty's responsibility to disabled applicants. Once a student has disclosed a disability the institution is obliged not to discriminate on the grounds of this.

If a disability is not disclosed until enrolment members of staff are encouraged to refer the student to the Disability Co-ordinator or the Disability Unit.

Teaching strategy

All programmes should be looking to ensure that teaching on the programme is accessible as possible. There are guidelines available to assist in this and programmes can approach individuals within the University for assistance in developing effective learning. In some case the responsibility will be with an individual member of staff to make a reasonable adjustment to ensure a disabled student's access to the course.

- Physical accessibility should be considered for lecture theatres, classrooms, clinical skills areas and labs.
- Lecturers are encouraged to face the front when they are speaking.

- Lecturers are encouraged to provide handouts in advance of a session and on line. There are further guidelines about the production of handouts on the University's DAQ web page.
- Staff are encouraged to allow the recording of sessions.
- Lecturers are encouraged to read out any visual presentations to ensure they are being followed.
- Lecturers are encouraged to pace their delivery and consider breaks. In particular for interpreters.
- Lecturers should ensure that questions are addressed to the students and not their note takers or assistants.
- Students with communication issues should be supported when giving presentations. Staff should work with those in the professional environment to encourage development of a student's communication in the workplace.
- Tutors should encourage students to speak one at a time during group discussions and ensure that everyone is able to contribute and take part in the session.

Staff should be aware that APDU are able to run tailored sessions to support staff in delivering accessible teaching. They can offer guidance and practical advice on supporting students with disabilities.

Teaching Materials

Every effort should be made to ensure that all teaching materials are as accessible as possible. There will be students with individual requirements but these should be small adjustments to an accessible design programme.

- Videos and audio materials should be provided with subtitles or transcripts.
- Paper based materials should be available in large format.
- Staff are encouraged to use cream rather than white paper for any handouts.
- Booklists should be provided in advance.
- Any electronic based materials should be usable with assistive software, such as a screen reader.
- Software should allow students to go at their own speed.
- The layout and structure of any virtual learning environments being used should be accessible.

Assignments

Assignments are an opportunity for students to demonstrate their competence in achieving the learning outcomes. Sometimes an individual may require an adjustment in order for them to do this.

- Flexible deadlines. There is a separate policy that deals with the issues of extensions and gives clear guidelines on the appropriateness of their issue.
- Support for researching book lists
- Consideration to adjustments to an assignment, for example, allowing a student to submit a piece of work on video rather than in writing.
- Staff are encouraged to provide study skills support. Programmes are encouraged to build this in to their design.
- Consideration to giving feedback on coursework in alternative formats.
- Consideration to altering the mode of an assignment if it presents the student with an unnecessary barrier.

Review

It is very important to bear in mind the need for flexibility in regard to student support. Lecturers and students alike need to be prepared to experiment with different adjustments to identify the most effective. A student's needs may change over time. Students should be encouraged to give feedback on the adjustments that have been made. Any adjustments should be reviewed regularly to ensure their relevance.

Laboratory and clinical skills working

The Faculty has adapted its labs to ensure that they are accessible to all our students. Our computer suites are fitted with adjustable desks, labs with sufficient space to work in and as a faculty we are constantly meeting student accessibility demands to our facilities. Staff are encouraged to raise any areas that are an issue for students to work in so that practical solutions can be sought. Technicians are aware of health and safety issues to ensure that the requirements of all students are considered.

Placements and work based learning

Many of our students complete a placement during their study. Careful planning and monitoring will ensure that all students are successful in securing and completing a placement.

- Staff are encouraged to ensure that placements are accessible both to get there and whilst working.
- Placement providers should be encouraged to investigate accessibility issues with the student.
- Consideration needs to be given to students who require the provision of assistive technology or an assistant. Issues of confidentiality will need to be investigated.
- Staff should be clear with the placement provider who has the responsibility for making any necessary adjustments.
- Tutors should keep regular contact with the placement providers and the student to monitor progress.

This document acknowledges the 'Learning and Teaching' guidelines provide by the Disability Rights Commission and available via www.equalityhumanrights.com