A shift in responsibility: Inclusive Learning and Teaching to replace parts of the Disabled Students’ Allowances for students with Dyslexia and Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD)

The following pages include examples from across the sector of good practice with regards to inclusive practice that is thought to make a particular difference to the experience for students with dyslexia and other specific learning difficulties.

**Lecture notes in advance**

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More accurately described as access to teaching materials ahead of lectures, seminars, practical classes and other academic contact sessions, this practice enables students to read and process the information prior to the lecture. Having access to copies of any slides or hand-outs which will be used in the session in advance helps students to engage with the lecture because they can reduce the need for reading and listening simultaneously which puts a high demand on working memory. Where slides are not used, an outline of the session can be provided instead. This is a reasonable adjustment which is currently recommended for all students with Dyslexia/SpLD and at a minimum the university needs to give students with Dyslexia/SpLD access to lecture notes and other teaching materials in advance to avoid complaints and potential penalties.

**Inclusive Practice Example 1**

The universities commitment to inclusive practice is demonstrated through the introduction of a policy that lecture notes, for example copies of PowerPoints and any handouts, are made available on the universities VLE at least 48 hours before the session.

**“You need to be prepared before the lecture and know (in advance) what you are going to discuss, because it takes a lot of concentration to follow”.**

Student feedback during PESE focus Group February, 2016



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**Key terms and formulae given in advance**

The introduction of new terminology and names within a lecture can be problematic for some students. Dyslexic traits such as less developed working memory and spelling and writing difficulties make note taking challenging. Provision of a list of new terms and vocabulary, with explanations where necessary, enables students to familiarise themselves with new words before the lecture, seminar, tutorial, practical or placement. It is also helpful to explain any jargon, acronyms and abbreviations that may be used.

**Inclusive Practice Example 2**

Key terminology, names, dates and formulae are given, in an accessible format at least 48 hours before the lecture or other teaching session along with explanations of any jargon, acronyms and abbreviations.

**“There is a lot of medical terminology and we get advance core reading and questions that I find stimulating, and it’s easier to follow, so providing the terminology in advance is helpful”.**

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**Materials presented in an accessible way**

The design of documents and presentations, in particular how easy they are to read, impacts on the length of time students take to read the information and absorb the meaning. For example, when designing a PowerPoint lecturers can be advised that the way slides look is very important to their accessibility. A dark font and light background will provide a clear contrast. A cream background is often more accessible than pure white and overly 'fussy' backgrounds are best avoided. A sans serif typeface (Arial is best) of font size 24 or above (45 bold for titles) should be used. Bullet points assist in making slides easier to follow. Further advice can be given on the design of handouts, Moodle sites and feedback.

Electronic materials should be provided in formats which enable students to amend the formatting, colour and text size (such as Word and PowerPoint). This gives an opportunity for students to use text-to-speech software to read through materials beforehand if they know they cannot read quickly enough in the lecture or to print hand-outs in a larger font or on coloured paper. Students are able to annotate the handouts either using a print-out or one of the many available apps to annotate documents electronically.

**Inclusive Practice Example 3**

All teaching staff to follow clear principles of accessible and inclusive design. These are available on the website as an easy to follow guide.

**“Not good when hand-outs (print-outs from PowerPoint) are given in very small print, I couldn’t read it. It’s good for saving paper, but you don’t get the information! It’s good if they are given beforehand, so that students can enlarge them. They do that now, so it’s easier”.**

**“I record my lectures. I don’t like too many words in there (PowerPoint slides), lots of text is distracting”.**

Students’ feedback during PESE focus Group February, 2016





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**Technology to create alternative formats**

Students should be able to adapt the learning materials to suit their individual needs. This may be necessary so that the documents are compatible with particular assistive technology that students rely on. For example, Text-to-speech software cannot read all document formats. Without the right software it can be difficult and very time consuming to convert documents into different formats. The difficulty in accessing teaching materials is a significant barrier to learning.

Previously, DSA funding covered some of the costs for alternative productions and occasionally funded a support worker to assist with this. As DSA is no longer available for this cost, the responsibility now falls to the university. An intuitive, easy to use and effective software solution has proved to be more cost effective than employing additional staff to create alternative formats. One university we spoke to through our PESE research told us they had recently subscribed to Sensus Access to fill this gap.

**Inclusive Practice Example 4**

University invests in technology to enable staff and students to quickly and effectively convert documents.

**SensusAccess**

“SensusAccess is a self-service, alternate media solution for educational institutions. SensusAccess allows students, faculty, staff and alumni to automatically convert documents into a range of alternate media including audio books (MP3 and DAISY), e-books (EPUB, EPUB3 and Mobi) and digital Braille. The service can also be used to convert inaccessible documents such as image-only PDF files, JPG pictures and Microsoft PowerPoint presentations into more accessible and less tricky formats. We call that Inclusion Technology.”

<http://www.sensusaccess.com/service-description>





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**Providing additional means to engage through digital media**

Multi-sensory teaching to give alternative ways for students to access the information is seen as a key to inclusive teaching. Students with dyslexia and specific learning difficulties are often acutely aware of how they learn best and their preferred learning style. Multi-sensory approaches recognise that the cohort will include students with a preference for visual, auditory or kinaesthetic learning. Examples of ways to present information include flowcharts, mind maps, diagrams, videos and podcasts, interactive sessions, practical exercises and text (given in advance). It can sometimes be difficult or time consuming to locate quality videos to supplement teaching; however subscription services can help with this.

**Inclusive Practice Example 5**

Box of Broadcasts from the British Universities and Colleges Film and Video Council (BUCFVC).

 ‘BOB’ is an on demand TV and radio service for education. The academically-focused system allows staff and students, at subscribing institutions, to record programmes from over 65 free-to-air channels and search the archive of over 2 million broadcasts.  It allows the subscribing university to create a modern and engaging learning experience that meets the expectations of students, with a reliable and academically focused archive of programmes. BoB is currently used by over 120 universities and colleges to enhance teaching and learning. You can create your own playlists, clips and clip complications and share on the VLE or on social media. You can add citations and access BOB across all devices.

<https://learningonscreen.ac.uk/ondemand>

**“Every Friday there is a lecture that is three hours long with a short break, the lecturer just talks and students just sit and listen- it’s difficult to engage”.**

Student feedback during PESE focus Group February, 2016

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**Alternative assessment**

The use of adjustments to exams, such as additional time, for students with dyslexia/SpLD and disabilities is a practice aligned to the deficit model of disability. It is hard to see this approach as inclusive. It is also a significant expense to the university.

The provision of a range of assessment methods can enable students to demonstrate their subject knowledge and understanding to the best of their ability. Currently at Brookes, alternative assessments are arranged on an ad-hoc basis for students where their disability means that adjustments to the existing method of assessment would not reasonably accommodate the student’s difficulties.

Workstream 4 of this PESE project investigated the approaches being taken across the sector. It found that some universities have made inclusive assessment, content accessible to their staff including checklists/”consideration matrices”, video case studies and online teaching and learning modules to help in designing and implementing inclusive assessment. One example included modules which offered choice in assessment method to all students.

**Inclusive Practice Example 6**

Alternative assessment methods considered during the module design and validation stages. Alternative assessment offered to all students with a Disability, Dyslexia/SpLD.

**“Sometimes it’s difficult to remember, even when having the paper and needing to read it, I can’t do it, I forget what I’m supposed to be doing … getting stressed and feeling embarrassed. I think I can’t do this!”**

Student feedback on delivering an assessed presentation during PESE focus Group February, 2016





**Increasing the availability of recordings of lectures**

Access to recordings of lectures is regularly recommended as a reasonable adjustment and most classes will have students with Dyslexia/SpLD using digital recorders (previously funded through Disabled Student’s Allowances) or other devices to record their lectures. Increasingly universities are investing in lecture capture technology to make recordings of all lectures available to students. At Brookes most teaching rooms have technology enabled so that lecturers can audio record their lectures along with a screencast (video screen capture).

**Inclusive Practice Example 7**

All sessions automatically recorded and immediately available for students to access. Lecturers would have to opt-out rather than opt-in.

 **“Lecture capture is the best invention since sliced bread! I can't possibly explain how useful it has been to my learning - no longer do I go away from a lecture panicking that I didn't understand something, knowing it will take me hours of searching online/through textbooks and articles to grasp the concepts. Instead, with lecture capture, I simply listen back to what the lecturer has said and any doubt is replaced”.**

**Student, University of Sheffield.**

You may wish to learn more about Mediasite desktop recorder which is available in all teaching rooms at Brookes http://www.brookes.ac.uk/obis/services/lecture-capture/

Regulation E19 relates to recording of lectures: http://www.brookes.ac.uk/regulations/

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**Inclusive by design**

Universities that are leading the way in their progress to becoming fully inclusive have inclusion as a key part of their strategy. Inclusive, accessible and student centred support is a principle within the initial curriculum design rather than being retro-fitted or adjustments made to the curriculum later on. Over time inclusive curriculum design should reduce the need to make adjustments or changes for individual students, reduce the number of resits and increase attainment levels.

At a good practice event following the announcement of the reductions to DSA funding colleagues from across the sector discussed the need to look at inclusivity at the design stage and to include best practice in the design guidance. They suggested considering inclusion when modules are reviewed to examine the inclusivity of assessment and teaching methods (University of Westminster, 2015).

**Inclusive Practice Example 8**

Inclusion as the focus for a year. An inclusive strand to be incorporated into the module review process. A checklist is used to select the key elements of inclusive teaching- for example “are the learning objectives of each session made explicit?”

**“All students have different learning approaches. Inclusive curriculum design should involve reflection on the opportunities for different approaches to learning to be embedded and/or offered as alternatives within the curriculum”.**

**Inclusive Curriculum Design in Higher Education, The Higher Education Academy (May, 2011).**

https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/inclusion/Disability/Inclusive\_curriculum\_design\_in\_higher\_education



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**Prioritise reading lists**

Guidance around support for students with dyslexia/SpLD frequently recommends informing students of the core reading required within the module. Identifying the most important texts, chapters or articles will help students with dyslexia who typically have difficulty skim-reading and have to re-read materials many times to gain understanding and retain information. Many students registered with the Dyslexia/SpLD Service have not had support for their difficulties at school and do not have the required study skills to study at HE level. Those that take-up Specialist 1-1 Study Skills Support (mostly funded through DSA) when they start their courses here will develop their reading skills using specific strategies.

**Inclusive Practice Example 9**

The university has a policy that includes the provision of an outline of the module and reading lists to be made available on Moodle at least 4 week before the start of the module and that the reading list should be prioritised to indicate key and supplementary reading.

**“The lecturer gives a topic to read each week, then you write a brief piece and then you discuss it in the seminars…that’s where I got the best marks, because it wasn't something too daunting”.**

Student feedback during PESE focus Group February, 2016

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**Assistive technology**

Students who have had an updated assessment of their dyslexia and specific learning difficulties (SpLD) and applied for DSA funding before they start their course will have assistive technology of their own and the option to have training to help them use it to its full potential. A significant proportion of students do not receive their DSA equipment until after they are well into their courses. In addition to this there are many students who are not eligible for DSA but would greatly benefit from using assistive technology. Assistive technology used by students with SpLD includes:

* Mindmapping software, e.g. Inspiration, often used as a visual tool for essay planning
* Text-to-speech software, e.g. TextHelp Read and Write used to listen to electronic text and listen back to your own writing
* Speech-to-text, e.g. Dragon used to dictate your text instead of typing
* Notetaking software, e.g. Audio Notetaker used to improve notetaking and organise notes and recordings

Some of this software is available at Brookes for all students to use.

**Inclusive Practice Example 10**

The university has site licences for up-to-date versions of the software described above. An Assistive technology Specialist is employed to support users of the software.

**We are currently running a project to evaluate assistive technology provision, assess options for future development and pilot training methods for students and staff.**

http://www.brookes.ac.uk/students/wellbeing/dyslexia-spld/assistive-technology-suite/