

Disability Service Survey 2017-18



Summary for students

In May 2018, we asked all students we had worked with during the academic year 2017-18 to complete a survey about the Disability Service at Oxford Brookes. We sent out 259 emails and received 33 forms (a response rate of 13%). We wanted to find out more about what students expected from our service, how they found out about and got in touch with us, how they experienced our service, and what (if any) impact the service had on their lives.

Though limited in number, the students who did get in touch offered us a great deal; they had a broad range of experiences and told them about these in detail. We really appreciate the time and effort they took to do this.

What students told us

Expectations (what students want from the service)

There are lots of reasons why students get in touch with us; they have a broad range of expectations of how we might be able to help. Most students have multiple, overlapping things going on in their lives (for example, worrying about their health, managing deadlines, and dealing with exams). Perhaps because of this, a big proportion (45%) of students felt that general/ongoing support is important for them. Students also emphasised information and signposting (39%), whilst almost half (45%) felt that the key thing for them was managing their health at university. A quarter of students feel worried about academic work (maintaining standards, meeting deadlines, etc).

This comment from one student illustrates the range of challenges many students with disabilities face:

Having been diagnosed with x, I was struggling with overall university life. I was struggling to attend lectures, was constantly in hospital, and struggling to meet deadlines. I also needed support in finding different accommodation that I could keep my car at; I struggle to get around without my car, and I have placement next year. I sought support in getting adjustments for my exams and deadlines, and in managing the weight of receiving the diagnosis of x.

Getting in touch and staying in touch

It was very important to find out whether our service is accessible. 66% of students said that it was easy to find out about the service, whilst 72% felt that it was easy to understand that that service was relevant to them and their needs. They found out about the service from a range of sources, including other staff and our website. A number of students didn't realise that our service was for them, one commenting, "I had not considered anxiety/panic attacks as a Disability," and another suggesting that we needed "more visibility."

In terms of contact with the service, 79% said that it has been easy to get in touch with us, whilst 82% felt that it had been easy to stay in touch with us. Students appreciated the different ways they could stay in touch with the service: email, telephone and face-to-face, as well as flexibility with appointments when their condition fluctuated. Students also talked about the supportive nature of staff, which made it easier to stay

in touch. A small number of students felt that it had been hard to stay in touch and that their problems hadn't been resolved.

Experiences (what it's like to use our services)

Overall, 86% of students who responded felt that their contact with the service had been positive. Similar numbers felt that their adviser/the service had a good understanding of their needs and that they worked in partnership with their adviser/the team.

Students talked about the range of ways they worked with the team. The vast majority had had help to create a memo to explain their needs to academic staff, whilst almost half had adjustments to exams. When we asked students about their experiences in more detail, many focused not just on *what* was offered, but *how* it was offered, like this student:

My support adviser was really helpful in writing up a memo that helped explain to my lecturers that I had a progressive condition that prevented me from attending all my lectures, and helped with adjusting my exams and assessment. This was really positive for me as it was causing me a lot of stress and anxiety, and having support in handling it helped. My adviser also helped me in finding different accommodation for my final year, which also helped relieve a lot of anxiety and stress. I found the overall experience very friendly and understanding, and the support was extremely helpful in keeping me at university.

Two student found the contact with the service to be a negative. However, the majority were positive, noting the 1:1 and ongoing nature of the support.

Impact and outcomes (what, if any, difference do we make)

Most students (78%) felt that the service had a positive impact on their experiences at Oxford Brookes, though they experienced this impact in lots of different ways. Most commonly, students had been given information and time to think through options and make choices, to articulate their needs. Fewer felt that they had been given the tools to cope with challenges in the future. These comments from one student speak volumes about the ambivalence many students feel about the label of "disability," and their reluctance to seek support:

I wish I had contacted you sooner. I kept thinking I could manage but illness at the beginning of the year significantly impacted on the remainder of this year. However, without the struggles I have had I would not be looking forward to Year 3, knowing I will have lots of IT software to help me better manage my academic studies. And I also have mentoring to look forward to. Having a DEM memo has helped with extensions. I am still not comfortable with being labelled as having a disability but that is me. If it were someone else I don't think I would even question it.

Some felt that the service couldn't help them because of wider university issues; unfortunately two students found the impact to be negative. Overall, 82% of students would recommend the survey to someone in a similar situation, one commenting, "I was for the first time in my life in 'equality of circumstances' with my fellow students."

Our response

The survey is both a snapshot and a starting point for us. Overall, the survey results were very positive, but there are things we can build on and develop, particularly:

- We aim to keep the **breadth of support** we offer, acknowledgement the full range of student needs, and offering an individualised response to those needs. We recognise that students' needs are complex, with many needing different kinds of support at the same time or as they progress through university.
- We are working on our **processes** to make sure that we can offer *all* students with disabilities and/or health problems equitable, timely and efficient support.

- We are working to more to **raise our profile** around the University, and to break down barriers to accessing support. We want all students/staff to know about the support we offer as early as possible, and to realise that we might be able to help them. We are looking at the language we use to describe our service to make it clear that we support students with any disability and/or long-term health condition.
- We are looking at ways we can **involve students more**, eg through ongoing feedback or focus groups.

The Disability Service team - October 2018