University of Worcester

Guidance for staff in managing work placements for disabled students

Accessible high quality placements and work based learning for all students

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Index

1. Organising placements: responsibilities

Disabled students have a general entitlement to the provision of educational opportunities in a manner that meets their individual requirements; this applies equally to placements and work based learning. The University and the placement provider both have responsibilities and some overlapping duties to disabled students on placement regardless of whether the placement is arranged by the University or by the student. The legal responsibility to ensure students are not disadvantaged in finding a placement, or whilst on a placement, lies with the University. However, responsibility to make reasonable adjustments for disabled students on placements resides with the placement providers.

Where a disabled student is due to undertake a work placement as part of their programme of study, the placement co-ordinator (or equivalent) should meet with the work placement provider in advance to ensure the provision of anticipatory and reasonable adjustments in line with legal requirements and to clarify the handling of sensitive issues such as disclosure.

Course leaders and placement co-ordinators should encourage students to disclose disability, impairment or specific learning difficulties well in advance of individual placements being arranged, to ensure that appropriate and relevant support can be discussed prior to placements being identified.

The following guidance is intended to be a practical guide for staff in arranging accessible work placements for all students. It recognises that some students face challenges in locating appropriate placements and in getting the most out of them.

The guidance is intended to help staff reflect on existing practice, and is structured to consider:

- Curriculum planning

- Work placement procedures

- Arranging work placements

- Supporting students on placement

- Reviewing and evaluating work placements.

Case studies
profile one

Tom has ocular albinism. People with this condition usually have blue eyes but in some cases, like Tom's, the iris has very little colour so their eyes look pink or reddish. (This is caused by the blood vessels inside the eye showing through the iris.) People with albinism can be very sensitive to light because the iris doesn't have enough colour to shield the retina properly. Wearing sunglasses or tinted contact lenses can help make them more comfortable out in the sun. Except for eye problems, most people with albinism are just as healthy as anyone else.

Albinism does not make a person completely blind. Although Tom is registered blind, he hasn't lost his vision completely. He can still read and study but he just needs larger print and magnifiers to help him.

Tom was enrolled on a BEd course at the university, studying to become a primary school teacher. To begin with, many of the tutors on his course were highly sceptical that he could succeed because of the difficulties they thought he would have on the course in relation to his visual impairment. They were soon won over by his enthusiasm, commitment and 'can-do' attitude.
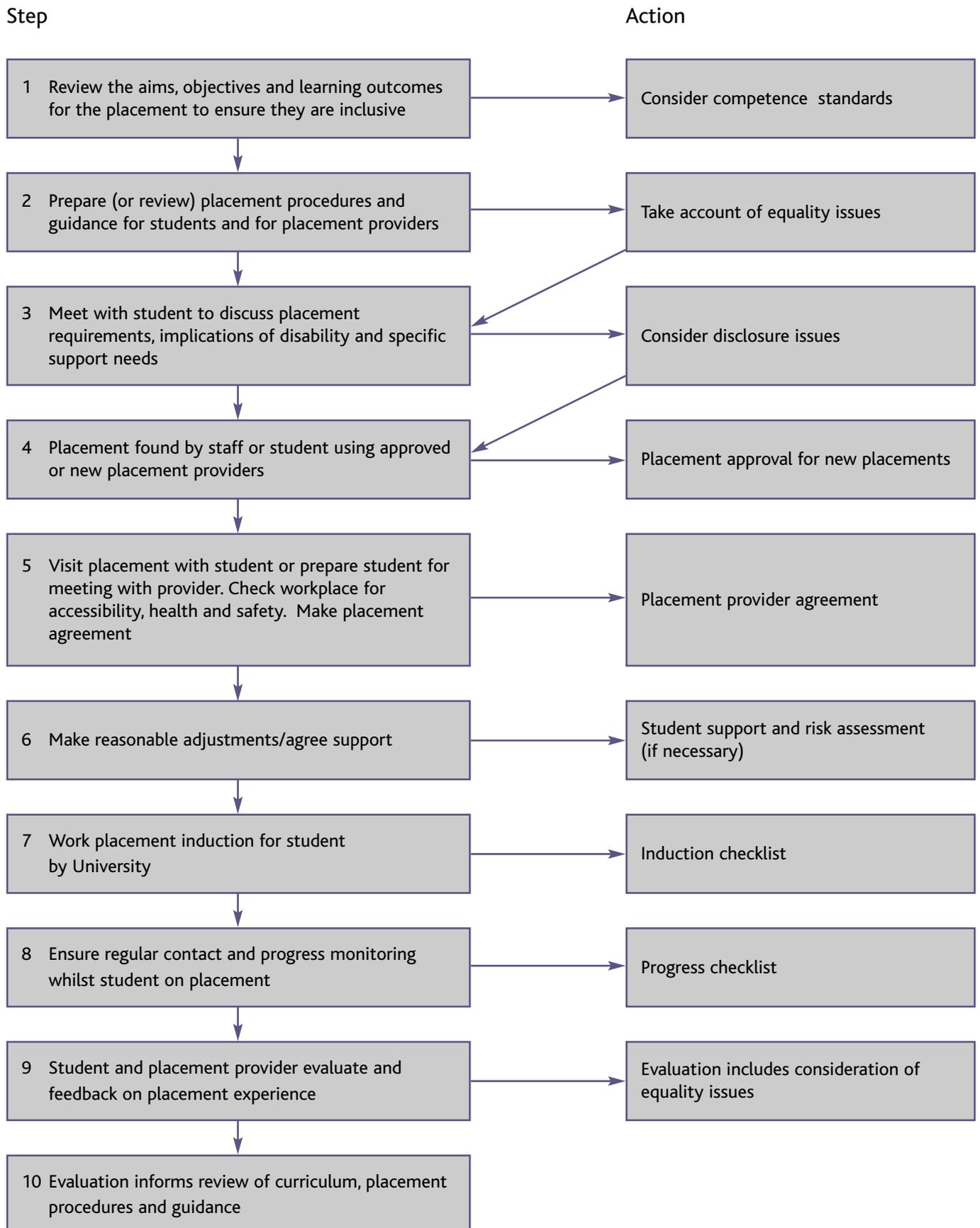
Tom was a 'colourful' and determined character who was convinced of his ability to succeed. He made good progress with his academic studies; however, he was soon confronted with a number of obstacles when it came to his first school placement. Initially, none of the primary schools felt able to accommodate him, so his personal tutor took up his case. She liaised with the university's disability service and Tom himself to establish the issues and agree on a strategy to support Tom in placement.

Finally, after much negotiation, and following additional consultation with ABAPSTAS* (The Association of Blind and Partially Sighted Teachers and Students), Tom's personal tutor found a primary school that was prepared to take Tom on placement even though the staff had no prior experience of supporting staff with a visual impairment. The prime concern of the Head was the safety of the children in her school. Following a risk assessment, and using a common sense approach, they agreed on a series of simple, cost free adjustments to practice that enabled Tom to undertake his first placement. The tutor also took care to ensure that the proposed arrangements meant that Tom would meet the placement assessment criteria.

Since Tom's limited sight meant that he could not supervise children safely in the school grounds during playtime, he swapped this responsibility with supervision of children in the library during lunchtimes, a similar responsibility viewed as additional to teaching. Because Tom could not supervise games or gymnastics safely, he was able to team teach these lessons with a qualified member of staff, taking a supporting role. To compensate for this, Tom then took the lead role in the music lessons for his own and another colleague's class. Everyone was happy with these arrangements - the school, the university, the parents and the children. Tom did well in his placement and, having proven his abilities in his first placement, his personal tutor was easily able to negotiate subsequent placements for him for the remainder of his course.

*http://www.abapstas.org.uk/

2. Managing accessible high quality placements for all students

Step	Action
1 Review the aims, objectives and learning outcomes for the placement to ensure they are inclusive	Consider competence standards
2 Prepare (or review) placement procedures and guidance for students and for placement providers	Take account of equality issues
3 Meet with student to discuss placement requirements, implications of disability and specific support needs	Consider disclosure issues
4 Placement found by staff or student using approved or new placement providers	Placement approval for new placements
5 Visit placement with student or prepare student for meeting with provider. Check workplace for accessibility, health and safety. Make placement agreement	Placement provider agreement
6 Make reasonable adjustments/agree support	Student support and risk assessment (if necessary)
7 Work placement induction for student by University	Induction checklist
8 Ensure regular contact and progress monitoring whilst student on placement	Progress checklist
9 Student and placement provider evaluate and feedback on placement experience	Evaluation includes consideration of equality issues
10 Evaluation informs review of curriculum, placement procedures and guidance	

3. Curriculum planning and anticipatory adjustments

The University has a legal responsibility to anticipate the needs of disabled students and make reasonable adjustments in advance. Such needs should be considered at the course planning stage, particularly where a work placement or field trip is an integral part of the course. As a starting point, staff will need to consider:

- [ ] What are the learning outcomes of the work placement and to what extent do they encompass competency standards?

- [ ] Are the learning outcomes/competency standards likely to be discriminatory or disadvantage any particular group of students?

- [ ] What flexibility is there in adjusting the learning outcomes or objectives of the work placement?

- [ ] Are there alternative ways in which students can demonstrate achievement of the placement learning outcomes?

- [ ] Is student feedback on placements elicited to evaluate the extent to which the curriculum is genuinely inclusive for all students?

- [ ] Is the willingness to adapt, make reasonable adjustments and facilitate accessibility to placement opportunities communicated to potential applicants in promotional course information?

Disability disclosure
Disabled students are not normally required to disclose their disability and may choose not to do so, particularly if they have an unseen disability and/or normally manage the effects of their disability successfully under normal day-to-day conditions. Work based placements, however, can provide new and unusual challenges which can negatively impact on a disabled student's abilities; students should therefore be provided with ongoing opportunities to disclose. When students do choose to disclose, written consent, establishing the level of disclosure they are consenting to, should be obtained.
See http://www.usemyability.org/resources/Disclosing-a-Disability.html.

Case studies
profile two

James had suffered for some years with chronic fatigue syndrome, but was eventually able to undertake a learning support course. When the need for a suitable placement was discussed, a couple of schools were approached and talks and visits were made to see which one would be best able to accommodate James's needs. James was able to undertake part-time learning support to align with his general level of working capacity, and was also provided with a quiet space in which to be able to work outside of the classroom, but still within the school environment, for class preparation work etc.

4. Work placement procedures

Procedures for ensuring the quality and accessibility of work placements before they are approved are essential if the University is to meet its responsibility to students, and ensure the precepts of the QAA code of practice have been met.

- [ ] Do the staff responsible for organising or co-ordinating placement opportunities have an understanding of legal responsibilities?

- [ ] Are the responsibilities for arranging and approving placements clear to all parties?

- [ ] Is there a procedure for auditing accessibility of placements?

- [ ] What procedural arrangements will be in place to ensure disabled students will be appropriately supported in obtaining, completing and reviewing a placement?

- [ ] Will a written agreement detailing the relative responsibilities of the placement provider, the student and the University be in place?

- [ ] Will placement providers be advised of their responsibilities with regard to disabled students who disclose their disability?

- [ ] Are there procedural arrangements in place to establish and negotiate with students, and (if appropriate) placement providers, the support needs of students?

- [ ] What are the arrangements for monitoring and reviewing the effectiveness of the procedures for work placements for disabled students?

- [ ] Are there clear procedures for dealing with problems, including complaints procedures?

A **written agreement** outlining responsibilities of the University, student and placement provider might cover:

- Physical access to the workplace
- Responsibility for assessing individual needs of disabled students
- Who will pay for any adjustments that need to be made for disabled students
- Health and safety responsibilities
- Risk assessment procedures
- Meeting any additional support needs
- Procedures for dealing with difficulties
- Processes for providing feedback to the University and the student(s) on student progress and on the effectiveness of arrangements
- Contact arrangements.

- If a student has disclosed a disability to the University, but does not wish this to be divulged to the workplace, this should be noted on the student's file.

5. Arranging an appropriate placement

Early communication and discussion regarding individual needs and learning outcomes between all parties is essential to ensure a positive experience for the student and the placement provider. Work placements for disabled students may take longer to set up and approve, but this will mean less likelihood of problems whilst the student is on placement.

☐ Is there a clear process for identifying students' placement requirements?

☐ Does **all** course documentation include a statement that encourages disclosure of disabilities so that adjustments to practice can be made? This is particularly important where the placement might create a situation where, due to the person's impairment within that context, there may be a risk to themselves or others. Under such circumstances, a risk assessment should be carried out by the placement supervisor together with the student to determine the level of risk and the appropriate adjustments. Where necessary, advice should be sought from the Disability and Dyslexia Service (DDS).

Discussion with a student in preparing for a placement might cover:

- Course requirements, competence standards and learning outcomes
- Student skills, prior experience and capabilities
- Geographical location and accessibility, including transport arrangements
- Student preferences for type of work and placement context
- Pace and pattern of work
- Student expectations
- Support needs, including, where necessary, arrangements for support workers
- Access to assistive technologies and printed material in accessible formats
- Health and safety considerations and risk assessment if appropriate
- Any reasonable adjustments
- Any concerns regarding disclosure and/or discrimination.

☐ What mechanisms are in place to assist students in finding out about placements?

☐ What additional support may be necessary for disabled students in, for example, approaching employers, making applications, disclosing disability, attending interviews and raising confidence?

☐ Is there provision, where appropriate, for the placement organiser/co-ordinator to visit the placement to check accessibility and assess any necessary adjustments etc, including, where appropriate, responsibility for funding any necessary adjustments?

☐ Is disability disclosure encouraged and talked through with students (including those who have not yet disclosed a disability)?

☐ Are students assisted in identifying their skills, abilities and capabilities, and presenting these with confidence?

☐ Do students have the opportunity to discuss their needs with placement organisers and, where appropriate, the DDS, in advance?

☐ How are all students briefed and prepared in advance of arranging, negotiating and taking up a placement?

☐ Is an agreement between the University, placement provider and student(s) drawn up and agreed?

Making it easier for students to arrange good accessible placements could include:

- Creating a dedicated website and keeping information on possible placement providers up-to-date
- Holding induction sessions and arranging student/employer events to facilitate informal networking
- Circulating lists of employer/industry contacts to students
- Including equality issues in the course curriculum
- Helping all students to identify and present positively with confidence their skills, experience and capabilities
- Helping students identify diversity and equality positive employers
- Providing opportunities for students to discuss their concerns about disclosure and negotiating with employers/placement providers
  Providing employers with placement checklists to be completed in negotiation with students
- Educating employers about the benefits of diversity and legal duties with regard to reasonable adjustments for disabled people.

Case studies
profiles three & four

Claudette was undertaking a paramedic course which has a high level of practical elements within it. However, Claudette was finding that she was struggling to remember how to repeat procedures which became increasingly frustrating for her; the more she worried, the worse the situation became. Claudette did have a mentor and they met at the end of each session to discuss how the work had gone. A couple of suggestions were made to Claudette which eased her frustrations and made an improvement in her ability to cope with the demands of the course. These included:

- annotating a mind map or a drawing of a person with comments alongside, as appropriate, which would be easier to digest than written notes, and which she could retain and even could pin it to the wall at home too as an aide memoire

- undertaking a procedure herself (and having the confidence to do so) instead of watching someone else doing the procedure. The mentor would observe and then provide feedback.

She had difficulty in making comprehensive notes during the sessions and the tutor suggested that Claudette use a voice recorder for some forms of note-taking in the classroom.

Claudette also started to use a small note-book to record administration of medicines, to have with her at all times so she could immediately record these important details. Claudette's confidence improved, her worries diminished and she was able to successfully become a paramedic, her childhood ambition.

Samira is a student on a nursing course and is dyslexic. Samira disclosed this ahead of joining the course at the University, and DSA funding provided texthelp. Whilst Samira coped well within the classroom and at home, a different situation became apparent once Samira went on placement. Written records within the hospital environment have to be professional and correct, but Samira was struggling with this aspect of the placement, which she was otherwise enjoying. Samira did not wish to disclose her dyslexia to the staff with whom she worked on placement and having spoken with the placement liaison contact at the University, it was arranged that a texthelp dongle would be purchased for Samira (by the University). This simple purchase made a very positive difference to Samira's work at the hospital and her determination to do well on placement ensured that the outcome was very successful.

6. Supporting students whilst on placement

As indicated above, this is largely a matter of early discussion with the student and then meeting and negotiation with the placement provider to agree responsibilities and any adjustments. Often the additional time taken in preparation minimises the need for additional support arrangements whilst the student is on placement.

☐ Is the placement physically accessible for those with sensory and mobility impairments? If not, can alternative arrangements be made, for example, for important meetings?

☐ Will communication in the workplace be accessible for those with sensory impairments?

☐ Does there need to be any adjustment in relation to start/finish times, or relocation of certain specific tasks?

☐ Is there a clear written agreement covering all of the adjustments and who will provide them?

☐ Do the student and the placement provider have clear lines of contact and clear expectations regarding progress monitoring?

☐ Does progress monitoring include an assessment of whether the placement provider is meeting the student's needs?

☐ Is there a process of regular communication and contact with the placement co-ordinator, or named University contact, in place?

For information about making reasonable adjustments in the workplace please go to www.usemyability.org.

Providing structured support for students whilst on placement might include:

- Ensuring all students are well briefed on the work placement process, requirements and learning outcomes
- Ensuring all students are aware of key legal rights, entitlements and acceptable/unacceptable practices regarding fair treatment http://www.rightsforinterns.org.uk/
- Drawing up a placement agreement specifying the responsibilities of the University, student and placement provider, and specifying any necessary adjustments
- Setting up a placement mentoring scheme
- Setting up an online forum for students to keep in touch with one another and with staff
- Discussing potential challenges and strategies students can use to overcome them
- Formalising contact arrangements between the staff and students, and between placement provider and University staff, so all have a named contact.

7. Reviewing and evaluating the placement

It is important to monitor and review placements and placement experiences to ensure that they work well for all students and particularly for disabled students. This means providing opportunities for students to feedback, reflect and assess their experience after placement.

☐ How is the placement assessed? Has consideration been given to issues of potential disadvantage for disabled students?

- [ ] Can assessments help students identify what has been learned from tackling difficulties and challenges, and how this shapes their plans and strategies for the future?

- [ ] Are students given opportunities to reflect on and assess their work placement?

- [ ] Do students have opportunities to share experiences and learning from work placements?

- [ ] Do monitoring/evaluation forms include specific questions about barriers and challenges?

- [ ] Is monitoring and feedback data discussed between all parties, including placement providers, students, course team and DDS?

- [ ] Are there procedures/protocols in place to alert employers to potential issues regarding future student placements and/or to disseminate good practice?

See http://www.scips.worc.ac.uk/uk/key_skills/placement.html for further information about assessments and placements.

Case studies
profiles five & six

Ryan is a mature, partially sighted student undertaking the PGCE primary years course. Straightforward and open negotiations between the student, his placement supervisor at the University of Worcester, and the school where the placement was to be undertaken, resulted in alterations for Ryan within the classroom in which he was to teach: a laptop was provided with screen magnification software. As Ryan had previously disclosed a disability and had access to DSA funding, then the cost of materials that needed to be converted to an accessible format for Ryan was covered. The school also obliged by converting some of their pertinent materials for Ryan to use. Additionally, the school, which had a very positive approach to inclusivity throughout their community, ensured whenever possible, that a Teaching Assistant was available in the classroom when Ryan was teaching.

Sophie was a student on an Education Studies course which included an assessment/course requirement to have some hours working within a school environment. Whilst the tutor at the University offered to give her an alternative form of assessment, Sophie was determined to undertake the same assessment as the rest of her cohort. Sophie is blind and was able to be accompanied to, and supported at, the venue by her support worker. Sophie already had her own laptop with screen reading software and was able to use this within the classroom environment, particularly when giving a talk to the class and answering questions from the children. Sophie was encouraged by the school to tackle various aspects of life within their curriculum and particularly enjoyed some 1:1 sessions with young pupils who read to her.

Case studies

profile seven

Kelly is a third year student undertaking a degree in sports studies. She did not disclose that she has a disability when she enrolled on the course (as is her right under law). She has not experienced any difficulties on her course in relation to her disability because she manages her condition really well.

When Kelly opted to take a work placement module, she was offered the opportunity to work at an Outdoor Education Centre. The Centre required her to complete a standard questionnaire, given to all employees, that asked her about her health and any limitations she might have in relation to a disability. She then disclosed that she has a medical condition.

Prior to agreeing to take her on placement, the work place mentor, who was new to the Centre, arranged to meet with Kelly to discuss the effects of her condition and to ensure that she would not prove to be a danger to herself or to others in the working environment.

The Centre often ran residential courses for children with disabilities and staff were well versed in making adjustments to the courses and the premises to enable their participation. At the meeting, however, the mentor began by asking Kelly rather personal information about her disability that was not directly relevant to work. It was clear from his attitude that he did not want the extra 'burden' of having to cope with a staff member with disability-related needs. This made Kelly feel very uncomfortable and she ended up cutting her interview short.

Kelly made an appointment with her module tutor and told her that she was having second thoughts about that particular placement. The module tutor had supervised students on placement at the Centre previously and was surprised at the turn of events. She arranged a meeting between herself, Kelly and the Centre's manager to discuss the situation.

The Centre's manager was unhappy to learn about the way the situation had been handled by the appointed mentor and reassured Kelly that the matter would be dealt with appropriately. He went on to discuss the nature of her limitations and asked her about any strategies she had used previously. Together, they completed a risk assessment.

Kelly has diabetes. She injects herself daily and also needs to eat regularly. The manager was able to reassure Kelly that she could have access to a compartment in one of the kitchen's fridges for her insulin. They reviewed the work programme and agreed a schedule that would enable Kelly to eat when necessary. They also had a discussion about 'hypos'* (short for 'hypoglycaemia' meaning low sugar). On the manager's advice, Kelly agreed that the other staff could be informed about her disability and that they should be alert for any of the signs of her having a hypo which could include:

Shakiness	Dizziness	Confusion	Sweating
Difficulty speaking	Feeling anxious or weak	Irritability	Pale skin.

The manager sent an email to all staff to inform them about Kelly's condition and potential needs. The email described the triggers that could cause Kelly to have a hypoglycaemic attack: missing a snack, not eating a whole meal, eating later than usual, not eating when ill, or drinking alcohol without eating any food. He also emphasised that extreme exercise could also trigger an attack. In the event of Kelly having an attack they were instructed to give her something to boost her blood sugar such as fruit juice, boiled sweets, or crackers.

The recently appointed mentor who had upset Kelly was sent on a disability awareness training course and a new mentor was appointed. Kelly did not experience any difficulties in relation to her condition whilst on placement at the Centre. She thoroughly enjoyed the placement, confident in the knowledge that the Centre's staff were well versed in what to look out for, and what to do in the event of an emergency. The Centre manager was delighted with her work ethic and her relationship with the clients.

Appendix

A1.1   Information on disability for staff

The following edited extracts are all taken from the SCIPs (Strategies for Creating Inclusive Programmes of Study) database, which contains a wide and helpful range of information on disabilities; their challenges; impact on learning and teaching and considerations for assessment and reasonable adjustments (www.scips.worc.ac.uk/). Further relevant information on enabling disabled students to develop their employability skills can also be found at: www.usemyability.org.

A1.2   Auditory Difficulties

Students with hearing impairments may depend on their sight for communication e.g. speech reading, lip reading, British Sign Language (BSL) or a form of English using BSL vocabulary called Sign Supported English (SSE).

There are four types of hearing loss:

- Conductive hearing loss (affecting the conduction pathways for sound to reach the inner ear). Conductive hearing losses usually affect all frequencies of hearing evenly and do not result in severe losses.

- Sensorineural hearing loss (from damage to the delicate sensory hair cells of the inner ear or the nerves which supply it). These hearing losses can range from mild to profound and they often affect the person's ability to hear certain frequencies more than others.

- A mixed hearing loss refers to a combination of conductive and sensorineural loss and means that a problem occurs in both the outer or middle and the inner ear.

- A central hearing loss results from damage or impairment to the nerves or nuclei of the central nervous system, either in the pathways to the brain or in the brain itself.

For severely and profoundly deaf people, acquiring language is a different process from the way in which hearing people develop language. Usually language is acquired through plentiful exposure to meaningful linguistic interaction in early childhood. Severe deafness drastically reduces both the quantity and the quality of linguistic input available to the deaf person.

For a deaf student, English language development is rarely natural and automatic, but can be a laborious process with numerous obstacles and pitfalls.

Difficulties manifest themselves most obviously in written work, where mistakes may be found with sentence structure, verb tenses, word omissions, etc. To exacerbate the problem, carrier language is often hidden in fluent speech and therefore difficult to lip-read.

The lack of hearing and auditory memory means that students may be unable to rehearse what is put down on a page. Furthermore, BSL has a grammar and syntax that is quite different to that of spoken English, which can also confuse the student.

Unfamiliar words, or words which have not been specifically introduced to the student, cannot be lip-read. Consequently, deaf students often have to research not only the technical jargon relating to the subject, but also language that is commonplace for hearing peers. An exceptional amount of time can be spent on reading and preparing assignments, often with the support of an individual language/learning support tutor.

http://www.usemyability.org/impairments/hi.html
http://www.scips.worc.ac.uk/uk/disabilities/hearing_impairment.html

A1.3   Mental Health Difficulties

The term mental health describes a sense of well being. It implies the capacity to live in a resourceful and fulfilling manner, having the resilience to deal with the challenges and obstacles that life and studying present.

Depression, stress and anxiety are the most common types of mental illness experienced by students. It is common for students to lack confidence and have low self-esteem despite having the same full range of intellectual abilities as the population as a whole.

A1.4   Anxiety

Student life is a transitional period and it can cause a lot of anxiety. Symptoms of anxiety can include: agitation, disturbed sleep, change of appetite, headaches, digestive difficulties or panic attacks. These symptoms are easily mistaken by anxious people for evidence of serious physical illness - their worry about this can make the symptoms even worse. [Changes in routine, such as starting a placement, can also create additional stress and aggravate the symptoms.]

Sudden unexpected surges of anxiety are called panic, and usually lead to the person having to quickly get out of whatever situation they happen to be in. Anxiety and panic are often accompanied by feelings of depression.

A1.5   Stress

There are many ordinary situations that can make students feel stressed for periods of time. For example, if workload is allowed to build up, during exam preparation or during a work placement.

The effects of stress depend on the severity, the length of time it goes on for and the individual concerned. How an individual deals with stress depends on their personality, ability to cope with situations, and whether there is someone supportive to talk to.

Students with mental health difficulties may experience greater anxieties about learning than other students. Some may take medication that affects their concentration, memory and their ability to participate. Short-term memory may be especially affected.

For many students their mental health may be variable, with good and bad days. This may affect attendance, punctuality and behaviour. Some students may be unable to engage in the learning process until relevant emotional issues are resolved. Progress will be variable, and regression can be common. Success can mean that some students may be reluctant to move on.

People with mental health difficulties can often lack confidence; if tutors can recognise this and promote the student's self esteem, it will have a positive outcome in terms of effective learning.

Given that periods of examination and assessment are generally the most stressful experiences for students, those with mental health difficulties may need special support at such times. This needs to be discussed and agreed with the student as early as possible.

http://www.usemyability.org/impairments/mhds.html
http://www.scips.worc.ac.uk/uk/disabilities/mentalhealthdifficulties.html

A1.6 Physical Disabilities including Neurological Disabilities

Physical disabilities affecting students can take many different forms. They can be temporary or permanent, fluctuating, stable or degenerative, and may affect parts of the body or the whole of it. Some students with physical disabilities, neurological conditions or acquired brain injury may have perceptual difficulties. Students may have experienced barriers to learning that relate to negative perceptions of their disability and low expectations. They may also have missed out on vital stages of learning during their schooling, affecting language acquisition and the development of literacy.

The initial barrier experienced by many students with physical disabilities is physically accessing the learning environment itself. For many the inaccessibility of buildings is a problem, so there are important questions to ask: Can students get into the building? Can they get around when in it? Is there somewhere for students to rest or take breaks? Is the student able to reach the teaching and learning materials?

Students with physical disabilities, neurological conditions or acquired brain injury may have perceptual difficulties, and these can take different forms. Some students have difficulty actually receiving information by seeing or hearing, while others can see or hear but cannot process the information they receive. This can cause difficulties with reading and writing, for example in locating the correct place on the page, or moving from left to right when reading or writing.

Students with a neurological impairment, who stammer or have other speech and language difficulties, along with students who are deaf or who have partial hearing, may all have difficulty communicating through speech.

People with communication difficulties are often thought to be far less able than they really are. It is important to check personal responses to ensure there are no automatic assumptions being made concerning a student's intelligence and ability if their speech is very slow or slurred. The potential of these students often goes unrecognised.
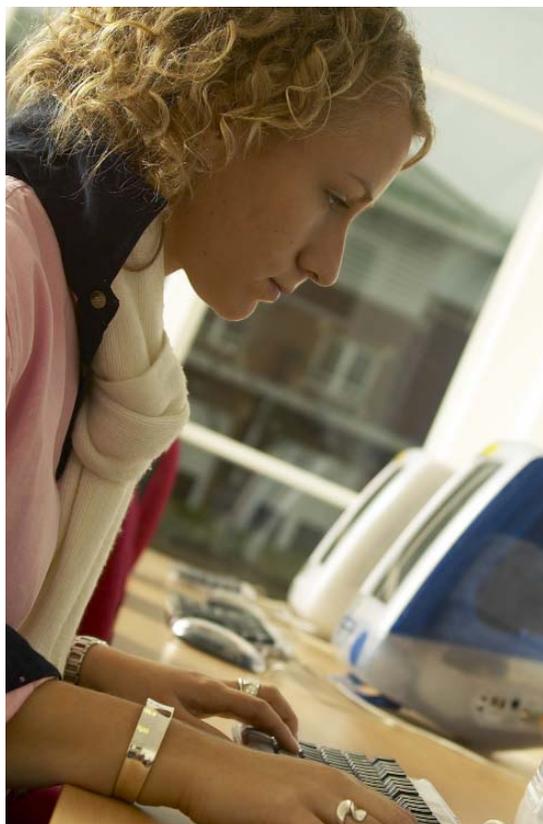
Students with short-term memory difficulties may find it very hard to remember instructions. Some students may have fluctuating memories, being able to complete a task in one session, but be unable to do it in another, making it difficult to record progress. Memory also affects students' ability to sequence. Some students with long-term memory difficulties may not learn even after many repetitions and much practice, and appear to 'start again' each time. It is important to remember that memory difficulties do not correlate with a student's intelligence.

http://www.usemyability.org/impairments/physical-impairments.html
http://www.scips.worc.ac.uk/uk/disabilities/physicaldisability.html

Specific Learning Difficulties

A1.7   Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

Inattention, hyperactivity and impulsivity are the main characteristics of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). As a student's academic success is often dependent on their ability to attend to tasks and tutor expectations with minimal distractions, a student with ADHD may struggle within the typical HE academic environment. Activities associated with acquiring necessary information for completing tasks, completing assignments and participating in discussions with their tutors and peers, are all activities that can potentially be problematic for the student with ADHD.

As students with ADHD may experience difficulties with the structured environment of a tutorial or lecture or focusing on their assigned work, they may need adjustments to the learning environment to help them remain focused on the task in hand. Students may need to be questioned about where they prefer to sit within the learning environment to help them to focus on what is being said; they may also benefit from working closely with another student who can help them to develop their co-operation skills or, if space permits, work in separate learning areas, away from other students. Different students will find different scenarios work better for them and open communication with the student about this is essential.

http://www.usemyability.org/impairments/adhd.html
http://www.scips.worc.ac.uk/uk/disabilities/adhdadd.html

A1.8   Autistic Spectrum Disorders

Autism is a lifelong developmental disorder that affects the way an individual communicates and relates to people around them. Children and adults with autism experience difficulties with everyday social interaction. Their ability to develop friendships is generally limited due to their capacity to understand other people's emotional expression.

People with autism often have accompanying learning difficulties but all individuals share the same common difficulty in making sense of the world around them... [and] generally experience three main areas of difficulty; these are known as the triad of impairments:

- Social interaction - difficulty with social relationships, e.g. appearing aloof and indifferent to others

- Social communication - difficulty with verbal and non-verbal communication, e.g. not fully understanding the meaning of common gestures, facial expressions or tone of voice

- Imagination - difficulty in the development of interpersonal skills and imagination, e.g. having a limited range of imaginative abilities, possibly copied and pursued rigidly and repetitively.

In addition to this triad, repetitive behaviour patterns and resistance to change in routine are often also characteristic.

A1.9   Aspergers Syndrome

Individuals with Aspergers syndrome find it difficult to read communication signals that most of us take for granted and, as a result, find it more difficult to communicate and interact with others. Aspergers syndrome is a form of autism, and a number of traits of autism are common to Aspergers syndrome, including:

◆   difficulty communicating - individuals may speak fluently but they may not take much notice of the reaction of the people listening to them; they may talk on and on regardless of the listener's interest or they may appear insensitive to their feelings. Despite having good language skills, people with Aspergers syndrome may sound over-precise, or over-literal jokes can cause problems as can exaggerated language, turns of phrase and metaphors

◆   difficulty forming social relationships - unlike the individual with classic autism, who often appears withdrawn and uninterested in the world around them, many people with Aspergers syndrome want to be sociable and enjoy human contact. Although they do still find it hard to understand non-verbal signals, including facial expressions, which makes it more difficult for them to form and maintain social relationships with people unaware of their needs

◆   lack of imagination and creativity - while they often excel at learning facts and figures, individuals with Aspergers syndrome often find it hard to think in abstract ways.

Students with autistic spectrum disorders may also have a number of characteristics that have a negative impact on the way they learn; these can include any or all of the following:

◆   Difficulty interacting with other students and tutors

◆   Misunderstanding or naivety within social interactions

◆   Anxiety within social interactions

◆   Reliance on routines and a dislike of sudden changes

◆   Poor organisational skills

◆   Easily distracted

◆   Confusion of relevant and irrelevant information

◆   Focusing on inappropriate details.

Students with autistic spectrum disorders may find group work situations problematic due to their difficulties with social interaction; specific group work difficulties might include: missing unspoken messages given through body language, facial expression, or tone of voice, making remarks that appear to be inappropriate to the context of the conversation, and difficulty accommodating to different audiences.

Students with autistic spectrum disorders are more likely to use language literally, finding it difficult to understand metaphors, jokes or abstract concepts. Their difficulty with the abstract and their inflexibility in thinking can extend to other areas, for example, reliance on fixed routines or demonstrating repetitive behaviour, such as wishing to sit in the same seat; they may experience distress when these routines are disrupted.

http://www.usemyability.org/impairments/asd.html
http://www.scips.worc.ac.uk/uk/disabilities/autism.html

A1.10 Dyslexia

Dyslexic students can often perform a range of complex tasks, such as solving complicated problems in electronics or design, yet cannot do the seemingly simple: learning to read and spell, organising writing, taking notes, remembering instructions, telling the time or finding their way around. A way of regarding this pattern of strengths and weaknesses is as a cognitive or learning style, in fact many dyslexic students themselves experience their dyslexia as a difference in the way they think or learn.

Because of their language processing and short-term memory difficulties, dyslexic students rely heavily on meaning and understanding, which requires:

◆   A highly personalised approach to learning

◆   A need to have the learning process and conventions made explicit

◆   A need to understand how and why in order to learn.

Reading forms a major part of most curricular activities and if a student has, for instance, half the reading speed of other students, this may put an immense strain on their studies, affecting their ability to remember what has been read. Vocabulary levels may also be poor and so comprehension suffers. Dyslexic students can experience problems with written expression and vocabulary to the point where it affects a tutor's understanding of their work.

Students with dyslexia may experience problems with their written work including some or all of the following:

◆   Poorly constructed and slow handwriting interfering with their ability to get ideas down

◆   Difficulty planning and structuring written work

◆   Problems with the transition of ideas

◆   Difficulty relating theory to practice

◆   Poor written expression and/or sentence structure

◆   Difficulty understanding conventions in writing

◆   Difficulty relating abstract to particular.

Students may experience problems taking in information given orally quickly or accurately enough, misunderstanding instructions or information, assimilating what has been said in a group situation, word-finding problems or with pronunciation of polysyllabic words.

Some dyslexic students experience short-term memory problems which can affect note-taking, reading, writing and organisation but can also make it difficult to organise their time and meet deadlines.

Many students with dyslexia are mathematically very able; however, some may have difficulties resulting from visual perceptual or short-term/working memory problems. Dyslexic students may also experience some or all of the following mathematical difficulties:

◆   Visual problems such as reversals and substitutions

◆   Transcription errors between media

◆   Losing place in multi-step calculations or failing to hold all aspects in mind

◆   Difficulty remembering sign and symbols

◆   Problems remembering formulae and theorems

◆   Difficulty retrieving specialised vocabulary

- Difficulty with arithmetic and basic numeracy

- Difficulty moving from concrete to abstract.

http://www.usemyability.org/impairments/dyslexia.html
http://www.scips.worc.ac.uk/uk/disabilities/dyslexia.html

A1.11   Dyspraxia

Dyspraxia is a specific learning difficulty that affects the brain's ability to plan sequences of movement. It is thought to be connected to the way that the brain develops, and can affect the planning of what to do and how to do it. It is often associated with problems of perception, language and thought. The effects that dyspraxia have on a person's ability to function in a day-to-day environment, as well as in a learning environment, can vary depending on the degree of difficulty.

Some people with dyspraxia have tactile defensiveness - they are over-sensitive to touch. Others may have articulatory dyspraxia, which causes difficulties with speaking and pronunciation. People with dyspraxia often have low self-esteem. They may experience depression, have mental health problems and experience emotional and behavioural difficulties.

Students may experience difficulties in some, or all, of the following areas:

- Gross motor skills: poor performance in sport, general clumsiness, poor balance, and difficulties in learning skills involving co-ordination of body parts, e.g. riding a bike or swimming

- Manual and practical work: problems using computer keyboards and mice, frequent spills in the laboratory and elsewhere, difficulty measuring accurately, slow, poor or illegible handwriting, messy presentation/work and problems with craft-work, cookery, etc

- Personal presentation and spatial skills: untidy and rumpled appearance, clumsy gait, poor posture, frequent bumping into things and tripping over and can be poor at sport, especially team and ball games

- Memory and attention span: poor attention span, poor short term memory, easily distracted in class, especially by noise and bright lights, difficulty following class discussions, slow retrieval of information, especially when under stress; may become disorientated e.g. getting lost in buildings and in new environments

- Written expression: erratic spelling and punctuation, awkward and confused sentence structure, poor proof-reading, inclusion of irrelevant material in essays and may be slow to complete work

- Visual and oral skills: trouble keeping place while reading and writing (tracking problems), poor relocating - cannot easily look from blackboard/overhead to notes, difficulty word finding, and wrong pronunciation of newly-introduced words, speaking indistinctly, loudly, fast or slowly, interrupting inappropriately and difficulty learning foreign languages

- Numerical and mathematical skills: tendency to reverse and mistype numbers, signs or decimal points, frequent and apparently careless mistakes, particular difficulty with geometry - both drawing and using equipment such as a compass or protractor and difficulty with spatial awareness e.g. drawing shapes, graphs, tables, etc

- Social, communication and emotional difficulties: problems with oral interaction and communication, low self-esteem and lack of confidence, frustration, defensiveness or aggression, over-talkative and excitable behaviour, withdrawn and reserved or may experience anxiety, stress and depression.

http://www.usemyability.org/impairments/dyspraxia.html
http://www.scips.worc.ac.uk/uk/disabilities/dyspraxia.html

A1.12 Visual Impairments

The term visual impairment covers a whole spectrum of people from those who are only slightly affected to the very small proportion who are totally blind and cannot distinguish light from dark. Only a small minority or partially sighted people have no useful vision.

Blind and partially sighted students are more dependent on their hearing for information gathering. People who have been blind since birth may have missed out on informal opportunities for learning to read, for example through the experience of signs and labels in everyday life. They will also have a conceptual framework for such concepts such as distance, dimensions and scale that is not drawn from visual images. They might have missed out on gathering everyday practical information about the world around them, which sighted people take for granted, and may therefore need to be introduced to new situations in a practical experimental manner before moving on to form concepts.

There are some fairly straightforward and low-tech ways of modifying or adapting equipment or activities to allow students with various impairments to participate in practical classes. Examples include: auditory displays of visual information (such as talking thermometers), tactical displays of visual information (such as beakers with raised markings), clamps and other devices for holding items of equipment, and hand held, illuminated magnifiers. Examples of such innovations are likely to multiply as more people who develop impairments while in employment are maintained and supported in their employment.

Students with visual difficulties working in laboratories can also experience problems with textual materials as well as equipment. In these circumstances, alternative formats, verbalising text or interfacing laboratory equipment with computer with large print or speech output can all be useful adjustments. Students with visual difficulties can also experience problems with laboratory layout and may require extra assistance to help them familiarise themselves with layout and location of equipment.

http://www.usemyability.org/impairments/vi.html
http://www.scips.worc.ac.uk/uk/disabilities/visualimpairment.html

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Further information

The sources listed below provide further information which is often geared to particular roles and disabilities. General checklists for evaluating placements, and templates for letters to be sent to potential employers, are available in the DfES guidance and a 'quickstart' checklist and a wide range of other information on universal instructional design for courses for distance learning and face-to-face students is available on the University of Guelph's site.

Birmingham City University *Supporting Students with Dyslexia* [online]
http://www.bcu.ac.uk/_media/docs/Dyslexia_Toolkit.pdf
[Accessed 19.5.11]

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http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/disability-office/staff/supporting-students/accessible-placements
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Accessible high quality placements and work based learning for all students
Guidance for staff in managing work placements for disabled students

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