

Disability Service Guide for Academic Liaison Officers & Tutors

Contents

[Introduction 3](#_Toc427073172)

[What is a Disability? 4](#_Toc427073173)

[Registering With the Disability Service 5](#_Toc427073174)

[Disclosure of disability 5](#_Toc427073175)

[Reasonable Accommodations 6](#_Toc427073176)

[Procedures to determine Reasonable Accommodations 6](#_Toc427073177)

[Needs assessment 6](#_Toc427073178)

[Communications with Academics and Departments /Schools 7](#_Toc427073179)

[Needs Assessments from the Disability Service 7](#_Toc427073180)

[Communicating Information to Department / School Staff 8](#_Toc427073181)

[Communicating with Students 8](#_Toc427073182)

[Confidentiality 9](#_Toc427073183)

FAQs http://www.tcd.ie/disability/A-Z/ 10

# Introduction

Trinity College, The University of Dublin is committed to ensuring that students with a disability have as complete and equitable access to all facets of Trinity life as can reasonably be provided. Trinity has adopted a code of practice which is applicable to all students with disabilities studying in Trinity. This code of practice is devised in accordance with the Disability Act 2005, the Equal Status Acts 2000 (as amended) and the University Act 1997. As stated in the [Trinity Calendar](http://www.tcd.ie/calendar/), students with a disability are encouraged to register with the Disability Service (DS) to seek supports where the disability could affect their ability to participate fully in all aspects of the course.

The DS has developed the “Outreach, Transition, Retention and Progression Plan 2015 – 2020”, which outlines clear and effective support systems at all stages of the student Higher Education journey. This plan supports students with disabilities across their Trinity career, from pre-entry to employment. It takes a strategic approach to enhancing the student experience by engaging prospective students, current students, and staff, with the intention of improving practice and implementing change across the whole institution. It is an example of evidence-based practice using on-going data collection and evaluation to improve the student journey, which is delivered in three phases:

Phase 1: Pre-entry, admission and the first-year experience.

Phase 2: Building and maintaining a college career.

Phase 3: Progressing through College to employment.

For further information on the DS Pathways to Trinity strategy is available here: [Student Journey](http://www.tcd.ie/disability/strategic-plan/)

# What Is a Disability?

The legal definition of disability, which is outlined in the Equal Status Acts (2000, as amended)*,* defines disability as follows:

1. “the total or partial absence of a person’s bodily or mental functions, including the absence of a part of a person’s body,
2. the presence in the body of organisms causing or likely to cause, chronic disease or illness,
3. the malfunction, malformation or disfigurement of a part of a person’s body,
4. a condition or malfunction which results in a person learning differently from a person without the condition or malfunction, or
5. a condition, illness or disease which affects a person’s thought processes, perception of reality, emotions or judgement or which results in disturbed behaviour.”

AHEAD offers a useful working definition, defining disability as follows:

A student is disabled if he/she requires a facility which is outside of the mainstream provision of the college in order to participate fully in higher education and without which the student would be educationally disadvantaged in comparison with their peers.

Students who register with the DS in Trinity have a range of disabilities:

* Autistic Spectrum Disorder
* Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
* Hard of hearing/Deaf
* Mental Health Difficulties
* Physical Disability
* Specific Learning Difficulties (e.g. Dyslexia)
* Significant Ongoing Illness
* Visually Impaired/Blind

The nature and type of support available varies and will be tailored to meet individual requirements, but may include the following:

* Arranging support providers, including: note-takers, academic/library assistants, personal assistants etc.
* Assisting students with applications for funded supports via the European Social Fund (ESF).
* Liaising with a number of departments across Trinity, including: Examinations Office, Schools, Accommodation, Estates and Facilities, Library, IS services etc. to ensure that specific support requirements for students are met.

# Registering With the Disability Service

## Disclosure of disability: pre or post entry

Within the CAO application system, applicants can enter the Disability Access Route to Education (DARE) by disclosing a disability. DARE is a supplementary admissions scheme which offers college places on reduced points to school leavers with disabilities. Through DARE, applicants can indicate a disability/specific learning difficulty on the application form and submit appropriate support documentation. For further details of the DARE scheme please see: [Access College Website.](http://www.accesscollege.ie/)

The information disclosed by applicants through DARE also allows the DS to prioritise which students need to be seen first — i.e. those with the most complex needs — and from August onwards, Disability Officers begin the process of assessing the needs of these students. Students can declare their disability at any time pre- or post-entry. When registering with the DS, students provide evidence of their disability/specific learning difficulty.

## Reasonable Accommodations

For the purpose of this document and all Trinity policies relating to students with disabilities, a “reasonable accommodation” (RA) is defined as being any action that helps alleviate a substantial disadvantage. Making a RA might involve changing procedures, modifying the delivery of the course taken, providing additional services (e.g. examination arrangements, materials in large print), or altering the physical environment.

## Procedures to determine Reasonable Accommodations

All students registering with the DS meet with a Disability Officer for a needs assessment, at which time potential supports are discussed. At peak times, August/September, in order to efficiently register students and arrange supports in a timely manner, the schedule of appointments begins for students who enter Trinity via DARE (below the points for the course of their choice) and those most likely to have high support needs.

In addition, all students receive a copy of the Student Handbook sent to them by email, which provides an outline of how a student may typically expect to be supported. Provisions beyond these guidelines can only be given in exceptional circumstances and must be requested through the student’s Disability Officer. All students registering with the DS must provide relevant evidence. RAs will only be granted if the documentation provided by the student properly identifies the deficits/difficulties that need to be compensated for. Evidence of a Specific Learning Difficulty (SLD, e.g. dyslexia) is required from an Educational Psychologist – guidelines on suitable documentation are available from the [DS website](http://www.tcd.ie/disability/policies/Disab-Forms.php). The DS also arranges supports for students during examinations and assessment. Further details are available at [Exam arrangements for students with disabilities](http://www.tcd.ie/disability/services/exam-accommodations.php).

## Needs assessment

All students who register with the DS have an individual assessment of needs to determine the support they require. The students have an informal “interview” with one of the Disability Officers which addresses the following:

1. Nature of disability or condition, to include: impact on education, severity, hospital admissions etc.;
2. Treatment: any medication they are taking, outpatients’ appointments, such as physiotherapy;
3. Previous support: what arrangements were made at secondary school, if any;
4. Current difficulties: what difficulties does the student anticipate they may have with their course;
5. Access to equipment and IT facilities;
6. Appropriate support.

This Needs Assessment helps determine the level of services the student requires. A report is generated following this Needs Assessment. The information in this report is passed on to the relevant staff within the College (i.e. teaching staff, DS personnel, College Tutor) to help them also provide assistance. Should the students’ needs or requirements change, students should inform their Disability Officer.

# Communications with Academics and Departments /Schools

## Needs Assessments from the Disability Service

After an assessment of need has taken place, a Disability Officer details all of the supports a student requires in a Learning Educational Needs Summary (LENS) report. This information is disseminated via Share Point at School/Departmental level, usually to the Academic Liaison Officer (ALO) and School Administrator. ALOs can liaise with the DS on any issues relating to students with disabilities studying in their department/school. The LENS report is automatically updated at the beginning of each academic year. All students in a particular School will have their support needs summarized on a group excel sheet. Only students with higher support needs will have individual reports. These students will be indicated on the excel sheet and their LENS reports will be stored in Share Point in a dedicated School folder.

When the School Share Point folder is made available, it is important that this information is communicated to all staff at a School level. We appreciate that individual Department/Schools will have their own procedures for maintaining and communicating information. However, with the implementation of the Disability Act 2005 it is vital that the support requirements of students are communicated effectively to **all** staff who are involved in teaching the student, including staff outside the Department/School e.g. if the student is completing modules within another Department/School. In cases such as this, the memo should be forwarded to this area of study in which the student is taking a module.

It is strongly recommended that the School ALO holds a copy of this memo on individually created files for each of the students registered with the DS in their Department/School.

## Communicating Information to Department / School Staff

As stated, in disseminating information regarding a student’s support requirements, the ALO can send the LENS from the DS directly to all teaching staff. This should provide staff with adequate information regarding the nature of the student’s disability and why such support is being put in place. In conjunction with the DS, the key role of the ALO is to ensure that such support is put in place at a Department/School level.

## Communicating with Students

The School ALO is a local contact for students with disabilities and, as such, students should contact their School ALO regarding any difficulties they are experiencing at an inter-department/school level.

At the beginning of each academic year all students are strongly advised by the DS to contact their School ALO to discuss any concerns or support requirements. Sometimes it is useful to have a meeting with the student and the Disability Officer to go over all items covered in the memo.

# Confidentiality

We encourage students with disabilities to disclose information on their disability/specific learning difficulty to the DS before they apply to college or at any point during their studies. Such disclosure is encouraged so that Trinity can work with the student in ensuring that any reasonable accommodation required is identified and facilitated in conjunction with the student.

Any documentation or information presented in disclosing a disability is held by the DS, and specific medical or other documentation will not be disclosed to any third party without the permission of the student.

Where a student requests, and is granted, any form of reasonable accommodation — such as extra time in exams, or permission to tape record lecturers’ notes — the DS will, in consultation with the student, disclose relevant information to the individuals in those departments responsible for providing or facilitating students in accessing such accommodations. In such instances, only information relevant to the particular situation will be disclosed.

The LENS report gives the DS permission to pass information regarding the student to staff directly involved in teaching or supporting them. Therefore, in communicating information regarding a student, the LENS can be passed to staff directly involved with the student. The information should still however be treated on a “need to know” basis and only those staff who teach/deal with the student should receive this information and not all staff.

Under Equality legislation, if a student discloses a disability to a staff member in the academic school and/or a Tutor, Trinity as a whole is deemed to know. It is therefore important to act on information that is disclosed to you. Encourage the student to register with the DS if they have not done so already. If a student does not want supports, or for the disclosure to go any further, it is recommended that you confirm this in writing with the student.

# FAQs <http://www.tcd.ie/disability/A-Z/>

**1. Does Trinity have a policy on supporting students with disabilities?**

Trinity has a Code of Practice for students with disabilities. This Code of Practice is intended to ensure a good standard of service to students with disabilities. Trinity will take reasonable steps to ensure that it does not place a student with a disability at a substantial disadvantage compared to a non-disabled student. The complete code is linked on our web page: [Disability Service Code of Practice](http://www.tcd.ie/disability/policies/Disab-Forms.php)

**2. Many LENS reports ask for the students to be provided with lecture notes. Is this necessary if notes are available online?**

Where the request for lecture notes has been made by the DS, it is imperative that, if it is not possible to provide such support, the DS is contacted immediately. This will enable the DS to discuss alternative support with the student.

More and more Departments/Schools are now making copies of lecture notes available online, which is extremely beneficial for all students, not just those with note-taking difficulties. An alternative to this is to email copies of notes to the student in advance, which again, avoids any contact with the student during the lecture.

**3. Whose responsibility is it to arrange accessible venues for students with disabilities?**

The DS endeavours to see those students with mobility or physical disabilities prior to the commencement of the new academic year to allow for the arrangement for timetables and accessible venues. If a student requires an accessible venue, this will be detailed in their support requirements memo.

It is the responsibility of the Department/School, in conjunction with Room Bookings where appropriate, to ensure that classes with students with mobility difficulties are given priority in booking accessible venues. Where difficulties arise in making such arrangements, it is essential that the Department/School contact the DS immediately in order to allow staff to assist in the negotiation process.

**4. Is there a policy on how much of an extension should be given to students who have been recommended “flexibility with deadlines”?**

Within the support requirements memo from the DS, one recommendation that may be detailed is the request for flexibility with deadlines. The rationale as to why this is necessary is also detailed. Students are informed by the DS that for any extensions they need to contact either their Tutor, School ALO or the member of staff concerned prior to the existing deadline for the work. Students are aware that they are not in receipt of a blanket extension for the academic year and this is a form of support not to be abused.

There is no policy or guideline as to how much time is reasonable. This will depend on the individual student’s circumstances and the lecturer involved. Deadlines are made for a reason, and sometimes it may not be possible to provide students with an extension e.g. work must be submitted before the next exam board meeting. Where possible, however, staff and students should agree a suitable submission date between themselves.

**5. Are there any guidelines on how to mark the work of a dyslexic student and students who are Deaf?**

In accordance with Trinity’s on-going commitment to providing reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities, the following changes have been introduced:

**Stickers:** Students with dyslexia, or who are deaf, or have a significant hearing difficulty now have the option of formally disclosing their disability on their exam scripts. A list of students who have requested this accommodation has been sent to the Exams office. The Exams Office will provide invigilators with the stickers, and instructions to apply the appropriate sticker to the exam scripts. The stickers are printed with the Trinity crest and a link for further information.

* Notes for examiners – assessment of students who have difficulties with reading, spelling and/or writing.

The following guidelines contain useful information and on how to mark the work of a Deaf or dyslexic student: [Exam Guidelines](https://www.tcd.ie/academicregistry/exams/assets/local/examsfordisabilitystudents2015.pdf).

**6. What happens if the support recommended does not suit the course of study?**

Disability Officers do not know everything about every course run in Trinity. However, it is likely that staff within the Department/School will! If the support recommended by the Disability Officer does not suit a particular part of the student’s course, please inform the Disability Officer concerned and discuss possible alternatives to ensure that the student is supported appropriately.

**7. What do I do if I think a student is dyslexic?**

The DS does not provide formal dyslexia screening or testing but students are offered a consultation with a disability officer to determine the next appropriate steps to take. Information related to this area can be viewed at: [Dyslexia](https://www.tcd.ie/disability/services/dyslexia-consult.php) Consultations.

**8. One of my students has a note-taker accompany him/her to class. What exactly is the role of the note-taker and should they be attending a class if the student is not present?**

If a student has a note-taker accompanying them to class, it will be detailed in their support memo. Some student may choose not to sit beside their note-taker in class and it may not be apparent who the note-taker is. All note-takers are encouraged to make themselves known to the lecturer, to ensure that embarrassing situations do not arise, such as the note-taker being asked a question.

The role of the note-taker is to take notes only. They should not participate in class discussions or interact with other students. Note-takers should not attend a class if the student is not there. However, in exceptional circumstances, note-takers have been arranged to take notes for students who are sick and cannot attend, for reasons related to their disability. Note-takers are asked to report to the DS if a student habitually fails to turn up.

**9. What financial assistance is available for students with disabilities?**

There are two main sources of funds for students with disabilities:

**Social Welfare Benefits include:**

* Disability Allowance
* Back to Education Allowance
* Supplementary Benefits

For more information see the Department of Social Protection web pages: [Disability Allowance Section](http://www.welfare.ie/EN/Schemes/IllnessDisabilityAndCaring/PeoplewithDisabilities/DisabilityAllowance/Pages/da.aspx).

**ESF Student with Disability Fund:**

Much of the study-related support for students with a disability is financed through the ESF fund. The National Access Office, on behalf of the Department of Education & Skills, pays these grants. This grant is not means-tested and is available to undergraduates and postgraduates studying in the third level sector. This fund is for a person who needs a specific academic support associated with their disability.

Students can also contact their Disability Officer to discuss funding. For more information on all funding available to students in higher education see: [Student Finance](http://www.studentfinance.ie)

**10. Is there a policy relating to Fitness to Practice?**

A fitness to practice policy for Trinity was adopted by the Board in May 2009. It contains guidelines for Schools and Course Committees on the content of school/departmental fitness to practice policies, together with recommendations on new procedures for dealing with fitness to practice cases. The report outlines the substantive elements of the policy, noting that relevant Schools/Disciplines should (when formulating a policy) address:

* The competencies that are being assessed in the specific course and/or placement
* Whether the competency requirement is justifiable in relation to each specific course and/or placement,
* How competencies are assessed, and
* Whether the School/Discipline has engaged with the DS to determine how the student's needs might be reasonably accommodated.

The adoption of this policy is a positive step and will protect students who disclose a disability and who seek reasonable accommodations in placements as part of their professional courses. The DS continues to engage with, and support, relevant schools in identifying problem areas in placements and in understanding the reasonable accommodation process in work-based environments. For more information see: [Fitness to Practice Policy](http://www.tcd.ie/about/policies/fitness-to-practice-policy.php)

**11. How can I help students who disclose a disability, or who think they may have a disability?**

**Students who disclose a disability**

Students who disclose a disability to staff and who are seeking guidance and support, should be informed in writing, preferably via their Trinity email account, that they are advised to register with the DS as soon as possible. The six steps to DS registration are provided at <http://www.tcd.ie/disability/current/registration.php>. You as a School/Discipline Academic may also complete a [Disability Services Referral Form](http://www.tcd.ie/disability/assets/doc/Word%20Docs/Student%20services%20referral%20form.doc) which the student should bring with them at the point of registration.

**Students who are experiencing difficulty with academic work**

Students have access to an academic skills module in Blackboard via <http://mymodule.tcd.ie/> and study support from Student Learning Development. The DS also provides resources for students with Dyslexia, which are of benefit to all students experiencing difficulties with academic skills. For example there are some very useful podcasts and leaflets available at <http://www.tcd.ie/disability/services/academic-support.php> and <http://www.tcd.ie/disability/services/academic-support/audio-media.php>

Information on free software that will assist with proofreading and editing written work, is available from <http://www.tcd.ie/disability/services/web-resources.php>

**Students on professional courses who disclose a disability but are reluctant to register with the Disability Service**

Students on professional courses who disclose a disability to school staff should be encouraged to register with the DS. This is because students who disclose a disability cannot avail of reasonable accommodations either for academic work or on placement without being registered with the DS. After discussion with their Tutor, students should be informed in writing, preferably via their Trinity email address, that they are advised to register with the DS as soon as possible. Students should also be directed to the ‘Guide for Students with Disabilities on Professional Placement’ which encourages all parties involved to work together to ensure that students with disabilities have a good work placement experience <http://www.tcd.ie/disability/services/placement-planning.php>.

**Referral from another Student Service to the Disability Service**

Some disabled students may be availing of other Student Services in Trinity and may benefit from services provided by DS, such as exam accommodation or Unilink. The Student Services Referral Form <http://www.tcd.ie/disability/assets/doc/Word%20Docs/Student%20services%20referral%20form.doc> should be completed by the relevant referral point (Counselling Service, College Health Centre, Tutor), with written consent from the student.

**Students who have been granted Medical Repeat status**

Where appropriate Tutors or ALOs can encourage students who are repeating the academic year on medical grounds to register with the Disability Service. In such cases students should complete the six steps to DS registration at <http://www.tcd.ie/disability/current/registration.php>.

Tutors or ALOs may also complete a [Disability Services Referral Form](http://www.tcd.ie/disability/assets/doc/Word%20Docs/Student%20services%20referral%20form.doc) which the student should bring with them at the point of registration.

**12. Who works in the Disability Service?**

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| **Declan Treanor**  **DS Director**  **E-mail:** [**dtreanor@tcd.ie**](mailto:dtreanor@tcd.ie)  **Tel: (01) 896 3475** | **Declan Reilly**  **Disability Officer**  **E-mail:** [**reillyde@tcd.ie**](mailto:reillyde@tcd.ie)  **Tel: (01) 896 3014** |
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