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A guide for Academic Liaison Officers on the Disability Service

The Student Journey

The Disability Service (DS) in Trinity College Dublin has developed an Outreach, Transition, Retention and Progression Plan 2010 – 2013 which will develop clear and effective support systems at all stages of the student Higher Education journey. This strategy supports students with disabilities across their college 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 Disability Service Pathways to Trinity strategy is available here: [Student Journey](#)

What is a disability?

The legal definition of disability, which is outlined in the Equal Status Acts 2000-2004, is the one that applies in college. This definition of disability is very broad and includes people who have a physical, learning, sensory, psychiatric or medical condition.

A more effective working definition used by AHEAD which defines disability as follows:

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“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.”

Generally students who register with DS in College are from the following groups:

- Asperger's Syndrome
- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
- Hearing Impaired, / Deaf
- Medical Disability
- Mental Health Difficulties
- Physical Disability
- Specific Learning Difficulties (e.g. dyslexia)
- 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, library assistants, proof-readers, personal assistants etc.
- Assisting students with applications for funded supports via the ESF Student with disability fund.
- Liaising with a number of departments across the College e.g. Exams Office, Schools, Accommodation, Director of Buildings Office, Library, IS services etc to ensure that students' specific support requirements are met.



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Registering with the Disability Service

Disclosure of Disability

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 their specific disability/specific learning difficulty on the application form and submit appropriate documentation. For further details of the DARE scheme please see: [Access College Website](#)

The information disclosed by applicants through DARE also allows the Disability Service 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 Disability Service students provide evidence of their disability / specific learning difficulty.

Reasonable Accommodations

For the purpose of this document and all College policies relating to students with disabilities, a reasonable accommodation might be any action that helps alleviate a substantial disadvantage. Making a reasonable accommodation 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 DS will meet with a Disability Officer who will advise the student what supports they may be able to avail of. In addition, all students will receive relevant information as part of their induction pack (Student Handbook) to College sent to them by DS. The handbook is provided to outline what a student can typically

expect. 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 DS must provide relevant evidence. Reasonable accommodations will only be granted if the documentation provided by the student properly identifies the deficits/difficulties that need to be compensated for. Evidence for a Specific Learning Difficulty (SLD e.g. dyslexia) is required from an Educational Psychologist – guidelines on suitable documentation is available at: [Dyslexia Assessment Guidelines](#)

The Disability Service also arranges supports for students during examinations and assessment. Further details are available at: [Exam arrangements for students with disabilities](#)

Needs assessment

All students who register with Disability Services 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: impact on education, severity, any hospital admissions;
2. Treatment: any medication they are taking, outpatient's 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
5. Course;
6. Access to equipment and IT facilities;
7. 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, Academic Liaison Officer Awareness Pack 2013 - 2014

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 support a student requires in a Learning Educational Needs Summary (LENS). This information is disseminated via Share Point at School level, usually to the Academic Liaison Officer (ALO) and School Administrator. ALO's can liaise with the Disability Service on any issues relating to students with disabilities studying in their department/school. The LENS 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 forward this area of study in which the student is taking a module.

It is strongly recommended that the School Academic Liaison Officer holds a copy of this memo on individually created files for each of the students registered with Disability Support Services 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 Disability Services 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 Disability Service, the key role of the disability contact person 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 intra-department/school level.

At the beginning of each academic year all students are strongly advised by Disability Services 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 Disability Service before they apply to college or at any point during their studies. Such disclosure is encouraged so that College 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 Disability Service and specific medical or other documentation will not be disclosed to any third party.

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 College will, in
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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.

This gives the Disability Service 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 you, the University 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 Disability Service 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.

FAQ's

1. Many LENS reports ask for the student to be provided with lecture notes. Is this necessary if notes are available on line?

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

More and more Departments/Schools are now making copies of lecture notes available on line, which is extremely beneficial for all students, not just those with note taking difficulties. Some students however require notes to be provided to them in advance of lectures and in such cases, this should be done in a discreet manner e.g. students are not provided with the material in front of their peers. A system that has worked well to

date is for a wallet/box for each student to be held in the Department /School office where staff can leave in lecture notes. Students can then call into the office to collect such material on a weekly basis. 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.

2. One of my students has a note taker accompany him 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 Disability Service if a student habitually fails to turn up.

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

The Disability Service 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 Disability Service immediately in 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 Disability Service, a recommendation, which 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 Disability Service that for any extensions they need to contact either their 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. However, were possible, 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 College'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 College 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 contains useful information and on how to mark the work of a Deaf or dyslexic student: [Exam Guidelines](#)

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

Disability Officers cannot possibly know everything about every course run in College. 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?

Information related to this area can be viewed at: [Dyslexia Screening](#)

7.1 Why are so many students with dyslexia studying at College?

Dyslexia has always existed, but improved assessment techniques and greater awareness of dyslexia amongst teachers and lecturers has resulted in more students being identified as having dyslexia than ever before.

8. Does College have a policy on supporting students with disabilities?

College has a Code of Practice for students with disabilities. This Code of Practice is intended to provide a model for a high standard of service to students with disabilities. College 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](#)

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

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

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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](#)

ESF Student with Disability Fund:

Much of the study related-support for students with a disability is financed through the ESF Student with Disability 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 with a specific academic support need 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](#)

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

A fitness to practice policy for College was adopted by 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:

- I. the competencies that are being assessed in the specific course and/or placement,
- II. whether the competency requirement is justifiable in relation to each specific course and/or placement,

- III. how competencies are assessed, and
- IV. in the case of a student with a disability, whether the School/discipline has engaged with the Disability Service 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 Disability Service continues to engage with relevant schools in supporting them to identify problem areas in placements and in understanding the reasonable accommodation process in work based environments. For more information see: <http://www.tcd.ie/about/policies/fitness-to-practice-policy.php>

11. What is the responsibility of students for their LENS report?

The Disability Service is aware that students do not always understand their responsibility in ensuring their accommodations specified in the Lens take place. From this academic year on, a greater emphasis will be put on students to take responsibility for the implementation of the supports and accommodations detailed in their reports. This will start from their first meeting with their disability officer where their responsibility will be explained and continue with the creation of their Lens report and its circulation.

12. Who works in the Disability Service?

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