A short guide to getting it right for disabled student placements

Guidance for university staff working with disabled students on placements

Judith Waterfield and Bob West
University of Plymouth

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Introduction

This section of the guidance is specifically directed at university academic and support staff, such as:

• Personal Tutors
• Placement organizers
• Placement co-ordinators
• Practice assessment panel members
• Programme managers
• Placement Development Teams
• Course organizers or course tutors

The guidance is in two sections.

The first part consists of a succinct set of five key reminders that provide the broad context for best practice.

The second part of the guidance, the larger section, is presented as six sets of interrelated key questions for academic and support staff to consider.   The answers to these will allow staff to decide whether they are operating within a framework of good practice or if their practice needs to be improved.   It might also be read as a form of practical risk assessment.

If you feel that there are questions that elicit an unsatisfactory response, these are likely to form the grounds for poor quality student outcomes and perhaps complaints under the DDA (2005).

The key questions are organised into the following six areas:

• Key questions for making early interventions
• Key questions for supporting disability disclosure
• Key questions for developing an anticipatory relationship with placement providers
• Key questions for developing clear role responsibilities
• Key questions for making 'reasonable adjustments' effective
• Key questions for supporting disabled student feedback

Five key reminders for university staff

1.**Disabled people have a legal right to expect equality of opportunity** and non-discrimination in the provision of placement learning.   In short, the removal of barriers. Disabled students anticipate not being treated stereotypically but wish to be seen as individuals with their own unique skills and aspirations. Attitudes and actions are best based on being positive about disability, derived from the social model, and the objective of making activities inclusive.

2. **Disclosure of disability may prove to be critical** to understanding student past experience, relevant skills acquired, support and technology solutions, and perceived strengths and weaknesses; all leading to the requirement under the DDA (2005) to establish the 'reasonable adjustments' likely to contribute towards a quality learning experience.

3. **Prompt timing is of the essence.** Placements for disabled students may require considerably longer to organize properly with a longer lead-in time, greater supervision time and students may take longer to complete tasks. At a practical level this is the most important aspect to keep in the forefront of your mind.

4. **Defining who has responsibility for what amongst stakeholders**, in a transparent way, is fundamental for providing an inclusive placement framework based on the legal requirement that administrative and academic staff should be anticipatory in making 'reasonable adjustments'.

5. **Continuous liaison between all the stakeholders** is a prerequisite for preparing, undertaking, monitoring and subsequently evaluating disabled student placement.   This will help support the evidence base for the pre-placement curriculum and future placement arrangements.

Some key questions for academic, administrative and support staff to consider

Key Questions for making early interventions

What early intervention procedure (i.e., linked to disability disclosure on the UCAS form) is available for ensuring that those disabled student applicants who are likely to require an occupational health assessment are offered one well in advance of any scheduled information meeting?

If a placement is embedded within a programme, is the issue of pre-placement planning such as the anticipation of 'reasonable adjustments', etc., discussed at an information meeting?

What procedures and policies are in place in the department to ensure that information concerning student placement, presented in the synopsis of an information meeting or in a Teaching and Learning Support Document (TLSD), is followed up and actioned?

Are students offered a questionnaire to support the allocation of placements, does it include any disability IAG?

In general is there any correlation between the allocation of placements and the requirements of disabled students?

If placements are hand-picked by staff within the faculty or school, how are disability considerations built into the procedure?

If placements are automatically allocated (i.e., electronically), or if students sign up for placements at the point of academic offer, what arrangements are there to ensure that a disabled student placement is a suitable one?

If students are offered self-elected placements, what guidance is offered to them to ensure that their choice is a sustainable one in terms of their disability and the 'reasonable adjustments' required?

What efforts are made to understand the disabled student's self-perception and how this might impact on their ability to meet the intended placement outcomes?

In the context of the responsibilities shared between disabled students, academic staff and placement providers, are disabled students encouraged to take responsibility for themselves (especially in a context where developing professional skills is part of the learning experience)?

On agreeing a placement, who in the faculty or school triggers the arrangement of a pre-placement meeting for a disabled student, involving the student, the placement co-ordinator, etc, DAS and the placement provider?

Who in the faculty or school has responsibility for disseminating the information from the TLSD to other academic colleagues?

What procedures in the faculty or school govern the actions taken to progress the information derived from the TLSD (e.g., in the context of the placement provider)?

Key questions for supporting disability disclosure

How is the potential value of disability disclosure to placement experience conveyed to the student?

Where a disabled student has agreed that disability disclosure will include disclosing to the placement provider, what criteria are to be used to establish 'who knows what' in the sharing of confidential information within placement partnerships?

In the instance of a disabled student having disclosed to the university but wishing not to disclose to the placement provider (partial disclosure), how is this reluctance dealt with?

If a student makes a late disclosure of disability what measures are taken to try to ensure that the placement opportunity is disrupted as little as possible?

Key questions for developing an anticipatory relationship with placement providers

Prior to placement is there an arrangement for agreeing to organize a pre-placement meeting with the student and the placement co-ordinator, etc?

How is being anticipatory towards disabled students linked to the collecting of information from those offering student placements?

Are placement providers evaluated in terms of their attitudes towards inclusive placements for disabled students?

If it is anticipated that professional values might be seen by placement providers to clash with support requirements, how is this overcome?

How are potential new placement providers approached in terms of developing inclusive placement opportunities?

Is the approval of new placement providers contingent upon a positive attitude towards disabled student placement?

Does the faculty or school have a list of organizations, agencies and authorities that are pro-active in offering placements to disabled students?

Does the faculty or school produce disability guidance for the placement provider in its placement guidance notes?

If there is a responsibility for supporting placement educators does it include any elements of disability awareness as part of their staff development?

If a disabled student reports discrimination or harassment in their placement, what action is taken? For example, what practical steps can be pursued to both register a complaint without jeopardizing a potentially scarce placement resource?

Key questions for developing clear role responsibilities

Where the duties and responsibilities of the HEI and the placement provider overlap is this interface clearly understood by all stakeholders?

How do you ensure that role confusion doesn't develop?

When a crisis occurs at a disabled student placement what actions are taken to manage and record events and monitor outcomes?

In situations of critical timing, what procedures exist for supporting disabled students when alterations are made to placement venues at short notice, or when placements are allocated at short notice?

Key questions for making 'reasonable adjustments' effective

Are 'reasonable adjustments' for individual student placements being considered in the faculty or school?

With student agreement, who has responsibility for and what means is used to inform the placement provider of the nature of the disability, the impact it has on the student, and the likely 'reasonable adjustments' required?

Are the support lessons learnt from previous placement(s) for an individual student applied to pre-planning for subsequent placements?

Have 'reasonable adjustments' been made in the context of ensuring that the academic standards are not compromised?

Is the relationship between the duty to make 'reasonable adjustments' and the legitimacy of competence standards properly understood and implemented?

What is the arrangement for organizing mid-term placement reviews for disabled students, and who is invited to attend?

How does the university monitor the non-discriminatory nature of the placement provision?

What procedures are in place for liaising with disabled students and placement providers during out of term time?

How are disabled student evaluations of 'reasonable adjustments' sought and acted upon?

What is the procedure in circumstances where 'reasonable adjustments' have not been correctly anticipated?

Key questions for supporting disabled student feedback

Is there a designated procedure or aspect of a more general evaluation that requires disabled students to provide feedback of their placement experiences in terms of 'reasonable adjustments' , inclusivity, discrimination, etc?

What measures are taken to encourage students to report unsuccessful aspects of placement that may have been based on disability discrimination or harassment?

There may be misconceptions amongst disabled students that negative feedback will affect their employment opportunities. How is this countered?

How is disabled student feedback fed into pre-placement planning for future students, the pre-placement curriculum and course development, approval, monitoring and review?

Who has responsibility for actioning disabled student placement feedback?