

A short guide to getting it right for disabled student placements

Guidance for placement providers with responsibilities for disabled student placements

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Introduction

This section of the guidance is specifically directed at placement providers and those staff who have responsibilities for disabled students on placement, such as:

- Representatives of organizations and agencies offering student placements
- Education leads
- Placement educators
- Mentors
- Off-site practice educators

The guidance is in two sections.

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

The second part of the guidance, the larger section, is presented as seven sets of key questions for placement providers 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 seven areas:

- Key questions for developing a positive culture of disability
- Key questions for supporting disability disclosure
- Key questions for making interventions anticipatory
- Key questions for making 'reasonable adjustments' effective
- Key questions for developing clear role responsibilities
- Key questions for supporting disabled student feedback
- Key questions for supporting CPD for placement educators and mentors, etc.

Six key reminders for placement providers

- 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 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. Being positive about disabled students on placements** will help maximize the institutional benefits accruing to other disabled employees, clients and customers.
- 3. 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. Reluctance to disclose has often been found to be based on past experience of disability discrimination in the work place.
- 4. 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.
- 5. 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 staff should be anticipatory in making 'reasonable adjustments.'
- 6. Continuous liaison between all the stakeholders** is a prerequisite for preparing, undertaking, monitoring and subsequently evaluating disabled student placement. This will help support the development of sound work practices and encourage staff to acquire specialist expertise.

Some key questions for placement providers to consider

Key questions for developing a positive culture of disability

When placement educators or mentors have past experience of working with disabled students, or a willingness to do so, is this information recorded and made known to the placement provider and the university?

Is the presence of a disabled student on placement regarded as an asset as a colleague, or construed in the same way that a disabled client or patient might be, i.e., potentially medicalized?

Where the mentoring of a small minority of disabled students on placement might lead to changing work practices for placement educators is there a mechanism for the reallocation of some of their other work responsibilities?

How does the positivity of a good inclusive opportunity for a disabled student placement get maximized for other disabled students, employees and clients?

How are disabled students on placement regarded as valuable role models within the organization?

Are disabled students encouraged to take responsibility for themselves in a context where developing professional skills is part of the learning experience?

How are the disabled students tried and tested life management and learning strategies embedded into the placement practice?

Do placement educators recognize the need to offer disabled students sufficient time to explain the challenges they experience whilst on placement?

How can your organization plan for the fact that one of the most common negative factors reported by disabled students on placement is their own anxiety (sometimes based on previous experiences of discrimination) and the detrimental consequences of that on performance, often not assuaged by placement mentors or placement educators?

In what ways is the misapprehension that placements need to be made easier for disabled students guarded against?

Is there any risk in how disabled student placement experience is organized that assumptions about what a student can and cannot do will inform what they are expected to do? For example, how do you guard against situations where essential competencies are not undertaken, through pre-conceived staff ideas, and therefore the placement is recorded as 'a failure'?

Key questions for supporting disability disclosure

When a student has declared a disability, and to meet the expectations in terms of student confidentiality, data protection and health and safety, who in the placement organization needs to know, and what do they need to know?

What measures are taken to ensure that the student has been actively involved in deciding 'who knows what' and the timing of any disclosure of their disability?

Key questions for making interventions anticipatory

Is the placement provider undertaking regular audits of their facilities and activities to evaluate their accessibility to disabled students on placement (which will benefit all disabled employees and clients or customers)?

Does the placement provider indicate the extent to which the placement is suitable for a disabled student?

Are disabled students offered pre-placement visits to establish the groundwork for the making of 'reasonable adjustments'?

Is information and guidance being sought about the nature of the disability and the student's experience of it?

Can disabled students be offered taster placements?

Are placement mentors linked to disabled students at the pre-placement stage to develop a good rapport for placement planning?

In order to determine that core competences are met, what mechanisms are in place to ensure that the disabled student experience of placement is not base-line, nor 'add on', but a full quality experience?

What access information, etc. is being supplied to the university to support the duty to be anticipatory in the making of 'reasonable adjustments'?

What are the contingency plans for ensuring disabled access when things go wrong, e.g., computer systems go down, lifts are out of order, on-site routes are closed, etc?

Key questions for making 'reasonable adjustments' effective

To ensure a quality learning experience, what procedures exist for liaising with the university regarding the making of 'reasonable adjustments' and how they will be arranged in advance of the placement, adequately financed and properly monitored?

Is an action plan made to confirm that 'reasonable adjustments' are in place before the commencement of the placement?

Have 'reasonable adjustments' been made to ensure that competence standards are being fairly applied?

Are 'reasonable adjustments' framed in the context that disabled people don't wish to be given 'special treatment' just to have a 'level playing field'?

Are the lessons learned from the 'reasonable adjustments' provided in previous placements considered in current and future pre-placement planning?

What 'reasonable adjustments' are being considered? For example:

- familiarization and extended lead-in times to the commencement of placements;
- part-time placements;
- mid-day starts to placements;
- additional time allotted for tasks;
- extra breaks;
- flexible deadlines;
- the greater frequency of supervisions;
- dictaphones used in place of hand written notes;
- suggesting different ways of doing things;
- the assistance of enablers on placement or during write up time;
- placements offered within sensible travel distances from the student's home, etc?

How are funds being accessed to support 'reasonable adjustments' at work (e.g. Access to Work), for travel, assistive technology, the provision of enablers during the write up time, etc?

Is part of the focus of supervision with disabled students directed towards a written evaluation of the 'reasonable adjustments' being provided, and is this information disseminated in a confidential way to the other stakeholders including in the university?

Is it recognised that there may be discrepancies between how 'reasonable adjustments' are understood, provided and supported in the university compared with how they are conceived within the placement provider, and that these differences might lead to difficulties?

What remedial actions are proposed during a placement when 'reasonable adjustments' have not been correctly anticipated?

What procedures exist for minimizing the impact of a change of placement for the 'reasonable adjustments' made for a disabled student?

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?

Do placement educators, mentors, etc. have clear information about who to contact in the university regarding academic and support procedures?

Are the staff at the university with a responsibility for supporting placement educators providing the right kinds of IAG to support disabled student placements?

Key questions for supporting disabled student feedback

Who has responsibility for actioning disabled student placement feedback?

If a student reports discrimination or harassment as a consequence of their disability, how is this actioned?

If the placement educator is changed who will then be responsible for overseeing the 'reasonable adjustments'?

How is the performance feedback offered to disabled students delivered in a constructive way?

Key questions for supporting CPD for placement educators and mentors, etc.

Are all staff that come into contact with disabled students on placement aware of their individual responsibilities under the DDA (2005)?

What CPD regarding disability awareness and the anticipatory duty to make 'reasonable adjustments' is offered to placement educators, mentors, etc?

Do placement educators have easy access to sources of disability guidance?