Disability Advisory Service

# Good practice guidance on facilitating access to admissions for disabled candidates

This document covers:

* The key features of Oxford’s policy on access to admissions for disabled people
* The Equality Act
* Recruitment
* Open days and individual visits
* Encouraging and responding to disclosure of disability
* Post-interview / pre-matriculation

A separate document is dedicated to interviews and gives information about reasonable adjustments which might be applicable.

Staff are welcome to contact the Disability Advisory Service on disability@admin.ox.ac.uk to discuss any aspects of provision or individual cases.

## Key features of the Oxford policy on undergraduate admissions for disabled people

In summary the admissions process should:

* Provide ample opportunity for applicants to declare a disability. While applicants are invited to declare on their UCAS form, further invitations are recommended in subsequent communications.
* Colleges should take active steps to identify and put in place the adjustments which might be required by an applicant; appropriate supporting evidence should be obtained; direct contact with the candidate and their school is recommended.
* Colleges should aim to reflect adjustments provided at the candidate’s school in their processes, without guaranteeing such adjustment either during admissions or on matriculation. If exceptional and unusual adjustments are requested further advice may be sought from the Disability Advisory Service.
* The adjustments agreed by the first interviewing college should be replicated at any subsequent interviews.
* The adjustments offered must be noted on ADSS. Where a disabled candidate requires no adjustments this too must be noted in ADSS, to avoid unnecessary duplication of work in subsequent colleges.

## The Equality Act

The University and Colleges are bound by the Equality Act (2010). The key points are that:

* an educational institution should not treat a disabled student less favourably than others for a reason relating to their disability

Example: An applicant who has dyslexia is asked to take a literacy test as a condition of entry. No other applicants are required to take the test. This is likely to be unlawful.

* an institution is required to make reasonable adjustments if a disabled person would otherwise be placed at a substantial disadvantage, and these adjustments should be anticipatory as far as practicable

Example: A student with speech impairment needs additional time to express himself during the interview. The University does not accommodate this need. This is likely to be unlawful.

Example: To anticipate the needs of disabled applicants, the college ensures all its written communications are produced within accessibility guidelines to ensure ease of reading for all.

* the legislation applies to all admissions, enrolments and other student services, which includes assessment and teaching materials

The Equality Act therefore makes it unlawful for an HEI to discriminate against a disabled person: in the admissions process; in the terms on which admissions or enrolment (matriculation) offers are made; by refusing or deliberately omitting to accept an application for admissions or enrolment on the grounds of disability.

The Act does not require academic standards to be lowered. An HEI will be expected to consider what is essential to a procedure or course (which therefore cannot be compromised as it represents a competence standard), and what is peripheral or incidental and can be waived or modified.

2. Definition of disability under the Equality Act

A person has a disability if he or she has a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his or her ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities

* Physical impairment includes sensory conditions such as visual or hearing impairment, and long-term health conditions.
* Mental impairment includes a mental health illness that is a clinically well-recognised illness, by a respected body of medical opinion (World Health Organisation definition of disease).
* Substantial indicates not minor or trivial.
* Long-term is where effects have lasted or are expected to last at least 12 months: effects of a condition which are likely to last less than 12 months, such as temporary infection, or a broken leg are not covered.
* Normal day-to-day activities include those which are carried out by most people on a fairly regular and frequent basis, for example using the stairs. Study activities are considered to fall within the definition of normal day-to-day activity.

## Recruitment

Encourage prospective students to feel able to provide information about a disability, by putting a positive statement in the College prospectus, on the website and in any other College publicity where appropriate. The QAA code of practice recommends developing an environment where individuals feel able to disclose their disability. Publicly welcoming applications from disabled candidates will help to achieve this.

In line with the Common Framework on Supporting Students with Disabilities, Colleges should ensure that the contact details of the Disability Lead and Disability Co-ordinator are easily available so that candidates are clear about whom they might contact for information.

## Making Open days, access events and individual visits accessible

### Open days and access events

All prospective students should have equal access to open days and access events, although some students will also benefit from the option of an individual visit. The following steps are needed to ensure accessibility for visitors:

* All communications about the event must include an invitation to inform the college/department about individual accessibility requirements, providing a named contact for this..
* Presentations and activities are held in accessible locations, with accessible toilet facilities, and that lifts are operational, etc.
* Clear signage is used throughout and printed materials are readily available in accessible formats [this means ….].
* All staff welcoming visitors, at minimum, know to whom they should direct disability-related enquiries. Broad disability awareness training for all open day staff would be ideal.
* The college/ department disability lead or co-ordinator is available on the day. If this is not possible a member of staff who is familiar with the accessible features of the college/department and support available should be on hand to provide information and guidance.
* Consider allocating a student helper to individual disabled candidates on request – either in advance or when visitors arrive. Where disabled candidates contact the college/department in advance, consider offering a staff-accompanied visit.
* Direct candidates to visit the Disability Advisory Service Open Day stand.

Other arrangements for specific candidates might include:

* receiving printed information in an alternative format (electronic version or audio tape; large print; Braille; other)
* provision of a support worker – for example a sign language interpreter
* permission for an individual to accompany the candidate at their request
* a support animal (a guide dog or hearing support animal)
* wheelchair access throughout the visit
* any dietary requirements
* a quiet, private space available for the visitors use

### Individual visits

Some disabled students will benefit from a personal visit, where an open day visit is not possible or in addition to the Open Day, and this constitutes a reasonable adjustment to the admissions process. This can give both the College and the candidate the opportunity to discuss informally what support might be required and what can be reasonably provided (adjustments either at interview or during study). In addition, a visit to the appropriate department(s) can be facilitated. It is important to make it clear that the visit is not an assessment of suitability to study a subject. The candidate can subsequently decide whether they wish to make an application.

On the day of the visit explain the level of support, provision of equipment, and other facilities that the College / department can offer. Explain what arrangements might be available for using the library. Discuss the possibility of accommodation adjustments and what the college can typically offer. Undertake an ‘accompanied walk through’ of the College / department involving areas that the candidate might need to access such as the library, tutorial rooms, hall, and accommodation.

## Encouraging and responding to disclosure of disability

The Undergraduate Admissions Office will notify Colleges of any disability declared on UCAS applications. Not all candidates will use this opportunity to declare their disability. Some candidates might believe that they will be discriminated against if they disclose this information. Other candidates might just not consider themselves to be disabled even though significant adjustments may be needed to enable successful study. Applicants are not required to declare this information on their UCAS application, even though it is prudent for them to do so. It is therefore advisable to provide a further opportunity to declare when arrangements for an interview are being made. Include a sentence or paragraph in interview invitation letters (or in other appropriate forms), to ask candidates if any adjustments or individual arrangements are required for the interview due to a disability.

For those candidates who do declare a disability, we suggest Colleges find out well in advance what their particular requirements might be. If candidates have complex requirements (for example, material in braille) significant time is required to ensure arrangements are in place. We recommend contact shortly after the acknowledgement of application, while being clear the contact does not constitute an invitation to interview and reassuring candidates that information will not be used in the shortlisting process.

In communications seeking information about adjustments we suggest colleges ask explicitly about “access arrangements in examinations” as the phrase “reasonable adjustments” is not one commonly used in schools. Also ask about any support needed during the rest of their stay in Oxford relating to accommodation, dinning, route-finding, personal care or other support.

In unusual or complex cases, with appropriate permission, we also suggest you contact the candidate’s school for additional information. Schools can provide useful, supplementary information as well as the required evidence. An appropriate contact would be the school’s Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator, who should have a full picture of the support provided to any particular individual.

For the guidance on supporting the student in the interview itself, please see the ‘Reasonable adjustments for interview candidates’ document.

## Post-interview / Pre-matriculation support

Where applicants are offered a place, Colleges are asked to encourage candidates to begin the process of arranging any necessary adjustments and support for their studies as soon as possible. Please explain that Government funding related processes can take up to 14 weeks to complete so early planning is vital. Please direct candidates to the Disability Advisory Service who will work with them and the college and department disability lead/co-coordinator as appropriate.