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Accessible and inclusive teaching: ways to improve teaching and learning for all and support disabled students

Inclusive teaching and anticipatory adjustments

Anticipatory adjustments

Approximately 10-15% of all students require some form of adjustment to teaching due to a disability. Making one-off changes to routines around teaching each time a reasonable adjustment is needed can be time-consuming, but changing habits and routines to anticipate these adjustments can lead to a better learning environment for all. By anticipating the reasonable adjustments that students are likely to need, such as providing teaching materials in advance, providing handouts and presentations in accessible formats, or giving access to lecture capture, all students can benefit and the number of one-off adjustments needed are reduced.

Inclusive teaching

In the context of disability provision, inclusive teaching reduces the need for individual adjustments, because many of the barriers that disabled students may face have been anticipated and removed. It recognises that many of the adjustments made for disabled students could benefit many other students if made available to all.

Providing anticipatory adjustments for disabled students is just one aspect of an inclusive approach to teaching. Every student has their own preferences for learning, at different paces and using different methods. Inclusive teaching practice values the diversity and difference in individual learners, and harnesses this to improve the learning experience for every student. Inclusive teaching practices tend to give students greater choice and control over their learning, and make fewer assumptions about prior experiences or knowledge. The Centre for Teaching and Learning will launch a new inclusive teaching online course in Michaelmas term 2020.

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The term 'inclusive teaching' is broad-ranging and encompasses various ideas and strategies. Many of the techniques that are widely recognised as good teaching practice are also inclusive.

Examples

A teacher using an inclusive approach might:

- Make materials available to students in advance of teaching sessions so they have time to read and prepare
- Encourage group work so students can learn from each other and encounter different perspectives and approaches
- Create a range of opportunities for students to contribute and demonstrate their learning
- Design reading lists that reflect a diversity of authors and contributors to the field so that students can learn from a variety of critical approaches
- Provide prioritised reading lists to help students manage their time and focus their reading
- Set aside time to clarify aims and expectations so students know what they should expect to learn and work towards
- Take into account possible differences in students' prior knowledge when designing teaching and consider different ways to approach material based on this diversity
- Design teaching content and activities to align with the other lectures, classes or tutorials students are attending so they can build on knowledge and skills progressively
- Use tutorials to support students to develop their individual interests and strengths whilst also providing specific interventions to address individual weaknesses

An inclusive approach encourages a sense of belonging in students: the learning environment takes account of their needs and recognises the diversity they bring as a strength.

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Tutorials

The tutorial system lends itself to responding to individual students' aptitudes, learning needs, and prior experience. In this context reasonable adjustments for disabled students can be made as a natural part of the personalised provision made in tutorials.

Lectures

Reasonable adjustments must also be made to lectures for students with a Student Support Plan. This can include: use of lecture capture, permission to record teaching sessions, access to teaching materials in advance, provision of materials in electronic formats for those who need alternative formats. There are now digital platforms available at Oxford to ensure that the most common adjustments to teaching can be delivered effectively and efficiently, and made available to all students. The Canvas virtual learning environment can be used to provide teaching materials in advance in electronic format, the Replay Service provides lecture capture for those departments or lecturers who opt-in, and the new ORLO service enables readings lists to be digitised, making it straightforward to find the full electronic text online or physical text in Oxford libraries.

College and departmental responsibilities

Colleges, departments and faculties are responsible for identifying any anticipatory steps they could take to remove the need for individual adjustments and promote inclusive practice. The Centre for Teaching and Learning offers guidance and examples of best practice on creating accessible tutorials, lectures and teaching materials.

Colleges and departments/faculties are responsible for ensuring that the Student Support Plan is communicated to the relevant staff, including to those tutors coordinating the papers the student is taking (in the case of graduates, the Tutor for Graduates or supervisor). Where individual adjustments to teaching and learning are necessary, these will be put in place by teaching staff, with the support of the relevant administrators (e.g. Disability Coordinator, IT Officer, Canvas administrator, undergraduate/graduate studies administrator). The next page of this guide provides advice on implementing reasonable adjustments to teaching and learning.

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If it becomes clear that the recommendations in the SSP are not sufficient to mitigate the student's disadvantage, or the recommendations aren't reasonable in the specific context, the college, department or faculty (as appropriate) should notify the Disability Advisory Service, who will consult with the student and then recommend appropriate changes/alternatives.

Related links

Centre for Teaching and Learning: Programmes and Courses

Tips for Oxford tutors on making teaching resources accessible