



**Work Placements  
for Undergraduates  
With a Visual Impairment:**

**Inclusive of the Range of Disabilities**

**Presented by**

**Visually Impaired Learners**

**2009 - January 2010**

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## **Introduction**

The Royal National College for the Blind (RNC) was engaged in a project funded by the West Midlands Lifelong Learning Network (LLN) – Work Placements for Undergraduates with a Visual impairment: Inclusive of the range of disabilities presented by VI learners.

RNC is the United Kingdom's leading Further Education specialist residential college for students who have a visual impairment. Our mission statement is: "We lead, innovate, develop, promote and deliver world class products and services, driving standards for excellence".

There are approximately 150 students at RNC made up of younger students between the ages of 16 and 19 and adult students aged 18 years and over from the UK and abroad. RNC offers a range of academic, vocational and independence programmes.

RNC was awarded 'Beacon Status' in December 2005. RNC is the only specialist college for blind and visually impaired students to have received this prestigious award. One of the responsibilities involved in obtaining and maintaining this status is dissemination of good practice. This project is one example of RNCs dissemination of activity throughout the sector and the wider educational community.

## **Background**

People with disabilities have faced substantial difficulties in accessing education and have experienced much higher unemployment than the non-disabled (Wolffe and Spungin 2002, Grewai et al 2003). In recent years opportunities for Higher Education has increased dramatically yet it remains uncertain whether obtaining a higher education will translate into a more successful transition into employment for these learners (Adams and Brown 2006).

Learners who are disabled are on average more likely to study on Foundation degrees and HND programmes than their non-disabled counterparts. Both pathways require a work placement to be completed as part of the 'learning experience'.

At the Royal National College for the Blind it has been recognised that providing students with the opportunity to experience the working environment of their chosen area of study is an important component of many courses. Work placements can be especially important for students with a disability as they encourage independence, aid the development of socialisation and allow students to build personal strategies to overcome barriers whilst putting their academic knowledge into practice.

However, we became concerned about the apparent challenges faced by learners with a visual impairment in Higher Education when following a degree or HND programme that includes a work placement. This will be an increasing problem with the rise in Foundation degrees for the learners and the H.E. institutions and it is therefore important to ensure that we are aware of all the issues that an undergraduate may encounter when trying to arrange a placement.

This report describes the journey of the project, addressing the aims and objectives and will create a greater understanding of the challenges experienced by visually

impaired students when following a degree or HND programme that includes a work placement.

### **Aims and Objectives of the Project**

To work with University of Worcester (and other regional universities) to investigate:

1. The university trying to facilitate the placement.
2. The employer who will be offering the placement.
3. The student who needs a meaningful placement that will contribute to the overall learning experience.

### **The stakeholders were identified as**

- Visually impaired students following a degree or HND programme that includes a work placement.
- Universities offering a degree or HND programme that includes a work placement.
- Employers offering a work placement.
- DSA Assessors.

### **Key Products from the project**

- Case studies for dissemination.
- Guidelines for use by regional HE providers to assist in arranging work placements for undergraduates with a visual impairment.
- DSA Assessor considerations to ensure that appropriate support mechanisms can be put in place for an undergraduate with a visual impairment who may undertake a work placement as part of an HE programme.
- An information sheet for undergraduates planning to undertake a work placement providing guidance on support available.
- A webpage offering information for potential employers offering a placement.

### **Method**

The project used a combination of:

- A case study approach with learners who have completed a work placement, who are expecting to undertake a placement and who are currently undertaking a work placement.
- Interviews with stakeholders.
- Internet research.

The project began by contacting a variety of universities looking for learners who could become case studies to document their experiences. Although support was offered by some universities this method was not successful due to the limited numbers of students who currently fit the project case study criteria and the problems associated with passing on personal details.

More success was achieved through regional support staff speaking to their students, putting requests on social networking sites and as the RNC is a national college, contacting ex students.

The Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills<sup>1</sup> estimate that by age 19, the proportion of disabled people that have participated in HE courses is around 30%, as opposed to 45% of those without disabilities.

The proportions of applicants, accepted applicants and students enrolled in HE who declare a disability or are in receipt of Disabled Students' Allowances (DSAs) have increased over time. The proportion of applicants who declared a disability on their UCAS application form has gradually increased over the past 7 years.

## **Disabled Students' Allowance**

When a student with an impairment, specific learning difficulty or mental health condition begins a course in higher education they may be entitled to extra financial help towards the costs of specialist equipment, a non-medical helper or extra travel costs through the Disabled Students' Allowances (DSA)<sup>2</sup>.

Disabled Students' Allowances are grants to help meet the extra course costs students can face as a direct result of a disability or specific learning difficulty. They are aimed at helping disabled people to study on an equal basis with other students.

Disabled Students' Allowances can help pay for:

- Specialist equipment needed for studying - for example, computer software.
- A non-medical helper, such as a note-taker or reader.
- Extra travel costs encountered as a result of a disability.
- Other costs - for example, tapes or Braille paper.

46% of students reporting as blind / partially sighted are in receipt of DSA<sup>1</sup>.

When a student applies for a DSA an assessor will meet with the student and assess their individual needs based on their disability and the requirements of the course.

The case studies were used to consider the range of support provided and the effectiveness of that support. The level and usefulness of the support appeared to vary around the country. In some cases student needs were well catered for whilst others were not so fortunate. A copy of the case studies is given in [Appendix A on page 13](#).

Some of the students in the case studies said that looking back they were not prepared for their DSA assessment. Due to their fears, they could really only focus on surviving the first term. Not all of the case study students even realised that there could be a placement or what it might entail.

Going to university is very stressful and very much an unknown, students are not always aware of the possibility of a placement or they don't realise the implications. The emphasis is on the assessor to be pro-active in investigating whether there is

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<sup>1</sup> Disabled Students and Higher Education, Higher Educational Analysis, Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills - 2009

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/DisabledPeople/EducationAndTraining/HigherEducation/DG\\_10035904](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/DisabledPeople/EducationAndTraining/HigherEducation/DG_10035904)

likely to be a work placement, and ensure they have all of the relevant information on the requirements of the course.

The equipment specified by the assessors appeared to vary. The exact details of a placement are unlikely to be known when the student attends for their DSA assessment. This can mean that the assessor needs to provide an educated guess as to what their requirements could be. Some students were well supported while for others the DSA assessment did not meet their needs.

Problems have arisen when, rather than a portable version of the assistive technology software being provided, screen reading software was already installed on a PC or laptop. For students who were unable to use their own equipment in the workplace this posed a problem. For example, a laptop may not be allowed on the premises due to DDA requirements, security issues or because the bespoke software is only installed on the company system.

Travel arrangements and travel costs were another area of concern. One student on a community based placement had to rely on a relative to drive her to her appointments. Without this support being available she would not have been able to complete the course. In this situation, as it the placement was always likely to be community based it would have been helpful if provision had been made for the student to access funding from the DSA to pay for taxis.

One other case study described how she would have benefited from some low tech equipment. This student was travelling 120 miles a day by train. The allocation of a monocular for looking at train displays and station information screens would have provided confidence and independence, putting her on a more equal basis with other train passengers.

The case study students who appeared to cope without any major problems on placements tended to attend a college that had experience of working with visually impaired students, or, the students themselves were very confident and well informed of the course requirements, had knowledge of what equipment would benefit them and had coping strategies in place.

One case study student suggested a mentoring scheme provided by visually impaired students who have experienced a successful work placement for students with less life skills.

As most students are not confident and knowledgeable they rely on their assessor. Not all of the students understood that their assessors were supportive, approachable and their equipment needs could be discussed and a mutual agreement reached. It was suggested by a case study student that clear discussions with the DSA Assessor would be appreciated on the following:

- Ensuring that the student fully understands budget situation
- What equipment is available
- What a student can and can't get
- The possible training options associated with using any recommended equipment.

An information sheet for undergraduates planning to undertake a work placement that provides guidance on support available was produced as a product of this project. A copy of the information sheet is given in [Appendix B on page 43](#).

Considerations for DSA assessors to ensure that appropriate support mechanisms can be put in place for an undergraduate with a visual impairment who may undertake a work placement as part of an HE programme is given in [Appendix C on page 47](#).

## **The university**

The case studies indicated that there was some disparity between the levels of support offered to students who were attempting to find and successfully complete a work placement. Some were not offered any support.

HESA data<sup>3</sup> suggests that disability, even after controlling for a range of other factors, still has a statistically significant and negative impact on degree attainment. A slightly greater proportion of students with no disability (59%) obtain a good degree compared with 52% of students with multiple disabilities.

Students with disabilities require prior planning and anticipatory action in order to perform to their potential and on as level a playing field as possible. Mobility and orientation training will take time to organise as will the delivery and training of any additional equipment. As a result students with disabilities are more likely to need support in arranging a placement.

Universities were contacted to establish the types and levels of support available. A copy of the responses received are given in [Appendix D on page 49](#).

All of the universities that responded provide additional support to ensure their students can successfully complete a placement on an equal basis with other students. Examples of the support offered is given in [Appendix E on page 54](#) and online resources on [page 78](#).

Most colleges offer support in a range of accessible media and some refer to mental health difficulty and aDShe (association of dyslexia specialists in higher education) guidelines for placement staff working with students.

The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy has developed a set of guidelines aimed at Supporting Disabled Physiotherapy Students on Clinical Placement. In addition, aDShe, the association of Dyslexia Specialists in Higher Education have produced guidelines for Quality Assurance in Specialist Support for Students with SpLDs (Specific Learning Difficulties/Differences) in Higher Education. These two documents could assist colleges greatly in their preparation for students with a visual impairment and other disabilities to successfully complete a work placement.

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<sup>3</sup> Disabled Students and Higher Education, Higher Educational Analysis, Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills - 2009

The employer has no direct responsibility in relation to disabled students on placement as there is no contract of employment. Therefore it is essential that academic staff, particularly those responsible for organising placements, liaise and work closely with placement staff to ensure there is an appropriate information exchange to enable reasonable adjustments to be made in preparation for taking a disabled student on placement.<sup>4</sup>

When arranging a placement it is recommended that one member of staff within the university is identified as the single point of contact for staff, students and the employers. It is acknowledged that in some universities this role may be split between several staff members in which case it would be advisable for one person to accept responsibility for the role of co-ordinating the placement activities and oversee the co-ordination and liaison to ensure that all areas are effectively addressed.

JISC in their Creation of Learning Content recognise the balancing act between what a learners would prefer, what an institution can afford and what gives the learner greatest autonomy, responsibility and self direction. The long-term aim should always be to encourage the learner to increasing levels of autonomy and self-reliance<sup>5</sup>.

Most visually impaired students will require reasonable adjustments to access information and to produce their own written records. Students should be encouraged, with backup from the university, to take responsibility for having personal strategies in place and ideas about how best reasonable adjustments might be made.

Several of the case studies found that in addition to the original DSA they needed further provision. For some students the colleges stepped in and loaned equipment, without which there would not have been a successful outcome.

A set of Guidelines to assist in arranging work placements for disabled undergraduates with a visual impairment was produced as a product of this project. A copy of the Guidelines are given in [Appendix F on page 88](#).

In preparation for a work placement students should be encouraged to consider the skills they have developed through academic study, extra-curricular activities and any previous employment, voluntary work or work placements.

The Higher Education Academy with the Council for Industry and Higher Education (CIHE) has produced a guide to promote and support the use of the Student Employability Profiles<sup>6</sup>. Each profile identifies skills that can be developed through the study of a particular discipline based on subject benchmark statements developed by UK higher education academic communities. Employers were involved in recognising the employability skills, competencies and attributes valued when recruiting.

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<sup>4</sup> The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy - guidance on supporting disabled physiotherapy students on clinical placement.

<sup>5</sup> [www.techdis.ac.uk/getcreation](http://www.techdis.ac.uk/getcreation)

<sup>6</sup> Student Employability Profiles - A guide for higher education practitioners

Encouraging students to create their own skills and attributes profile, identifying the skills that they are developing through degree level study and how these relate to competencies valued by employers will support students while they are considering what they have to offer a potential work placement provider or employer.

## **The perception of employers about issues around a person with a visual impairment in the work place undertaking a work placement**

The labour market outcomes for disabled graduates appear to be worse than for those without disabilities. HESA<sup>7</sup> reports that compared to 6% of qualifiers without a disability, 13% of blind/partially sighted students are assumed to be unemployed six months after qualifying. Only 53% of visually impaired students are in permanent employment after qualifying.

Employability is:

a set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes - that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy.’

Yorke (2004, reissued 2006)<sup>8</sup>

When considering the challenges faced by learners with a visual impairment in Higher Education an important aspect is, understanding the perception by employers of student needs and the impact on the working environment.

A selection of employers who have previously offered work placements to students with a visual impairment were approached. A copy of the employer comments are given in [Appendix G on page 93](#).

Getting the right message across to employers who will potentially offer a placement will provide confidence and improve working relationships. Discussions with employers have shown that they are often willing to offer support. The following comments were made.

“If we don’t take a chance then we become a polarized society where we avoid taking on people with challenges”.

“We can be guilty of looking at people and seeing the disability. We can learn more about how to work with disabled people from providing a placement than we can from attending a training session”.

“Having had such a positive experience the company would certainly contemplate taking on another work placement student with a disability in the future”.

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<sup>7</sup> Disabled Students and Higher Education, Higher Educational Analysis, Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills - 2009

<sup>8</sup> Student Employability Profiles - A guide for higher education practitioners

Employers are often unsure of the facts around visual impairment. A website that answers questions suggested by the employers was produced as a product of this project. The website contents are given in [Appendix H on page 100](#).

All of the employers made a point of saying that they would like to receive information about the skills people have to offer and what they would be capable of doing independently, other than just answering the phone. Most of the employers who were approached referred to work placement students as potential employees. The employers wanted to make it clear what they would be looking for from a work placement student/potential employee. All said the most important was:

- Confidence to put across their skills.
- Confidence to put across their equipment needs.
- A 'can do' or 'have a go' attitude.

The other aspects they would be looking for included:

- Qualifications.
- An interest and knowledge about the role.
- Commitment to the job and company.
- Trust and respect.

## Summary

The proportion of applicants, accepted applicants and students enrolled in HE who declare a disability or are in receipt of Disabled Students' Allowances (DSAs) have gradually increased over the past 7 years<sup>1</sup>.

The challenges faced by learners with a visual impairment in Higher Education when following a degree or HND programme that includes a work placement are likely to increase as it becomes more difficult in the current economic climate for a student to find a suitable placement.

For undergraduates with a visual impairment to successfully find and complete a placement requires input from several parties including the student, the DSA Assessor, the University and the employer.

Student confidence and employability skills appear to be key in many areas and as a result should be focused on and encouraged. Having the confidence to communicate with the DSA Assessor and discuss their requirements to work independently and effectively will aid in the students understanding of what is required in the work place and encourage them to take ownership.

The DSA Assessors must be mindful of the uncertainty involved with work placements and ensure that the student is aware that time has been allowed during the assessment to discuss pro-actively how needs on a work placement may differ from needs when studying on campus. The equipment requirements can be discussed and a mutual agreement reached. The DSA assessor should also

encourage the student to contact them or their Disability Needs Co-ordinator if their requirements change or the DSA provision needs to be amended.

Universities aren't always experienced with working with visually impaired students. Students with disabilities require prior planning and anticipatory action in order to perform to their potential and on as level a playing field as possible.

Most colleges offer support in a range of accessible media and refer to mental health difficulty or aDShe (association of dyslexia specialists in higher education) guidelines for placement staff working with students. A set of Guidelines to assist in arranging work placements for disabled undergraduates with a visual impairment was produced as a product of this project.

When considering the challenges faced by learners with a visual impairment in Higher Education an important aspect is, understanding the perception by employers of student needs and the impact on the working environment.

Getting the right message across to employers who will potentially offer a placement will provide confidence and improve working relationships. Discussions with employers have shown that they are often willing to offer support.

Employers are often unsure of the facts around visual impairment. The employers who were approached to give their comments as part of this project suggested a series of questions and information that they would have found useful. A website has been developed to answer their questions and provide information.

For undergraduates with a visual impairment inclusive of the range of disabilities presented by visually impaired learners to successfully find and complete a placement requires a multi-disciplinary agreement to be in place with input from the Student, the DSA Assessor, the University and the Employer. As recommended by aDShe in their guidelines for Quality Assurance in Specialist Support for Students colleges, "Provide advice to colleagues on inclusive learning and reasonable adjustments".

# **Appendices**

## **Case Studies**

## Case Study 1 – completed a placement

### Profile of student

<b>Name to be known by:</b>	student A
<b>Age range:</b>	late 20's
<b>Eye condition:</b>	Macular Dystrophy
<b>Preferred reading medium:</b>	large print
<b>Primary assistive technology:</b>	Lunar magnification
<b>University attended:</b>	Birmingham City University and was sponsored by Queen Alexander College)
<b>Years attended university:</b>	2006-2008
<b>Course attended:</b>	Dip Rehab Studies (VI)

**Have you completed your course and if not why?** Yes

### The DSA assessment

<b>Did you have a DSA assessment?</b>	Yes
<b>When was your assessment?</b>	2006
<b>Where was your assessment?</b>	Perry Bar campus

**Was your DSA assessor aware that your course would/could include a placement?**

Yes. Discussed the placement with Assessor and he said he'd discuss with the tutor but he didn't.

**What provision was made during your DSA assessment for you to work on an outside placement?**

Nothing

**Did you suggest any particular equipment?**

- Laptop
- Supernova
- A note taker
- Extra time

**Was any of the equipment suggested by you provided?**

- Laptop
- Supernova - but couldn't use it on the placement as it was a ready installed version and due to confidentiality issues wasn't able to use own laptop.
- Note taker – 2nd year student provided
- Extra time in exams.

### **What other equipment was provided?**

Only the equipment listed above

### **Did you receive training on how to use the equipment?**

Yes Supernova training was provided

### **On reflection, would any other equipment have been useful?**

Other provision was needed and as a result Queen Alexander College who were sponsoring Student A stepped in and provided the following - rather than relying on the DSA:

- A large monitor
- Portable pen drive version of Supernova for use on placement
- Travel expenses – Student A relied on a relative to drive her to the various appointments and Queen Alexander College paid for the expenses
- A reliable note taker - In the 1st year the note taker produced very good notes but was extremely slow in passing them on by which point they were not so useful

### **The support available within the university**

#### **Was all the information provided in an appropriate and accessible format?**

Many of the tutors were great but others needed constant encouragement

#### **Were there facilities provided for you to be able to access information, i.e. scanner, JAWS?**

Yes

#### **Did you receive or need training on how to use the equipment within the university?**

Received orientation & familiarisation of campus training

#### **What did the university do to help you find a placement?**

Help wasn't necessary although it was available if necessary

#### **Did you meet with anyone at the university to discuss what you would be doing on placement and if your needs would be met?**

Yes

#### **When a placement had been found did someone from the university contact the placement to discuss the facilities you would need?**

Yes

**Was there someone you could contact at the university if you had any problems while you were on placement?**

Yes

**The perception of employers about issues around a disabled person in the work place undertaking a work placement**

**Did you visit the placement prior to starting there?**

Yes

**Was there someone at the placement you could speak to about any problems with accessibility or any other issues?**

Yes

**How long was the placement going to last?**

80 days

**How long did you stay at the placement?**

80 days

**Was there someone at your university that your placement could contact if there were any problems while you were on placement?**

Yes

**Were the placement staff given some visually impaired awareness training prior to your placement?**

No not necessary as some of the staff were visually impaired and all staff were considerate

**The experience for the student doing a work placement**

**What aspects of the placement would you say worked well?**

Understanding of Student A's needs

Many of the clients were older people who could empathise with her sight condition

**What aspects of the placement would you say did not work?**

- The time taken before Student A could begin to work independently and effectively

- Travel, by not having a driver/support assistant Student A couldn't get to her appointments and had to rely on a relative

**On reflection, was the placement useful and meaningful for your course?**

Yes definitely, the skills and experience were invaluable

**If you were to go on placement again, is there anything you would do differently or recommend?**

Have the confidence to communicate with the DSA Assessor and discuss the requirements to be able to work independently and effectively at college and on a placement which would include getting to and from appointments with clients.

Students really need the confidence to discuss any problems, then people are helpful and willing.

Would recommend all parties received VI awareness training and worked together.

## Case Study 2 – completed a placement

### Profile of student

<b>Name to be known by:</b>	Student B
<b>Age range:</b>	Early 20's
<b>Eye condition:</b>	Registered Blind light perception only and Cerebral Palsy
<b>Preferred reading medium:</b>	Braille
<b>Primary assistive technology:</b>	JAWS
<b>University attended:</b>	Buckinghamshire University
<b>Years attended university:</b>	2007-8
<b>Course attended:</b>	Business Management

### Have you completed your course and if not why?

Course not completed.  
Struggled with the reading materials as insufficient provided in an accessible format.

### The DSA assessment

<b>Did you have a DSA assessment?</b>	Yes
<b>When was your assessment?</b>	July 2007
<b>Where was your assessment?</b>	Stevenage

### Was your DSA assessor aware that your course would/could include a placement?

The DSA Assessor did not ask.  
Student B was aware that a placement may be required/provided but didn't realise it was compulsory at that time and it wasn't discussed.

### What provision was made during your DSA assessment for you to work on an outside placement?

None, the subject wasn't broached and no suggestions were made as Student B was unaware of what would be needed or what equipment may be available.

### Did you suggest any particular equipment?

Student B was asked what was needed and suggested:

- Laptop for home study
- JAWS screen reading software
- A scribe and reader to assist in college lectures and exams
- Braille note-taker for lectures
- Perkins Braille for backup for the Braille note-taker
- Embosser for creating the Braille materials
- Materials to be provided either in Braille or an electronic format.

### **Was any of the equipment suggested by you provided?**

- Laptop for home study
- JAWS screen reading software
- A scribe and reader to assist in college lectures and exams.

### **Was any other equipment was provided?**

- Laptop docking station
- Scanner
- Kurzweil OCR scanning software
- Printer
- Flextalk DAISY reader
- Transport to and from college (approx ½ hour drive).

When a placement was actually being set-up agency support that usually worked with elderly visually impaired people was provided.

### **Did you receive training on how to use the equipment?**

Received training in own home on Kurzweil scanner software  
Laptop and printer were installed along with the docking station in Student B's home.

### **On reflection, would any other equipment have been useful?**

Portable version of JAWS for use on placement  
Accessible format conversion software.

### **The support available within the university**

#### **Was all the information provided in an appropriate and accessible format?**

No

#### **Were there facilities provided for you to be able to access information, i.e. scanner, JAWS?**

- JAWS version 7
- Scanner
- Omni page OCR software

#### **Did you receive or need training on how to use the equipment within the university?**

No training but a support worker was provided to assist Student B so no possibility of independent working.

Study skills trainer although he was visually impaired himself and had a different learning style and method of explaining.

**What did the university do to help you find a placement?**

Nothing, all students were required to find their own placement. Student B's personal tutor stated that that a placement offering a minimum of 200 hours was compulsory – Student B says it was hinted at prior to beginning the course but didn't realise it was compulsory.

**Did you meet with anyone at the university to discuss what you would be doing on placement and if your needs would be met?**

No

**When a placement had been found did someone from the university contact the placement to discuss the facilities you would need?**

No

**Was there someone you could contact at the university if you had any problems while you were on placement?**

No

**The perception of employers about issues around a disabled person in the work place undertaking a work placement**

**Did you visit the placement prior to starting there?**

Yes because it was Student B's previous school. They were very helpful and welcoming

**Was there someone at the placement you could speak to about any problems with accessibility or any other issues?**

No

**How long was the placement going to last?**

4 hours once a week for 2 academic years

**How long did you stay at the placement?**

2 months

**Was there someone at your university that your placement could contact if there were any problems while you were on placement?**

No

**Were the placement staff given some visually impaired awareness training prior to your placement?**

No

**The experience for the student doing a work placement**

**What aspects of the placement would you say worked well?**

- The atmosphere
- Transport to and from the placement
- The staff were approachable
- Staff attempts to assist with mobility.

**What aspects of the placement would you say did not work?**

- Staff knowledge with accessibility
- No available format conversion software
- No staff VI awareness training.

**On reflection, was the placement useful and meaningful for your course?**

In theory it would have been useful but in practice it wasn't due to the lack of VI awareness and accessible materials.

**If you were to go on placement again, is there anything you would do differently or recommend?**

Would recommend all parties received VI awareness training and worked together.

DSA Assessor should explain:

- What equipment is available
- What a student can get and what they can't
- Explain the budget situation
- Provide more and better training on how to use the equipment provided.

## Case Study 3 – completed a placement

### Profile of student

<b>Name to be known by:</b>	Student C
<b>Age range:</b>	Mid 20's
<b>Eye condition:</b>	Macular degeneration (non age related)
<b>Preferred reading medium:</b>	Electronic
<b>Primary assistive technology:</b>	Zoomtext
<b>University attended:</b>	Worcester
<b>Years attended university:</b>	2003
<b>Course attended:</b>	HND IT.

### Have you completed your course and if not why?

No, for various reasons including reliability of note takers, lack of confidence with being in a sighted environment and enjoying too much social life.

### The DSA assessment

<b>Did you have a DSA assessment?</b>	Yes
<b>When was your assessment?</b>	2003
<b>Where was your assessment?</b>	Hereford

### Was your DSA assessor aware that your course would/could include a placement?

No, a placement was optional and Student C was preoccupied with getting onto the course and what would be involved with coping in the first term.

### What provision was made during your DSA assessment for you to work on an outside placement?

None as student C wasn't aware at that point.

### Did you suggest any particular equipment?

No, doesn't remember having an opportunity.

### Was any of the equipment suggested by you provided?

N/A

### **Was any other equipment was provided?**

- Laptop
- Wireless keyboard and mouse
- Laptop bag
- Printer
- Sony mini disc player
- Headphones
- Microphone
- Mini discs
- Microsoft Office
- Microsoft Project
- Microsoft FrontPage
- Zoomtext
- A note taker to assist in college lectures and exams.

### **Did you receive training on how to use the equipment?**

No

### **On reflection, would any other equipment have been useful?**

Although he had the Sony mini disc player he feels a dedicated digital voice recorder would have been better.

### **The support available within the university**

#### **Was all the information provided in an appropriate and accessible format?**

Yes, occasionally had to ask but most of the time everything was provided as and when needed including notes being put onto a CD by the Equal Opportunities Advisor.

#### **Were there facilities provided for you to be able to access information, i.e. scanner, JAWS?**

There was an Access Room set aside for students with additional needs which included scanning facilities and assistive technologies.

#### **Did you receive or need training on how to use the equipment within the university?**

Given an induction and how to use the equipment by the Equal Opportunities Advisor.

#### **What did the university do to help you find a placement?**

Didn't actually go on placement while on the course although feels that the university would have helped.

**Did you meet with anyone at the university to discuss what you would be doing on placement and if your needs would be met?**

N/A

**When a placement had been found did someone from the university contact the placement to discuss the facilities you would need?**

N/A

**Was there someone you could contact at the university if you had any problems while you were on placement?**

Program Advisor or Equal Opportunities Advisor.

**The perception of employers about issues around a disabled person in the work place undertaking a work placement**

**Did you visit the placement prior to starting there?**

Although student C didn't complete a placement on his course he did a voluntary placement following leaving university.

**Was there someone at the placement you could speak to about any problems with accessibility or any other issues?**

No as his role at the placement was to give advice on making website and brochures accessible to VI users.

**How long was the placement going to last?**

As and when.

**How long did you stay at the placement?**

3 times a week for a 1 month.

**Was there someone at your university that your placement could contact if there were any problems while you were on placement?**

N/A

**Were the placement staff given some visually impaired awareness training prior to your placement?**

No but became part of the role.

## **The experience for the student doing a work placement**

### **What aspects of the placement would you say worked well?**

It was comfortable and he was able to pass on knowledge and advice.

### **What aspects of the placement would you say did not work?**

The business went on to pay a professional company to produce the finished accessible items, although arguably that was a success because before then they were just producing items in-house.

### **On reflection, was the placement useful and meaningful for your course?**

N/A although as this is the only work experience Student C had completed at that time it gave him some confidence towards thinking about moving into the world of work.

### **If you were to go on placement again, is there anything you would do differently or recommend?**

Student C is now on another course and currently on a placement. He now feels he would approach difficulties differently and is more likely to succeed due to being much more confident and comfortable in being able to ask for things generally.

## Case Study 4 – currently on a placement

### Profile of student

<b>Name to be known by:</b>	Student 'Liz' (this is not their name)
<b>Age range:</b>	Late 30's
<b>Eye condition:</b>	Glaucoma
<b>Preferred reading medium:</b>	Electronic/Audio
<b>Primary assistive technology:</b>	JAWS and Zoomtext combined
<b>Name of University:</b>	Birmingham Metropolitan
<b>Years started university:</b>	2008
<b>Course:</b>	Level 4 - Counselling

### The DSA assessment

**When was your DSA assessment?** Hasn't had one

Student 'Liz' didn't feel she needed a DSA assessment as she had previously attended a university course in addition to having previously worked. She felt she already had the majority of the necessary equipment so she provided the college with an overview of what her requirements were and was able to negotiate with the college any additional equipment.

### Did you suggest any particular equipment?

- The college pay for a transcription service to put the main course material into DAISY format.
- To be loaned an Optic Book 3600 scanner.

### Was any of the equipment suggested by you provided?

Yes

### What other equipment was provided?

Along with the loan of an Optic Book 3600 scanner to scan books to electronic format, a copy of Fine Reader v5 but arranged to upgraded to v8 herself.

### Did you receive training on how to use the equipment?

Humanware provided a trainer although Student 'Liz' didn't feel he had the necessary people engagement skills and as a result sorted out her own effective training.

### Can you think of any other equipment/provision that would be useful?

No

## **The support available within the university**

### **Is all the information provided in an appropriate and accessible format?**

No not initially, they were willing although not always adequately informed.

### **Are there facilities provided for you to be able to access information at university, i.e. scanner, JAWS?**

No assistive software is available within the university and as a result Student 'Liz' is reliant on her own equipment.

### **Have you received or do you need training on how to use the equipment within the university?**

N/A

### **What did the university do to help you find a placement?**

Students are required to find own placement, although they may have been willing to assist if necessary.

### **When a placement was found did someone from the university contact the placement to discuss the facilities you would need?**

No, the placement was already known to the department and as a result they were already aware that it would be suitable.

### **Did you meet with anyone at the university to discuss what you would be doing on placement and if your needs will be met?**

No

### **Is there someone you will be able to contact at the university if you have any problems while you are on placement?**

Yes

## **The perception of employers about issues around a disabled person in the workplace undertaking a work placement**

### **Did you visit the placement prior to starting there?**

Yes

### **Is there someone at the placement you can speak to about any problems with accessibility or any other issues?**

Yes

### **Approximately how long will the placement last?**

18 months

### **Is there someone at your university that your placement will be able to contact if there are any problems while you were on placement?**

Yes

### **Do you think it could have been useful if the placement staff had received some visually impaired awareness training prior to your placement?**

Not necessary as they were already aware

### **The experience for the student doing a work placement**

#### **What aspects of the placement do you think works well and why?**

Speaking up in a positive way and learning how to be assertive but not being demanding as this is a necessary and transferable skill, even for the Supermarket shopping.

Student 'Liz' feels the more challenges faced and achieved and positive feedback received means she is seen for what she can do rather than for her disabilities.

#### **What aspects of the placement are you concerned about?**

Leaflets on any ongoing training are displayed in Reception but as a result of creating good relations and making her presence felt, in a good way, then the Receptionist and other staff ensure electronic copies are sent so that she is not excluded.

#### **In what way do you think a placement will be useful and meaningful for your course?**

Couldn't do without it as it the interpersonal skills are integral to the qualification.

#### **Is there anything else you would like to say or recommend?**

The big transition has been learning that she had to be the one saying, "this is what I need", and taking control.

Student 'Liz' would like to see a mentoring scheme provided by visually impaired students who have experienced a successful work placement for students with less life skills.

## Case Study 5 – to go on a placement

### Profile of student

<b>Name to be known by:</b>	student Fred
<b>Age range:</b>	late 20's
<b>Eye condition:</b>	tunnel vision
<b>Preferred reading medium:</b>	Size 16-18 Arial font or electronic
<b>Primary assistive technology:</b>	Supernova magnification for normal use plus speech for lengthy documents
<b>Name of University:</b>	Birmingham City University
<b>Years started university:</b>	2008
<b>Course:</b>	Rehabilitation

### The DSA assessment

<b>When was your DSA assessment?</b>	2007
<b>Where was your DSA assessment?</b>	Hereford

### Was your DSA assessor aware that your course would/could include a placement?

Yes but wasn't aware of any online exams as they were not listed as part of the course at the time of enrolment.

### What provision was made during your DSA assessment for you to work on an outside placement?

- Taxi fares to and from home visits
- Note taker for weekly set number of hours whilst on placement
- Digital voice recorder
- Scanner
- 3 hours scanning training
- Supernova pen drive
- 8 hours supernova training

### Did you suggest any particular equipment?

Digital Note taker.

### Was any of the equipment suggested by you provided?

Yes

### **What other equipment was provided?**

- Supernova pen drive
- Taxi fares to and from home visits
- Reader for set number of hours
- Note taker for weekly set number of hours whilst on placement
- Digital voice recorder
- Book chair
- PC
- Printer
- Paper & ink
- Scanner
- 3 hours scanning training
- 8 hours supernova training

### **Did you receive training on how to use the equipment?**

Yes

### **Can you think of any other equipment/provision that would be useful?**

What would be useful would be some software that converts voice recordings into text.

Also a CCTV which was suggested at the time but student Fred didn't realise how useful that would be at the time.

A laptop would be useful and now Fred is considering buying one especially as he is very concerned about the time taken to convert notes from a digital voice recorder into forms and other required documentation.

### **The support available within the university**

#### **Is all the information provided in an appropriate and accessible format?**

Yes they are experienced and well prepared.

#### **Are there facilities provided for you to be able to access information at university, i.e. scanner, JAWS?**

Good provision includes main PowerPoint screen the smaller ones on desks around the room.

#### **Have you received or do you need training on how to use the equipment within the university?**

Mainly practical work so not necessary.

#### **What did/is the university doing to help you find a placement?**

Nothing – they expect student to find somewhere. Placement gave support to get forms submitted.

**When a placement is found will someone from the university contact the placement to discuss the facilities you would need?**

List of criteria to enable a good accessible placement was provided by the university.

**Have you/or are you going to meet with anyone at the university to discuss what you would be doing on placement and if your needs will be met?**

No

**Is there someone you will be able to contact at the university if you have any problems while you are on placement?**

Yes – lecturer will visit.

**The perception of employers about issues around a disabled person in the workplace undertaking a work placement**

**Have you visited a placement or will you visit prior to starting there?**

Yes

**Will there be someone at the placement you can speak to about any problems with accessibility or any other issues?**

Yes

**Approximately how long will the placement last?**

4 months

**Is there someone at your university that your placement will be able to contact if there are any problems while you were on placement?**

Yes

**Is it likely or do you think it could be useful if the placement staff were to receive some visually impaired awareness training prior to your placement?**

Not necessary as already achieved

## **The experience for the student doing a work placement**

### **What aspects of the placement do you think will work well and why?**

Fred is looking forward to putting into practice everything studied at university and making everything relevant.

### **What aspects of the placement are you concerned about?**

Has a digital recorder but doesn't have a laptop so notes recorded regarding individual cases could take too long to put into the correct forms afterwards and also making additional notes

Generally keeping up with case loads.

### **In what way do you think a placement will be useful and meaningful for your course?**

Fred is looking forward to putting into practice everything studied at uni and making everything relevant.

### **Is there anything else you would like to say or recommend?**

The local authority were very helpful with form filling and making sure that the equipment was delivered quickly which made a difference.

## Case Study 6 – completed a placement

### Profile of student

<b>Name to be known by:</b>	Carra
<b>Age range:</b>	Late 20's
<b>Eye condition:</b>	Leber's Amaurosis
<b>Preferred reading medium:</b>	electronic
<b>Primary assistive technology:</b>	JAWS
<b>University attended:</b>	Worcester
<b>Years attended university:</b>	2003 – 2010 (some part time elements and some full time)
<b>Course attended:</b>	Combined Studies

### Have you completed your course and if not why?

No, still ongoing

### The DSA assessment

<b>Did you have a DSA assessment?</b>	Yes
<b>When was your assessment?</b>	2010
<b>Where was your assessment?</b>	Hereford

### Was your DSA assessor aware that your course would/could include a placement?

Yes

### What provision was made during your DSA assessment for you to work on an outside placement?

Options were discussed but not necessary as its been ongoing for some time

### Did you suggest any particular equipment?

Yes

### Was any of the equipment suggested by you provided?

Eyepal (portable OCR scanner)

### **Roughly, what equipment was provided or recommended?**

Laptop  
Eyepal  
JAWS  
Office 2007

### **Will you receive training on how to use the equipment?**

No not necessary as already an experienced user

### **On reflection, would any other equipment have been useful?**

No, although many were discussed at length

## **The support available within the university**

### **Was all the information provided in an appropriate and accessible format?**

This is the 3<sup>rd</sup> university attended by Carra. The previous 2 universities attended resulted in having to give up the course as a result of lack of sufficient support.

- Worcester - Yes mostly although alternate formats can sometimes take so long to arrive as a result can be no longer useful.
- Northampton disability co-ordinator was deaf which made discussions very difficult.
- Glamorgan didn't provide sufficient support with providing documents in an accessible format.

### **Were there facilities provided for you to be able to access information, i.e. scanner, JAWS?**

Some in one room

### **Did you receive or need training on how to use the equipment within the university?**

The option was available but not necessary

### **What did the university do to help you find a placement?**

Nothing but did offer to support if required

Has completed 2 work placements:

One through Remploy

One through contacting the organisation directly

### **Did you meet with anyone at the university to discuss what you would be doing on placement and if your needs would be met?**

No

**When a placement had been found did someone from the university contact the placement to discuss the facilities you would need?**

No

**Was there someone you could contact at the university if you had any problems while you were on placement?**

Module tutor

**The perception of employers about issues around a disabled person in the work place undertaking a work placement**

**Did you visit the placement prior to starting there?**

The second placement Yes

The first placement No

**Was there someone at the placement you could speak to about any problems with accessibility or any other issues?**

Yes line manager

**How long was the placement going to last?**

60 hours

**How long did you stay at the placement?**

Now on a 12 month part time contract

**Was there someone at your university that your placement could contact if there were any problems while you were on placement?**

No

**Were the placement staff given some visually impaired awareness training prior to your placement?**

No

**The experience for the student doing a work placement**

**What aspects of the placement would you say worked well?**

It is a requirement of the course, 1<sup>st</sup> paid job, learn office etiquette, team working, attending meetings, varied range of experience  
Completing additional qualifications through the placement

**What aspects of the placement would you say did not work?**

None, it has gone well although some visual impairment awareness staff training would have prevented some inappropriate tasks being set

**On reflection, was the placement useful and meaningful for your course?**

Yes

**If you were to go on placement again, is there anything you would do differently or recommend?**

10 years ago wouldn't have known to ask the assessor due to a lack of experience with equipment and wouldn't have had the life experience to know what would be involved and what would work and what wouldn't.

The DSA assessment would ideally be in 2 parts, first part to get the initial equipment to started on the course and then a review a few months later to pick up on any additional requirements once settled into the course and would have a clearer picture of what was needed and why certain pieces of equipment could be useful.

## Case Study 7 – about to go on a placement

### Profile of student

<b>Name to be known by:</b>	student 'Ella' (not the students' real name)
<b>Age range:</b>	early 40's
<b>Eye condition:</b>	Retinitis Pigmentosa
<b>Preferred reading medium:</b>	Braille and electronic
<b>Primary assistive technology:</b>	JAWS
<b>Name of University:</b>	Plymouth
<b>Years started university:</b>	2009
<b>Name of your Course:</b>	Foundation in Complimentary Health Studies

### The DSA assessment

#### When was your DSA assessment?

Applied in July 2009 to Student Finance England. Plymouth University recognised that the delay in receiving a response through Student Finance England would jeopardise her ability to study and decided to intervene.

At the end of August 2009 they performed their own DSA assessment and will forward it to the appropriate body when the time comes.

**Where was your DSA assessment?** Plymouth University

#### Was your DSA assessor aware that your course would/could include a placement?

No it wasn't discussed

#### What provision was made during your DSA assessment for you to work on an outside placement?

None

#### Did you suggest any particular equipment?

A Tracker Breeze was suggested to aid with navigating the different campus buildings but will also be useful when attempting to get to the placement.

#### Was any of the equipment suggested by you provided?

The assessor was very supportive and approachable so the equipment needs were discussed and a mutual agreement was reached on what to ask for.

Everything possible has been provided on loan from the university in the meantime.

### **What other equipment was provided?**

What has been asked for is as follows:

- A support worker
- Laptop
- JAWS
- Milestone digital voice recorder and DAISY player
- Foot pedal controls for the milestone
- Scanner
- Kutzweil OCR scanning software
- Book allowance for transcribing books into Braille

### **Did you receive training on how to use the equipment?**

Training will be provided

### **Can you think of any other equipment/provision that would be useful?**

Taxi allowance

### **The support available within the university**

### **Is all the information provided in an appropriate and accessible format?**

The university are converting text into Braille as and when it is required

Extensive mobility training has been provided around the university campuses

Everything is put on MOODLE although there are some problems with PowerPoint presentations which are used a lot and consist mainly of pictures. Most lecturers send any handouts by email the day before the lecture.

### **Are there facilities provided for you to be able to access information at university, i.e. scanner, JAWS?**

No, there are no screen reading facilities available although there is a magnification package and a CCTV. This means having to carry a heavy laptop at all times which is causing some back problems.

### **Have you received or do you need training on how to use the equipment within the university?**

No

**What did/is the university doing to help you find a placement?**

The placement is not until the second year and as yet hasn't been discussed.

**When a placement is found will someone from the university contact the placement to discuss the facilities you would need?**

No idea at this point

**Have you/or are you going to meet with anyone at the university to discuss what you would be doing on placement and if your needs will be met?**

No idea at this point

**Is there someone you will be able to contact at the university if you have any problems while you are on placement?**

No idea at this point although has high expectations that the course facilitator will continue to be supportive

**The perception of employers about issues around a disabled person in the workplace undertaking a work placement**

**Have you visited a placement or will you visit prior to starting there?**

Will go and introduce herself regardless of what's expected to arrange facilities for the dog as well as for her personal needs

**Will there be someone at the placement you can speak to about any problems with accessibility or any other issues?**

No idea at this point but would hope so

**Approximately how long will the placement last?**

1–2 months

**Is there someone at your university that your placement will be able to contact if there are any problems while you were on placement?**

Faculty manager / course facilitator

**Is it likely or do you think it could be useful if the placement staff were to receive some visually impaired awareness training prior to your placement?**

Highly unlikely but would be extremely useful

## **The experience for the student doing a work placement**

### **What aspects of the placement do you think will work well and why?**

Don't know but hopefully working in a good environment will help with decision of whether to be self employed or work for an organisation.

### **What aspects of the placement are you concerned about?**

Paperwork and admin requirements and peoples perceived ideas about someone who is visually impaired working there.

### **In what way do you think a placement will be useful and meaningful for your course?**

It'll bring together everything that has been learnt on the course, current development, legislation and integrating alternative therapies into mainstream health environments.

### **Is there anything else you would like to say or recommend?**

There are 11 in the group ranging from 21 to 61 years of age. Bearing in mind she has only been there for 4 weeks the way the staff have helped has been unbelievable and she cannot recommend Plymouth highly enough. They have a 'can do' attitude and check everything is ok and if there is anything else they could do. Her lecturer wrote to one of the Therapist Practitioner Associations for advice on how she should measure the oils and as a result provided her with syringes.

Student Ella does miss having someone else who is visually impaired to say, "How did you cope with this".

## Information for undergraduates planning to undertake a work placement

Engaging in the opportunity to experience the working environment of a chosen area of study is an important component of many courses. Work placements are especially important for students with a disability as they encourage independence, aid the development of socialisation and allow personal strategies to be built to overcome barriers whilst putting academic knowledge into practice.

There is a lot of support available to students, although it is important prior to obtaining that support, to consider what an employer who would be offering a placement would be looking for. Discussions with employers have shown that they are willing to offer support. For example

“If we don't take a chance then we become a polarized society where we avoid taking on people with challenges”.

Employers are often unsure of the facts around visual impairment including what it would cost them to offer a placement and what a student on placement can offer in return. It should not cost an employer anything to provide a placement and all students have many skills to offer. A website aimed at employers has been developed alongside this information sheet to answer many of the questions posed.

Following a placement one employer said,

“Having had such a positive experience we would certainly contemplate taking on another work placement student with a disability in the future”.

All of the employers approached wanted to make it clear what they would be looking for from either a work placement student/potential employee. All said the most important was:

- Confidence to put across their skills.
- Confidence to put across their equipment needs.
- Be willing to have a go.

At the start of your college course, or at a later date, you may decide you would like to have a Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) assessment. Disabled Students' Allowances are grants to help meet the extra course costs students can face as a direct result of a disability or specific learning difficulty. They are aimed at helping students with a disability to study on an equal basis with other students. How much you get depends on your individual needs and whether your course is full time or part time, up to a maximum allowance. The government website Directgov will give you more information at

[http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/DisabledPeople/EducationAndTraining/HigherEducation/DG\\_10034898](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/DisabledPeople/EducationAndTraining/HigherEducation/DG_10034898).

The maximum available grant for a full-time and part-time higher education student in 2010/11 or 2009/10 is as follows:

For specialist equipment to last the entire course - full time £5,161 - part time £5,161.  
For a non-medical helper per year - full time £20,520 - part time £15,390 depending on the intensity of the course.

General Disabled Students' Allowances per year – full time £1,724 - part time £1,293 depending on the intensity of the course.

When you apply, you will be asked to go for a needs assessment to establish exactly what support you require. This will be carried out by a person with specialist experience (DSA Assessor) at an independent assessment centre, or at a centre within your college or university. The cost of the needs assessment may be met through your Disabled Students' Allowances.

Your assessor will be supportive, approachable and your equipment needs can be discussed and a mutual agreement reached. If your course could include a work placement or even field trips it is important to discuss this with your DSA assessor because it can make a difference to the type of equipment recommended, your needs may differ when on a work placement to when studying on campus.

Most colleges have more than one department that will be happy to provide assistance. The structure of the departments tends to vary from college to college but if you go to Student Services someone will always guide you in the right direction. The possible departments include:

- Disability and Additional Needs Unit.
- Personal Assistance scheme.
- Accessible Careers Centre and career guidance.
- Careers advice for students with disabilities.
- Learning Support & Disability Resources.
- Placement Support Careers and Employability Centre.
- Placements Managers and officers attached to the various schools/departments.

All materials will be available in a variety of accessible formats including many online resources. Again you should go to Student Services who will provide you with a list of any online services your college offers. The following are examples of what could be offered:

- Placement action sheet that demonstrate the various possible routes.
- Placement action plan process.
- Preparation for work placement.
- Your rights in education.
- A website packed full of useful advice, information and links.

**Below is a list of useful websites:**

DSA-QAG is a non-profit making Regulatory Quality Assurance Group who have produced a useful set of frequently asked question related to DSA's including how to apply, what is an Assessment of Needs, Getting your equipment and Troubleshooting <http://www.dsa-qag.org.uk/content.asp?ContentID=40>.

The National Network of Assessment Centres (UK) is a wide network of specialist services that work together to facilitate access for disabled people to education, training, employment and personal development in the post 16 sector. Assessment Centre services include quality assessment and support in the use of assistive technology and/or specialised learning strategies

<http://www.nnac.org/students/faq.php>

The British Computer Association of the Blind (BCAB) provides information and support for blind and partially sighted computer users. Our membership includes people of all skill levels and interests

<http://www.bcab.org.uk/useful-resources.html>.

Action for Blind People is one of the largest charities in the UK providing free and confidential support for blind and partially sighted people in all aspects of their lives. Whether it's finding a job or holding onto one following sight loss, our Employment teams provide support and advice to you and your employer

<http://www.actionforblindpeople.org.uk/help-advice/employment/>.

The Disabled Workers Co-operative helps disabled people to help themselves. Their aim is twofold - to raise the independence of disabled people (for those that want it) by enabling them to take an active role in the economy and achieve a greater sense of self-worth and also to raise awareness of the contribution that disabled people can make to society

<http://www.disabledworkers.org.uk/>.

AbilityNet is a national charity helping disabled adults and children use computers and the internet by adapting and adjusting their technology. Our special expertise is ensuring that whatever your age, health condition, disability or situation you find exactly the right way to adapt or adjust your ICT to make it easier to use

<http://www.abilitynet.org.uk/atwork>.

The Graduate Forum allows you to select a topic and talk to graduates via the message board. There is a resident careers consultant who will contribute to many of the discussions. If you are not sure what to do go to the Rules of use including terms and conditions link and select How to use this forum from the topic list

<http://tomcat4.prospects.ac.uk:8080/forum/index.php>.

Thomas Pocklington Trust is a leading provider of housing, care and support services for people with sight loss

<http://www.pocklington-trust.org.uk/aboutus>.

Helping you find and keep a job. If you are looking for work, a Jobcentre Plus Disability Employment Adviser might be able to help you find something that is suitable. There are also other places you can look for job vacancies

[http://www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk/JCP/Customers/Disabled\\_People\\_and\\_Carers/Looking\\_for\\_a\\_job/index.html](http://www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk/JCP/Customers/Disabled_People_and_Carers/Looking_for_a_job/index.html).

Diversity - Jobcentre Plus offers a wide range of services to support employers seeking to recruit and retain people with disabilities and to assist people with disabilities to return to and remain in work

<http://www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk/JCP/Employers/advisoryservices/diversity/index.html>.

TalentPlus is a project delivered by Blue Orchid and Manchester Metropolitan University. Blue Orchid is a Manchester-based business support and start-up consultancy, which has helped more than 3,400 companies upskill, retrain, raise productivity and improve overall performance, and helped start 510 businesses  
<http://www.mmu.ac.uk/careers/students-and-graduates/talentplus/faq.php>.

Skill is the National Bureau for Students with Disabilities, a national charity promoting opportunities for young people and adults with any kind of impairment in post-16 education, training and employment  
<http://skillcms.ds2620.dedicated.turbodns.co.uk/page.aspx?p=132&c=29#DLA>.

Employment Opportunities is a students and graduate service that has been established since 1999 and has pioneered recruitment for disabled students and graduates. Historically they provided internships within the investment banking sector and now also work with a selection of top city law firms, professional services and the public sector  
<http://www.opportunities.org.uk/>.

If you have a disability or health condition and want to start or return to work, Remploy can help you make the most of your ability. The range of employment services are designed to help you get the job that's right for you  
<http://www.remploy.co.uk/jobseekers.ashx>.

Graduate Talent Pool is a new service, designed to help match the skills businesses require with those offered by new and recent graduates. On this website you can advertise internship opportunities for free, directly to graduates. You can also register up to 10 sifting questions so that only the most suitable graduates apply for your vacancies  
[http://graduatetalentpool.bis.gov.uk/cms/ShowPage/Home\\_page/p!ekppgba](http://graduatetalentpool.bis.gov.uk/cms/ShowPage/Home_page/p!ekppgba).

Employers' Forum on Disability say that they are the world's leading employers' organisation focused on disability as it affects business. Their mission is to enable companies to become disability confident by making it easier to recruit and retain disabled employees and to serve disabled customers  
<http://www.efd.org.uk/>.

## **DSA Assessor Considerations**

Going to university and studying in a mainstream environment can be very daunting to many students with sensory impairments and other disabilities. As a result it is not uncommon for these students to be unable to focus and fully comprehend the practical requirements of their course.

At the time of the DSA assessment it is unlikely that the student will have clear information about a potential work placement. Some students interviewed said they were not prepared for their DSA assessment because at the time, due to their fears, they could really only focus on surviving the first term. Not all of these students even realised that there could be a placement or what it might entail.

For various reasons some students do not have a DSA assessment until after the course has started and as a result may be better informed of their requirements. However, this is not recommended as it would mean starting the course with insufficient support and have the obvious consequences. It was suggested by a student that the DSA assessment ideally be in 2 parts, first part to get the initial equipment to start on the course and then a review a few months later to pick up on any additional requirements once the student has settled into the course and would have a clearer picture of what was needed and why certain pieces of equipment could be useful.

Assessors must be mindful of the uncertainty involved with work placements and ensure that the student is aware that time has been allowed during the assessment to discuss pro-actively how needs on a work placement may differ from needs when studying on campus.

Students have suggested that they would appreciate clear discussions with the DSA Assessor on the following:

- Ensuring that the student fully understands budget situation
- What equipment is available
- What a student can and can't get
- The possible training options associated with using any recommended equipment.

## **Course Content**

Course content, delivery, work placement requirements and methods of assessment can and frequently do change, even mid course. It is always worth contacting the college where the student is studying and speaking to the course leader to check you have up to date information.

## **Assistive Technologies**

A student on placement may not be able to take their own equipment. A laptop may not be allowed on the premises due to DDA requirements, security issues or because the bespoke software is only installed on the company system. The student may also be required in this situation to use several computers. Portable versions will allow more flexibility.

Note taking and documenting interviews are often an area of concern. A digital note taker where the recorded content can be exported into a portable audio device or downloaded into Microsoft Word and edited in a few simple steps would be appreciated by many print disabled applicants, especially when completing forms.

A student whose primary reading and writing medium is Braille may find an electronic Braille note taker a more efficient method for making notes. The student may also find a Braille note taker less disruptive than a voice recorder, and as a result preserve independence while allowing the student to feel less conspicuous.

As a student on placement is only temporary, they may not have a dedicated room. Lighting may not be appropriate in a temporary environment. This could change a student's needs. The type and quality of the CCTV required could change. If appropriate to the student perhaps it would be worth considering a portable version in addition to or in place of a desktop CCTV.

Portable magnifiers can be useful for on the go reading and writing, most people with low vision need good direct light when reading, an illuminated magnifier could help.

A talking GPS system may be a consideration for some students in certain circumstances.

Public transport often uses screens to display up to date information. The allocation of a monocular for looking at train displays and station information screens could provide some students with increased confidence and independence, putting the student on a more equal basis with other train passengers.

## **Travel and Travel Expenses**

Travel can be a difficult area. The assessor should consider that the work placement may be of extended duration. Independent travel to and from the location may be viable, provided appropriate mobility and orientation that included additional route learning has taken place. The stress of travelling independently should be considered on an individual basis. Additional route training is likely to be appropriate in subsequent years to access a work placement.

Some courses mean a community based placement is more likely. In this situation frequent taxi usage should be a consideration.

## **Training**

If a student is more used to desktop based equipment they are likely to require some initial training in the use of portable versions.

Software to convert material into an accessible format and how to download the contents of a digital note taker into a word processor are areas that students often say they require additional training.

It is worth mentioning that where appropriate, training rather than a long term support worker is likely to increase the possibility of independent working.

## **Responses from Universities**

## Responses from University No. 1

I have forwarded your message onto our Placement Coordinators in our various Schools of Study; .... They should be in touch shortly with a response to your query.

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I have to admit that the number of students in my school with major disabilities are few, however there are a number of students with disabilities such as dyslexia. At the moment our current procedure is to offer students with a disability an interview with our Disability and Additional Needs Unit. They advise students on finance and whether they need to apply to Access to Work for additional support at work. My role is to ensure that the placement has been checked for any Health and Safety Issues. I hope this help any further questions please let me know.

---

In our university the students are expected to find their own placement, there is currently no assistance from my team but our Disability and Additional Needs Unit may work with the employer and the students to provide additional facilities that particular individual may require.

---

For placements in the UK I think Remploy is a good starting point.  
[www.remplo.co.uk](http://www.remplo.co.uk)

---

Within the University the Disability and Additional Needs Unit (DANU) may be your best point of contact for this subject area.

---

There are a range of organisations that can help a student with disabilities with their placement

**Externally** Remploy: they run a specialist HE employability programme  
[www.remplo.co.uk](http://www.remplo.co.uk)

EmployAbility: they often come onto campus to present to students or to attend our various fairs [www.employ-ability.org.uk](http://www.employ-ability.org.uk)

Skill: they produce a range of resources for staff and students [www.skill.org.uk](http://www.skill.org.uk)

Employment Opportunities: [www.opportunities.org.uk](http://www.opportunities.org.uk)

There is assistance for employers who need to make adjusts to their premises and for students this is thru job centre plus [www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk](http://www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk) under the access to work programme

There is information on the prospects website too [www.prospects.ac.uk](http://www.prospects.ac.uk)

**Internally** the university actively tries to address the needs of all students through its work policies. The careers centre offers a range of information resources including two house leaflets on our accessibility and a leaflet on career decisions including disclosure. I can post these to you if you wish. We also have a disability unit which focuses more on the students' academic life.

---

Here are the word versions and I will send you the PDF-ed versions by post

---

If you follow this link to the site, it will give you information on the service and contact details.

## Responses from University No. 2

I have passed this along to a couple of colleagues. One has much more experience of dealing with numbers of students going on vocational placements. I have also forwarded to a colleague in my team on this campus, where we do fewer directly vocational courses (although I suppose that's a debateable concept). She has flagged up a case where a blind student had "full" support (DSA funded learning support assistant) when he went on a work placement for his music degree. If you are interested in this I can try and get you more details.

.....

(We have used the ADSHE guidance on work placement support in the past to direct our thinking. This is on our website and directed at and made available to colleagues in Faculties etc.)

.....

Here is an anonymised report from the work placement:

XXXXX's was my only experience of our involvement in placements. In XXXXX's case, the placement was one he arranged himself through his own contacts, rather than one we specifically helped him obtain. The main issue with it, from my point of view, was that the placement was in the Christmas vacation period, and his acceptance with the employer depended on my being with him at all times, since he was unsighted and the employer queried the public liability insurance position in the event of an accident, and was not able himself to provide support.

I was willing to do this, and my travel costs amounting to around £300 were refunded by the DSA. The placement was successful - but I guess the arrangement we had to come to does highlight a difficulty when we attempt to arrange placements for students with disabilities.

.....

### University No. 3

Finding suitable work placements for visually impaired learners has proved rather problematic, and thus far we have been confined to seeking assistance from agencies who specialise in working with disability, and in particular visual impairment. This being the case, the hosting organisation is usually able to provide the support mechanisms. The blind student who is currently on programme with us, has a support worker at all times – however we haven't currently managed to secure a suitable placement this academic year, and he only had limited access last year. We are currently exploring two placement routes – the first being with our local School Sports partnership, who have a specialist working to promote Disability Sport in the Borough – as a pre-cursor to London 2012. The second potential placement is with The Pocklington Trust, a voluntary organisation working with the visually impaired, who were featured recently on "The Secret Millionaire".

To answer your question more fully, I would like to talk to the student and establish the type of support needs that he would ideally have met on a placement, and then respond to you properly – I'm conscious that I'm only being vague at the moment!

Anecdotally, I make it my business to introduce able bodied Sports students to a range of Disability Sports – this gives them a valuable understanding of adapted activity and the different skill-sets required. The true value of this, is their increased willingness to support disabled peers. I have had international basketballers awe-inspired by wheelchair basketball.

I'm sorry for not being more specific, but I will get back to you once I've spoken to our learner.

## **University No. 4**

The Disability Support and Mental Health Teams at the University do offer support for students undertaking work placements as part of their course. I have attached the placement guidelines produced for staff supporting students with mental health difficulties, as well as our procedure for implementing support on placement and a template of a placement action plan.

I hope this is useful.

## **Examples of Resources Offered**

(Font size and spacing adjusted on resources to show content yet save paper)

## Open University

### Your rights in education

The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 amended the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA) to make it unlawful for education providers to discriminate against disabled pupils, students and adult learners; and to make sure disabled people are not disadvantaged in comparison with people who are not disabled.

It is also possible for universities and colleges to provide non-medical helper support, for example notetakers, sign-language interpreters and extra tutorial support, while your DSA application is still being processed. The university or college can be reimbursed from your DSA if the type of support provided is later recommended in your needs assessment. This is stated in the [DSA Guidance Notes Regulation 165](#).

You are not eligible for DSAs if you are a sandwich-course student on a full-year paid placement. DSAs can be awarded to students studying:

- full-time and part-time undergraduate courses (degree or HND-level courses) including Open University and other distance-learning courses; and
- certain full-time and part-time postgraduate courses (courses for which the entry requirement is at least a first degree or equivalent) including Open University and other distance-learning courses;
- who can prove that they have a disability, mental-health condition or specific learning difficulty which affects their ability to study.

### Financial help for disabled students

If you have an impairment, health condition (including a mental health condition) or specific learning difficulty like dyslexia, you may be entitled to claim extra financial help as a student. This is paid on top of anything you get through the standard student finance package.

- Financial help for disabled students
- Sources of extra financial help for disabled students include:
  - Disabled Students' Allowances
  - Access to Learning Fund
  - Disability Living Allowance
  - Employment and Support Allowance - These are paid on top of the standard student finance package.
- Disabled Students' Allowances

Disabled Students' Allowances are grants to help with the extra costs a student may face as the direct result of an impairment, health condition or specific learning difficulty.

### Disabled Students' Allowances

Disabled Students' Allowances provide extra financial help if you have a disability or specific learning difficulty like dyslexia. They are available on top of the standard student finance package and don't have to be repaid. This page is an introduction to what is available if you live in England.

Who Disabled Students' Allowances are aimed at

Disabled Students' Allowances are grants to help meet the extra course costs students can face as a direct result of a disability or specific learning difficulty. They are aimed at helping disabled people to study on an equal basis with other students.

Eligible full-time, part-time and postgraduate students can apply for Disabled Students' Allowances. The amount you get doesn't depend on your household income. Disabled Students' Allowances are paid on top of the standard student finance package, and don't have to be paid back.

What they can be used for

Disabled Students' Allowances can help pay for:  
specialist equipment you need for studying - for example, computer software  
a non-medical helper, such as a note-taker or reader  
extra travel costs you have to pay because of your disability  
other costs - for example, tapes or Braille paper

Eligibility

You can apply if you are doing:

a full-time course that lasts at least one year (including a distance-learning course)  
a part-time course that lasts at least one year and doesn't take more than twice as long to complete as an equivalent full-time course (including a distance-learning course)  
Checking that you're eligible for student finance  
To apply for financial help through Disabled Students' Allowances, both you and your course must meet some other conditions. It's worth checking these before you make your application.

## Disability support in higher education



Universities and colleges are increasingly aware of the needs of disabled students and students with specific learning difficulties. They can provide support in a number of ways – and you may be able to get extra financial help.

What is higher education?

Higher education is the next step on from further education. Studying at university or college, you'll work towards one of a range of qualifications such as a degree - for example, a BA or BSc - foundation degree, or a diploma/certificate of higher education.

You can go into higher education at any age but many people enter when they are around 18 years old. There's a lot to consider if you're planning to go into higher education, and as a disabled student you'll need to give plenty of thought to:

- where to study
- the support you may need while studying
- support with day-to-day living
- money and funding

For general information on university and higher education, see the general 'education and learning' section of Directgov.

[University and higher education \(general education and learning section\)](#)

Where to study

Universities and higher education colleges have an obligation to make provision for disabled students. Each place of study should publish a Disability Statement setting out how it provides support. You can ask to see a copy of this statement, as well as looking on their website to see details of their policies.

Support provided by colleges and universities could include:

- accommodation adapted for the needs of disabled students
- professional care staff
- assistance from volunteers

Every university or college has a Disability Advisor or Learning Support Coordinator to help you get the most out of your time in higher education. They can tell you about the support available - for example equipment to help you study. When applying to a university, you don't have to tell them about your disability - but you'd need to do so to get any additional support or funding.

You may find it useful to contact your university or college's disability adviser or disability coordinator before you make a final decision about where to study. It's also a good idea to go and check the institution out for yourself.

[Deciding where to study \(general education and learning section\)](#)

Support while you're studying

- There are many things universities can do to help disabled students, including providing course materials in Braille and other accessible formats
- ensuring buildings and facilities are accessible
- encouraging flexible teaching methods
- providing support during exams
- allowing additional time to complete courses

You may also need assistance on a day-to-day basis to help you study. This could be someone to:

- interpret words into sign language
- take notes for you
- write down your words - for example in an exam

help you overcome physical barriers

## Disabled Students' Allowances - how to apply



Find out how to apply for Disabled Students' Allowances if you are from England, and what to do if your application is turned down.

Applying for Disabled Students' Allowances

There are two different ways of applying for Disabled Students' Allowances. Which one you should use depends on whether you are:

doing a full-time higher education course

studying part-time or doing a postgraduate course

Most universities and colleges have a disability adviser. They can help with your application and give you advice about other sources of funding.

Full-time higher education students

You should fill in form DSA1. If you tick the relevant box on your main student finance application, you will be sent a copy of the DSA1 form automatically. You can also download one below.

Some local authorities may handle applications for Disabled Students' Allowances differently. For example, they may send a confirmation letter for you to sign instead of a form.

Alternative formats

The form and guidance booklet are available in large print, Braille and audio. To get copies in alternative formats, contact Student Finance England if you are applying for 2009/2010, or your local authority if you are applying for 2008/2009.

[Contact Student Finance England](#)

[Contact your local authority \(student finance applications\) Opens new window](#)

Postgraduates and part-time higher education students

If you are studying part time or doing a postgraduate course, you need to take the DSA1 form to your college or university, ask them to sign it and then send it to the address on the form.

If you are a part-time higher education student and your university or college has already completed form PTG1 for you, you don't need to get your DSA1 form signed as well. Just send it straight to the address on it once you have filled it in.

Open University students

You should apply directly to the Open University's Disabled Students' Allowances (DSA) office. If you tell the Open University that you have a disability when you apply, the office will send you the application form automatically.

[The Open University - Disabled Students' Allowances Opens new window](#)

Application forms for 2009/2010

Use the DSA1 form to apply for Disabled Students' Allowances.

[Download application form for Disabled Students' Allowances \(DSA1\) 2009/2010 \(PDF, 307K\)](#)

If you want to claim for expenses you have already paid out, fill in a 'Claim form for reimbursement of costs through Disabled Students' Allowances'.

[Download claim form for reimbursement of costs through Disabled Students' Allowances 2009/2010 \(PDF, 68K\)](#)

Applying for 2008/2009?

Student finance applications close nine months after the start of the academic year.

But if you're still able to apply for the 2008/2009 academic year, you'll need to get a 2008/2009 version of form DSA1 from your local authority – or from the Student Loans Company, if they're handling applications for your area.

[Contact your local authority \(student finance applications\) Opens new window](#)

Where to send your application form

If you are a new student starting your course in the academic year 2009/2010, send your completed form to Student Finance England.

[Student Finance England](#)

If you started your course in the academic year 2008/2009 or earlier, you usually need to send your completed form to your local authority. Contact your local authority to find out where to send your form.

[Contact your local authority \(student finance applications\) Opens new window](#)

If your application is turned down

If your application is turned down, you can ask for an explanation.

If you disagree with the decision, you can ask Student Finance England or your local authority - whichever one assessed your application - to review your case. If the decision is reviewed and you still feel it is wrong, get in touch with them and ask how you can appeal against it.

[Contact Student Finance England](#)

[Contact your local authority \(student finance applications\) Opens new window](#)

## Disabled Students' Allowances - how much you can get



The amount of help available through Disabled Students' Allowances is based on an assessment of your individual needs – up to a maximum allowance. The different allowances have different limits. This page offers a guide to how much you can get if you are a student from England.

Working out Disabled Students' Allowances

Disabled Students' Allowances are aimed at helping people with a disability, mental health condition or specific learning difficulty to study on the same basis as other students. So how much you get depends on your individual needs – up to a maximum allowance.

When you apply, you will be asked to go for a needs assessment to establish exactly what support you require. This will be carried out by a person with specialist experience at an independent assessment centre, or at a centre within your college or university. The cost of the needs assessment may be met through your Disabled Students' Allowances.

If you're a part-time student, the amount you can get is also affected by the 'intensity' of your course – how much time you spend studying compared to a full-time student.

Household income is not taken into account when working out entitlement to Disabled Students' Allowances. They're paid on top of any help you get through the standard student finance package, and you don't have to pay them back.

Allowances for full-time and part-time higher education students

The tables below show the maximum allowances for full-time and part-time higher education students (including Open University students and other distance learners).

Maximum allowances are meant to support the highest levels of need, so most people will get less.

On top of the allowances listed in this table, you can claim for 'reasonable spending' on extra travel costs for the academic year.

Maximums for full-time and part-time higher education students: 2009/2010

Type of allowance	Full-time students	Part-time students
Specialist equipment	£5,161 for entire course	£5,161 for entire course
Non-medical helper	£20,520 a year	£15,390 a year (depends on intensity of course)
General Disabled Students' Allowances	£1,724 a year	£1,293 a year (depends on intensity of course)

Allowances for postgraduate students

Postgraduate students (including Open University students and other distance learners) can apply for a single allowance to cover all costs.

The maximum allowance for 2009/2010 is £10,260.

How they are paid

The money will either be paid into your bank account or directly to the supplier of the services - for example your university, college or equipment supplier.

Effect on other financial help

Disabled Students' Allowances are not counted as income when working out your entitlement to benefits or tax credits.

[Benefits for higher education students with low incomes \(money, tax and benefits section\)](#)

If your circumstances change

If your disability becomes more severe during your course, you can apply to have another needs assessment. Contact the organisation which handled your application to arrange this.

You'll still be entitled to Disabled Students' Allowances if you transfer to another course. But if you need different equipment and you've already used up your equipment allowance, you will not be able to get any more through Disabled Students' Allowances.

What do I need to do to get Disabled Students' Allowances (DSAs)?

#### **Step 1**

Complete and return the DSA application form with evidence of your disability, mental health condition or specific learning difficulty.

#### **Step 2**

We will assess your application and send you a letter to let you know if you qualify for DSAs or not.

#### **Step 4**

You attend your Needs Assessment and receive a report which identifies any specialist equipment and other support you may need.

#### **Step 5**

We will send you a letter to tell you whether any specialist equipment and other support that has been recommended in your Needs Assessment Report can be paid for from DSAs.

We will also provide instructions for ordering equipment or arranging other support.

You will receive DSAs

Delivery of specialist equipment

Non-medical helpers allowance

General Allowance

Extra travel costs

Visit our website at [www.direct.gov.uk/studentfinance](http://www.direct.gov.uk/studentfinance)

## **The role of disability advisers**

Disability advisers are available at most higher-education institutions and play an important role in the DSA process. The role of disability advisers may vary between institutions but, generally, they will:

- help students with their DSA applications;
- offer disabled students advice on other sources of funding and support that may be available;
- arrange DSA needs assessments on behalf of students;
- advise on the particular needs that may arise from specific courses;
- help put in place the support that is recommended in the DSA needs assessment report;
- explain and give advice on assessments, called diagnostic assessment reports, of specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia;
- explain and give advice on DSA needs assessment reports;
- co-ordinate the network of support workers;
- work with accommodation services, social services, Student Finance England (or your local authority) and academic departments;
- make recommendations for the academic department in relation to students, for example, special exam arrangements;
- supervise and arrange training for support workers;
- research, develop and help put into practice institutions' policies for exams, physical access and fieldwork; and
- develop and put into practice disability elements of various institutional strategies.

Without the involvement of a disability adviser, the process of getting DSA support might be more difficult. We recommend that the disability adviser is sent a copy of your DSA needs assessment report

Your DSA needs assessor will only send the disability adviser a copy of the report if they have your permission, in writing. Your disability adviser should not normally carry out your DSA needs assessment.

The **Social Model** sees society's attitudes towards a person's impairment as the 'barrier' to participating, not the impairment itself. A person's impairment is not the problem - the problem is with society, which does not include everyone.

## **The four DSA categories are:**

### **Specialist equipment allowance**

To pay for items such as computer equipment, specialist software, furniture or training

### **Non-medical helpers allowance**

To pay for a support worker, personal assistant or other helper you need to benefit fully from your course

### **General expenditure allowance**

For any additional costs not covered by the other allowances, for example, extra books or photocopying. It can also be used to 'top up' the specialist equipment and non-medical helper's allowances

### **Travel allowance**

For extra travel costs you have to pay because of your disability. This is not normally for everyday travel costs which any student would expect to have. For example, if you need a taxi while most other students use public transport, you will receive the difference between the two fares. There is no travel allowance category in Scotland.

## Preparation for work placement

Competencies Unravelling (Aston University Careers Service, 2006)

### Mode one: Materials led

In this case resources are used in their original form: for example, the Skills and Attributes Map and Reflective Questions can be used for Personal Development Planning.

### Mode two: Adaptation

a self-assessment grid. The generic employability competencies would need to be explained to, and discussed with the students. They could then be encouraged to consider the skills and competencies which they have developed through extra-curricular activities and employment and map these against the competencies in readiness for developing a CV or completing an application form

- the basis of a role analysis exercise – students could be asked to look at a number of jobs commonly entered by alumni. Through carrying out research using a number of resources e.g. occupational material produced by Graduate Prospects and professional associations students could identify the key competencies required and present these back to the main group
- to create person specifications. Students could be given a number of job adverts or job descriptions that represent areas of work which alumni commonly enter. They could be asked to write the person specification on which these posts are based. What are the key skills/competencies that could be required?
- as an interview checklist for discussion with either final-year students returning from work placement or alumni. The task is to find out more about their role and competencies used. The Student Employability Profile produced by the Higher Education Academy Economics Subject Centre (2005) includes a series of case studies in which alumni have talked about the skills and competencies that they developed through their degree.
- a stimulus for discussion around the language of recruitment which could aid students' understanding of employers' requirements. After the tutor has worked through an example, students could be given several competencies and encouraged to consider a definition and the type of evidence which would demonstrate that an individual possesses this competence.
- a feedback form which students could use while observing peers undertaking assessment exercises.

### Mode three: Design

The material acts as stimulus to the creation of an original resource. An example might be getting students to create their own Skills and Attributes Map/Profile and comparing it with the existing model

### Skills assessment card-sort

This exercise, based on parts of the Student Employability Profile, could be used in a session designed to encourage students to consider what they have to offer potential employers. The activity uses card sorts, a resource that requires students to organise a number of cards into particular categories. It provides an ideal opportunity to 'externalise' decision-making processes in a flexible manner as students can 'try-out' different scenarios simply by rearranging the cards.

### Commercial awareness

Understands the economics of the business. Understands the business benefits and commercial realities from both the organisation's and the customer's perspectives

People who are good at this:

- demonstrate breadth of awareness of business knowledge (e.g. recognises issues in finance, sales, marketing)
- show consideration of such business implications as increased revenue/profit, decreased expenditure, increased productivity, improved company image and market share
- identify new business opportunities
- take commercial constraints into account
- are able to analyse financial trends (e.g. revenue, profit, productivity) and forecast accordingly
- show an awareness of commercial activity
- show an awareness of competitive products and services and market trends
- identify ways to reduce costs.

The alphabetical Glossary of Competencies Definitions, which is included in both the Guide for Employers, Kubler and Forbes (2005) and the Student Employability Profiles, has also been used as

an effective handout for students providing a brief summary of the competencies which employers seek.

Examples of application/interview questions:

Tell me about an occasion when you made a cost saving in the past. How did you choose where to make the savings? How much money do you think that you saved?

What do you know about the competitors in this business?

What differentiates us from our competitors?’

### **Competencies Unravelling (Aston University Careers Service, 2006)**

### **Universities UK (2002) cited in Scottish Funding Councils for Further and Higher Education (2005)**

#### **Interview technique**

- Provide your students with the application details of a relevant job.
- Inform them that they are required to undertake a mock interview for this position
- In preparation for the interview (in addition to the other advice you give your students on interview technique), provide all students with a copy of the student profile information. Suggest they reflect on those aspects of their degree they think are most relevant to the job application
- You can further help your students prepare for interviews by getting them to think about a situation they were in, the task that needed doing, the action they took, the result or outcome achieved and what they learned from this. This will help them to become conversant with competency-based interviewing and help them to develop their story
- At the interview ask your student some of the following questions:
  - Why should I employ a Geographer/Earth Scientist/Environmental Scientist?
  - What can a graduate from your discipline offer me that other graduates cannot?
  - What challenges and problems have you overcome and how?
  - What are the main skills you can offer the (mock) position?
- Give relevant examples of the actual activities you have undertaken that required the skills you highlight (try to encourage your student to highlight how different activities develop different aspects of the same skill e.g. project management requires a different emphasis on time management and organisational skills than would writing an essay)
- This activity will give students experience in preparing for and handling a job interview and it will get them to consider what distinctive qualities they can bring to a job as a graduate of Geography/Earth Science/Environmental Science.

#### **Personal development planning**

Personal Development Planning (PDP) is “a structured process undertaken by individuals to reflect on their own learning, performance and/or achievement and to plan for their personal, educational and career development” (QAA 2000)

There is a close relationship between PDP and Career Development Learning. Effective engagement with the PDP process can provide students with both the evidence and the language to convey their achievements to employers. In addition, reflecting on development and identifying strengths (and weaknesses) can help the individual develop as a learner and understand how their learning relates to a wider context.

The Student Employability Profiles can provide a range of resources to help students engage with PDP. The Skills and Attributes Map could be used to encourage students to identify the skills that they are developing through degree level study and how these relate to those competencies which many employers value. The Reflective Questions can be used in conjunction with this material to help students evidence their achievements using a vocabulary appropriate to the recruitment process.

“Employers used to ask potential employees what they had done and, implicitly, what skills they had acquired. Now they ask what it is that students have learned from their experiences and, implicitly, how well equipped they are to learn and continue learning.”

**Universities UK (2002) cited in Scottish Funding Councils for Further and Higher Education (2005)**

At The University of Northampton, we are developing discipline-based resources, ‘Supporting Success in your Subject’ to promote the integration of both Personal Development Planning activities and employability skills within the curriculum.

Currently paper and electronic versions on our VLE are being piloted by staff, who will be able to make direct links from course material and signpost to specific exercises or information.

These materials highlight extracts from both subject benchmark statements and the Student Employability Profiles to help staff and students identify those academic skills which are transferable to other contexts, and to encourage students to articulate their development more clearly; workshop materials have been designed to supplement these.

The employability potential of a subject could usefully be summarised in course/module handbooks, and the competency templates could assist with expressing learning outcomes more clearly in an employability context.

The set of reflective questions are particularly useful for adapting to PDP tasks, as preparation for tutorials, in assignment feedback or progress evaluation, and in designing career-management materials to support self-presentation/application skills. Crucial to student engagement with PDP and ownership of their self-development is an awareness of and confidence in the broad relevance of their subject, and the ability to make explicit connections with other learning experiences.

The packs include sections on linking to work-based scenarios and exploring possible employment sectors, which also draw upon the SEPs, graduate case studies, and discipline-based practice from ESECT and the subject centres. It is hoped these will give credibility and relevance to personal, academic and career planning activities for both staff and students.

**University of Northampton - Andrea Duncan, PDP Coordinator - The Office of Learning and Teaching**

### Pre-entry students

The Profiles can be used in a number of ways to communicate the benefits of studying a particular degree. Excerpts from the Profiles can be used in prospectuses, other promotional material, and Open Day talks. Thomas and May (2005) refer to the value of widening participation activities relating to employability which are delivered as part of outreach work and induction.

“US research indicates that students have greater institutional and disciplinary commitment if they perceive their study to have a direct bearing on achieving their career aspirations (Berger and Braxton, 1998)”

### Thomas and May (2005)

The Psychology and the Physical Sciences Subject Centres have produced a section of the Profiles for Psychology and Chemistry that are designed to help prospective students find out more about the benefits of studying the discipline. The material:

- introduces the concept of employability:

“Employability means developing a range of achievements, understandings and personal attributes that make it more likely you’ll get a job and be successful in it. Employers value applicants with degrees because they can ‘add value’ to their organisation. People who spend time studying a science subject will be able to demonstrate an ability to solve problems, to ask questions, to concentrate, to show commitment – all this, and more, will make you of value to a business”

- outlines the attributes, skills and experiences which employers are seeking
- describes the discipline-specific employability skills and aptitudes
- refers to further sources of information on graduate employability

### Work with employers

A ‘Guide for Employers’ Kubler and Forbes (2006) commissioned by the CIHE and Graduate Prospects is a valuable resource for use with employers and covers 43 subject disciplines.

The Guide introduces employers to the concept of the profiles and the CIHE Employability Competencies. It contains copies of the Discipline Profiles derived from the QAA Benchmark

statements, outlining the work-related skills that can be developed through the study of a particular subject and giving an insight into how these skills can be applied in different areas of employment. Extracts from this guide could be included in promotional material designed to encourage employers to recruit graduates or offer work placements from particular disciplines. The majority of the Discipline Profiles from the 'Guide for Employers' are reproduced in this publication between pages 32 and 139. '...the Student Employability Profiles are an important step forward in promoting better shared understanding of the content of different degree disciplines. As a graduate recruiter, I have already used the profiles to improve my knowledge of the skills sets and experiences that a graduate might expect to gain from various degrees, helping me to cast the net wider when looking for new graduate talent for our company.'

**Gary Argent, UK Graduate Recruitment Manager, LogicaCMG**

'The Student Employability Profiles have given employers a significant insight into the benefits of recruiting a student from our degree disciplines. Through highlighting the relationship between academic skills and knowledge and employability competencies, the profiles have contributed significantly to employers' understanding of the nature of these subjects and helped them consider how these graduates could contribute to their organisation'

The profiles may be of particular help developing links with those small and medium sized enterprises who may have had little contact with recent graduates or undergraduates:

'For employers that need new graduate recruits to perform effectively early in their careers, (particularly important for small to medium enterprises), this guide helps show the value a graduate can bring to an organisation straightaway.'

Kubler and Forbes (2005)

**Writing references**

Many staff in higher education will be asked by employers to provide references on students and very detailed information on appropriate content is available from Human Resources departments within individual institutions. One of the key areas covered in these references will often be how closely the student's skills, abilities and other qualities match those required in the job. The CIHE employability competencies provide an excellent guide to the range of attributes that employers seek and the material uses a terminology with which employers will be familiar. Staff could refer to the Skills and Attributes Maps that indicate how these competencies are covered through degree level study and select examples of academic work to support statements in a reference.



## Placement Action Plan

Student Name

Student Number

Course

Student Address

Contact Number

Date Agreed .....

### 1 Introduction

This Placement Plan is recommended by The Disability Team at Birmingham City University, to ensure that ..... has the appropriate support in place to help him/her to overcome any challenges whilst on placement.

### 2 Background

The main outcomes of the meeting:

### 3 Recommendations

The following section will describe the difficulties that xxxx may experience as a result of hxx disability and then provides details of the reasonable adjustments recommended.

**Challenges**

**Support required from ..... mentors whilst on placement**

**Strengths**

**Weaknesses**

### 4 Declaration

The recommendations in this report will need to be agreed by the five parties involved: -

Print.....signature.....date.....

**Faculty**

Print.....signature.....date.....

**Disability Team**

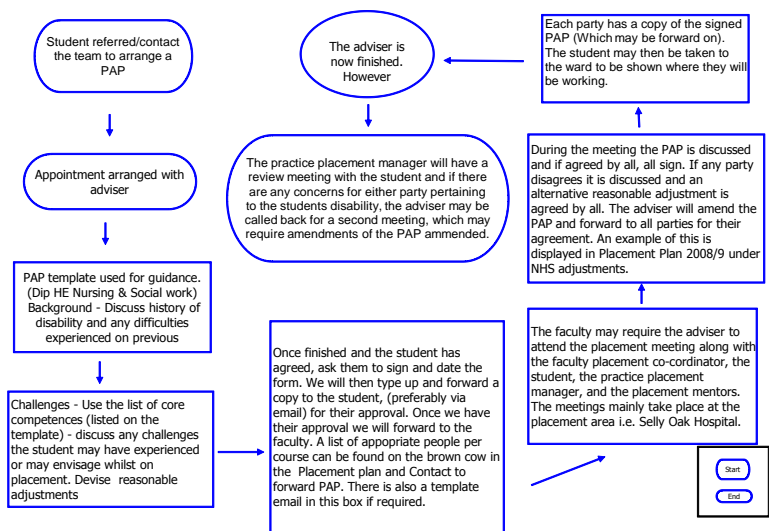
Print.....signature.....date.....

**Placement provider**

Print.....signature.....date.....

**Mentor**

Print.....signature.....date...



## PLACEMENT ACTION PLAN PROCESS

ASK us about...

Health & Wellbeing



**Guidelines for placement staff working  
with students who experience mental  
health-related difficulties**

Student Services/MentalHealth&WellbeingSupport/July09

**ASK**

ADVICE SUPPORT KNOWLEDGE  
Student Services

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### 1. Introduction

This booklet provides guidance for placement staff and managers working with Birmingham City University students who have declared a mental health difficulty. These guidelines aim to encourage organisations to reflect on their current practices, the ways in which they support students on placement, and to be aware of their legal obligations as an employer under the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA 1995 / 2005).

Statistics indicate that:

- 1 in 4 people are thought to experience mental health difficulties at some point during their lifetime (Office for National Statistics, 2001).
- 1 in 6 women and 1 in 9 men are likely to require treatment for a mental health difficulty during their lifetime (Department of Health, 2002).
- Between 15 and 30% of employees will experience mental health problems in any one year (DOH, 2002).

Unemployment affects those with long term mental health problems more than any other group of disabled people (ONS 1998, cited in DOH 2002). This guide aims to provide general advice to placement providers on the retention and future employment of students who have previously or are currently experiencing mental health problems.

A disclosure of a disability should be viewed positively and encouraged so that people can access any support they may require. However, many people with mental health difficulties have experienced discrimination in the workplace (or somewhere else) and so understandably choose not to disclose their difficulties due to feared stigma, lack of understanding and compassion, and the potential discriminatory consequences or repercussions. Unfortunately this means that they will be unlikely to access the support to which they are entitled and may experience additional challenges in their work or study environment.

It is important to treat all students as individuals and remember that what benefits one person may not necessarily work for another. If you have any specific questions about supporting a student from Birmingham City University with mental health difficulties, or for more general information or advice, details of how to contact one of the University's **Mental Health Advisers (MHA)** are provided at the end of this guide.

### 2. How might a student's mental health difficulties impact on their placement?

For most students their mental health difficulties will not pose any problems in relation to their placement. However, some may experience heightened anxiety about undertaking the placement and what may be expected of them. A small number may experience variable moods which could occasionally impact on their attendance. Some may take medication that affects their concentration, motivation, energy levels, and short-term memory to varying degrees.

Students who have previously or are currently experiencing mental health difficulties may be more vulnerable during periods of stress when their normal coping strategies might prove less effective, undermining their self esteem and confidence. They may feel anxious about integrating into a new staff team, particularly if they have not worked for some time.

It is important to stress that these things may be relevant to all students to some extent, regardless of whether or not they have mental health difficulties. 'Mental health' can be about anything to do with the way we think, feel, or behave and how this affects our day-to-day life. In this respect you could argue that we all have 'mental health' and are all vulnerable to experiencing difficulties from time to time depending on our circumstances.

If placement staff can recognise and are sensitive to these issues, and are able to provide reassurance and promote students' self esteem, it is likely to have a positive outcome in terms of enhancing their learning and development of clinical skills, and in achieving the placement competencies.

### **3. How can you support students with mental health difficulties whilst on placement?**

**3.1 Employer's are required to make 'reasonable adjustments' to enable an employee to perform their work duties in line with the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA 1995 / 2005).** See section 6 for more details. Therefore, prior to the start of a placement a discussion might need to take place between the student, a MHA, the Faculty Disability Tutor / placement co-ordinator, and Occupational Health regarding the student's support requirements whilst on placement.

This meeting or conversation may consider what (if any) reasonable adjustments the student requires and what the placement provider are able to deliver. Discussing the requirements in advance of the start of the placement ensures the student's needs are outlined and a written plan of action is established where necessary. The outline should form the basis of an ongoing review procedure regarding placement-related support issues.

However, since it can be difficult for the student (and the University or placement provider) to anticipate whether the student will require any support whilst on placement, it is not always possible to implement a placement support plan in advance and this may need to be reviewed after the placement has commenced.

**3.2 Organise a designated contact person(s)**, e.g. mentor or supervisor, at the place of employment who is provided with the placement support plan (if one is deemed necessary). This will provide the student with consistency in support, as well as a point of contact for the student and the University in the event of any difficulties and enables all parties to monitor and adapt support arrangements.

**3.3 Arranging an orientation session just before or at the start of the placement** will give the student the opportunity to meet the designated person or people who will be working most closely

with them, and enables them to ask any questions at the earliest opportunity which may also help to alleviate stress and anxiety levels.

**3.4 Students should be made to feel welcome and at ease** as it can take time to settle into new situations, develop confidence and demonstrate their abilities to the full. People with mental health difficulties may have experienced negative attitudes and felt misunderstood by others people in the past. Establishing a good relationship early on with plenty of encouragement can prove extremely helpful in this respect. Discuss with the student what situations they feel most comfortable and able to deal with and any areas where they may require additional support.

**3.5 Arrange a regular time and place to review progress** and ensure that sufficient time is put aside to discuss the needs of the student during their placement. Establishing a routine time and method for communication should make the student feel more at ease and in control. It can also help to identify and address any barriers that they may face in the workplace as a result of their mental health difficulties more quickly and efficiently.

**3.6 Some students may require some time off** to complete written work / write up reports, or to attend appointments with their placement mentor, course tutor, Doctor, or other relevant professionals. They may also need more regular breaks due to reduced concentration or lethargy, and the side-effects of medication may make it more difficult to work at specific times of the day. Consequently, some time away from their normal work placement duties and flexible working hours may be necessary at times. If a student knows they are in an environment that is fully supportive, they are less likely to feel stressed and anxious.

#### **4. Case studies**

The following case studies give examples of what might constitute a 'reasonable adjustment' under the DDA (1995 / 2005):

- *A student experiencing depression is on a placement as part of her undergraduate degree in Radiotherapy. Placements are usually arranged on the basis of a full working day. However, because of the effects of her new medication she often experiences extreme drowsiness in the mornings.*

*A reasonable adjustment might be for the placement co-ordinator to arrange for this student to work afternoons only but over a longer period of time, or for her to come in slightly later and finish the day slightly later, during the short term, whilst she is adjusting to this new medication.*

- *A student Nurse with mental health difficulties has to complete a 12 week clinical placement as part of his course. This student finds changes to his routine extremely difficult and is very anxious about how he will cope.*

*A reasonable adjustment might be to arrange an orientation session prior to the start of his placement, where he could meet with his allocated mentor and be provided with a structure of how his first day might run, thereby allowing him time to familiarise himself with the new environment.*

#### **5. Practical strategies for placement staff**

The following suggestions may help staff to support students experiencing a range of difficulties more confidently and effectively:

**5.1 Listening** to and acknowledging the individual's feelings or concerns can help to contain their anxieties. Inability (or unwillingness) to contain anxieties can create a very unsympathetic environment.

**5.2 Boundaries** – some people struggle more than others to adhere to rules and regulations, and some find it hard to maintain consistent boundaries in professional relationships. It is helpful for both students and staff to be clear about what is and what is not deemed to be acceptable behaviour, and what the consequences may be of breaking those boundaries.

Whilst attempts should be made to listen to concerns and contain anxieties, it is also important for staff to be clear about their own roles and responsibilities, and the limitations of any support they may be able to offer in terms of time constraints, personal or professional skills, and experience. Unclear boundaries can result in confusion and over-dependency on the student's part, and feelings of guilt by staff if they have to withdraw or reduce the level of support they are providing.

**5.3 Communication** should be clear but sensitive. It is helpful if the student has clear channels of communication; ideally one mentor / member of staff should be identified as a key contact point. At times some staff may encounter difficulties or feel uncomfortable about providing constructive criticism, particularly if they are concerned it may cause the student distress.

Whilst this should not inhibit staff from providing honest feedback, they may wish to give further thought to the *process* through which they do this and could consider involving the student in a discussion about the ways in which they would prefer to receive feedback.

**5.4 Recognise your personal and professional limitations and refer on if necessary.** If you are concerned about a student's mental or emotional wellbeing it is important that you discuss this with them and notify your line manager and the placement tutor / co-ordinator at the University.

However, you should also encourage the student to access any other appropriate support that might be available to them, e.g. the University Counselling Service, and the Mental Health Advisers (MHA) can provide further advice on this matter (see below for contact details).

## **6. Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995 / 2005**

The DDA (1995 / 2005) was the first attempt by the British Government to legislate against the discrimination faced by disabled persons. The DDA defines a disability as:

“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”.

The employment provisions of the DDA came into force on 2nd December 1996. Under the Act it is unlawful for employers to discriminate against or treat a disabled person less favourably than someone else because of his or her disability, or to fail to comply with a duty upon them to make reasonable adjustments.

The DDA requires employers to be proactive (as well as reactive) in anticipating the needs of disabled employees, which includes students on placement, making reasonable adjustments wherever necessary.

The following list is not exhaustive but some examples of reasonable adjustments:

- Altering the disabled person's working hours (within the practical operational hours of the service)
- Allowing the disabled person to be absent during working hours for rehabilitation, assessment, or treatment

- Modifying instructions or reference manuals and providing information in alternative formats
- Modifying procedures and methods for testing or assessment (without compromising the professional competencies or learning outcomes that are being assessed)
- Providing additional supervision, support and monitoring as necessary

The Code of Practice “for the Elimination of Discrimination in the Field of Employment against Disabled Persons or Persons who have had a Disability” provides further useful advice for how employers should address practical issues when recruiting staff (see reference below). The code was designed to help institutions ensure disabled students accessed a learning experience that is comparable with that of their peers.

### 7. Further information

For further information or advice on supporting students with mental health difficulties whilst on placement, please contact the **Mental Health Advisers (MHA)** at Birmingham City University:

### 8. Useful websites

[www.skill.org.uk](http://www.skill.org.uk)

[www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk)

[www.studentdepression.org](http://www.studentdepression.org)

[www.studentsinmind.org.uk](http://www.studentsinmind.org.uk)

[www.rethink.org](http://www.rethink.org)

[www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)

[www.stigma.org](http://www.stigma.org)

[www.open.ac.uk/inclusiveteaching](http://www.open.ac.uk/inclusiveteaching)

<http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/Pages/default.aspx>

<http://www.dwp.gov.uk/employers/dda/>

[http://www.brookes.ac.uk/student/services/osmhn/students/your\\_rights.html](http://www.brookes.ac.uk/student/services/osmhn/students/your_rights.html)

### 9. References and sources

- Department of Health (2002): ‘Mental health and employment in the NHS’. For copies of this publication email [doh@prolog.uk.com](mailto:doh@prolog.uk.com) and quote 29304. Also available from: [http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH\\_4008361](http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_4008361)
- DDA definition of a disability: [http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/DisabledPeople/RightsAndObligations/DisabilityRights/DG\\_4001069](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/DisabledPeople/RightsAndObligations/DisabilityRights/DG_4001069)
- London School of Economics (2006), The Depression Report: A new deal for depression and anxiety disorders. Centre for Economic Performance
- London South Bank University ‘Disability Guidelines/ Placements’ [http://www.lsbu.ac.uk/learningsupport/disabilities/disabilitynetAZ\\_m.shtml#men](http://www.lsbu.ac.uk/learningsupport/disabilities/disabilitynetAZ_m.shtml#men)
- Mental Health Foundation (2006), Truth Hurts: Report of the National Inquiry into Self-harm among Young People. Mental Health Foundation: London
- National Audit Office (2007), Helping People Through Mental Health Crisis, London: The Stationary Office
- Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (October 1999), Code of Practice for the Assurance of Academic Quality and Standards in Higher Education: Students with Disabilities
- Royal College of Psychiatrists (January 2003), The Mental Health of Students in Higher Education. Available from: [www.rcpsych.ac.uk/publications/cr/cr112.htm](http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/publications/cr/cr112.htm)
- Social Exclusion Unit (2004), Mental Health and Social Exclusion: Social Exclusion Unit Report Summary
- The Code of Practice “for the Elimination of Discrimination in the Field of Employment against Disabled Persons or Persons who have had a Disability”. See Employment Code of Practice, page 165 for further information on placements and work experience: [http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/publicationsandresources/Documents/Disability/Employment\\_code.doc](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/publicationsandresources/Documents/Disability/Employment_code.doc)
- The Office for National Statistics Psychiatric Morbidity report (2001)



## Your accessible Careers Centre

This leaflet summarises the facilities available to help you access careers information and guidance at Aston University Careers & Employability Centre. If the support you need is not mentioned here, please ask any member of staff for advice on the alternatives we can offer.

**The Careers Centre aims to ensure that all of our services and information are as accessible as possible for all disabled visitors or those having special requirements.**

## Careers Information Room

### The Careers Information Room

Our service is open plan and all rooms are wheelchair accessible, we are located on the first floor, South Wing in the Main Building. Please ask reception to contact us if you require assistance from the ground floor.

### Careers information

If you need the support of a member of staff to locate or access any careers information, please ask at the Careers Information Point. This leaflet and our other self-help ones can be made available in alternative formats on request.

### Careers advice

When booking an appointment to see a Careers Adviser please mention if you require any special assistance for the meeting and we will do our best to accommodate this.

### Careers Centre PCs

We have a suite of PCs in the Information Room equipped with screen reading software and MS Accessibility. We have one PC that is ideal for students with special requirements; it has a height adjustable desk, a large 24" screen, ergonomic accessories and a scanner for your use. Please ask a member of staff before your visit if you have any special requirements and we will do our best to accommodate.

## Workshops and individual guidance appointments

- **A conversor (listening device)** \* for use in careers guidance appointments or for workshops.
- **Handouts** for workshops can be provided in alternative formats upon request.

Please let us know your requirements when you book your place. Alternative arrangements can be made for taking psychometric tests, if you normally have extra time to complete exams. Please ask at the Careers Information Point or discuss your needs with a Careers Adviser.

If you need an interpreter or note-taker we will liaise with the Disabilities and Additional Needs Unit (DANU) to try and arrange this for you if you don't already have one assigned.

Please notify us as early as possible in the term as these services need several weeks notice to organise.

## Employer events and information

We will be happy to inform visiting employers of your additional needs to attend their presentations. Please discuss your requirements with staff in advance of the event.

### Careers Centre website

[www.aston.ac.uk/careers](http://www.aston.ac.uk/careers)

Our website provides information about the Careers Centre and gives you access to an extensive range of careers information and links including:

- Availability and the services we provide.
- Exclusive access to our online vacancy service and bespoke email updates. Facility to book advice appointments online.
- Lists and booking facility for our careers events planned for the forthcoming term. Access to our online careers resource library.
- View the most recent Aston graduates destination data by school and course. Access to all of our self-help careers information leaflets.
- Facility for joining the Careers Centre Lending Library.
- Promoting diversity section which has links to sources of information, advice and support on diversity awareness.

Our website is packed full of useful advice, information and links, please ask a member of the Information team if you would like guidance and help using our online services.



## Careers advice for students with disabilities

The purpose of this leaflet is to present useful career planning information and referral points for students with disabilities. The information provided does not claim to be definitive but we aim to provide a useful starting point for you.

Understanding your rights

### Q: How does the law protect me?

A: The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995 and 2005 makes it unlawful for an employer to discriminate against disabled applicants and employees. Employers have a duty to make "reasonable adjustments" to reduce or remove any substantial disadvantage caused to a disabled applicant or employee, be it through modifying the application process or by making changes to working hours or in the physical features of the workplace. Grants are available for "reasonable adjustment" costs through the "Access to Work" scheme. See Further Information section for more detail regarding the DDA, Reasonable Adjustments and the Access to Work scheme.

Looking for jobs

### Q: Which companies are more likely to employ disabled people?

A: Employers are becoming more aware of the business case for employing a diverse workforce, focusing on ability not disability and representing the communities and markets they work for. Ultimately you should make applications based on opportunities which match your own skills and interests.

However, there may be certain companies that are more disability-positive than others. Here are a few points to consider when job hunting (but don't restrict yourself to these guidelines):

Establish which employers are promoting their opportunities to disability organisations and related publications and websites. You will find more information on our website [www.aston.ac.uk/careers](http://www.aston.ac.uk/careers) and via Graduate Prospects [www.prospects.ac.uk](http://www.prospects.ac.uk)

Check to see if an employer is a member of the Employers' Forum on Disability; a leading employer membership organisation aimed at building disability confidence amongst employers: [www.employers-forum.co.uk](http://www.employers-forum.co.uk)

Watch out for the Jobcentre Plus "two ticks" disability symbol (below), which will be displayed and used by companies who have shown some level of commitment to those with disabilities. These employers will guarantee an interview to any applicants with a disability who meet the minimum criteria for the job.

Applying for work

### Q: CV or Application form?

A: Both require the same thing; you to demonstrate your skills in a way which meet the person specification and demonstrate your ability to do the job. The Careers Centre offers advice sheets on these issues, available in accessible formats to you upon request.

**Q: I can't handwrite my application form, what do I do?**

**Q: I can't read my application form properly, what can I do?**

A: Companies are required to offer everyone the equal opportunity to apply for a vacancy. If the application form is not in the format that you need it to be, call or e-mail the contact (this may be a Human Resources or Personnel department, or the line manager) and ask for the format in which you prefer. It is more than reasonable to complete the form in the way that it was presented to you e.g. if put on audio then you may send it back in audio format.

### **Disclosing a disability**

**Q: Should I disclose and if so, when is the best time?**

A: Your application should be dealt with in the same way as applications from non-disabled people and you should not be at a disadvantage if you disclose your disability. Deciding to disclose a disability to an employer is a personal choice, although you are obliged to mention your disability if you are asked a direct question about it. However some people may not feel comfortable with disclosing their disability and some will be unsure about the timing.

#### **1. Disclosure at CV stage**

When writing a CV you should be detailing your achievements and competencies. It is not necessary to put on your CV that you have a disability; it may not be relevant to the job. Due to recent legislation you only need list your name and address for personal details. If you cannot word process your CV and need to submit it in another format such as Braille or audio, you will need to explain why it has been done like this, and this means disclosing your disability. In this case you may want to highlight your disability in a positive light such as referring to additional organisation skills demonstrated if you have had to book personal assistants or used public transport.

#### **2. Disclosure at application form stage**

When filling in an application form, often on the back or on a separate page will be an equal opportunities questionnaire asking you about your ethnicity, religion and disability. This page is separated from your application before it is looked at by the deciding panel, and you may want to disclose here, or not, it is completely up to you.

If in the main section of the application form you are asked if you have a disability or not, generally this will fall before a question such as, "Do you have any special requirements should you be asked for an interview?" In this case you may wish to tick yes, and give a brief explanation of what you would need in an interview situation, such as; interview to be held on ground floor in absence of a lift, a break half way through or in a test to use a computer rather than pen and paper.

If you do not wish to disclose in the initial stage but if you do require any adjustments for an interview then if and when you are asked to go to an interview you can ask then for the adjustments and explain why. If you do not require any adjustments for an interview or any part of the application process e.g. written and verbal tests, assessment centres and team based tests, and are worried about disclosing then you do not need to disclose. However there are two things worth noting:

- 1) Many companies promise interviews to all disabled people who disclose on the application form and meet the essential criteria.
- 2) A job offer would be made on the basis of the information you have provided the company with throughout the application process and so before accepting you should consider making them aware of your disability.

#### **3. Interview stage**

You may feel it is still not relevant to disclose, however you may feel more comfortable disclosing in an interview situation where you can discuss the implications face to face and more clearly demonstrate your competencies. Try to anticipate employers' concerns and be ready to address them. Make them aware that financial support is available for adjustments through the previously mentioned "Access to Work" scheme - see Further Information.

### **Dealing with rejections**

If you are not offered the job after interview or do not get past the initial application process e.g. CV and application form, remember that you could be rejected for a number of reasons and in many cases it may be that other applicants had more experience than you or provided stronger evidence of meeting the required competencies. It's worth contacting the employer either by email or phone to ask for feedback. If you are offered a job and when you disclose your disability, the job offer is

withdrawn, you may wish to write to the employer, asking them to give you a reason for the job offer withdrawal and requesting a response in writing. You may then at this point want to get help from the Equality and Human Rights Commission, or another organisation equipped to help you with this matter - see Further Information.

### **Gaining experience**

Employers often cite work experience as one of the key things they look for in their graduate recruits. It is also a great opportunity to develop skills, improve your confidence and try out different career options. A 12 month industrial placement is the most common way of getting work experience for many Aston students. However, internships, vacation work and part-time jobs are also worth considering in addition to or instead of a placement year. For some areas of work such as investment banking, a summer internship prior to your final year of study is a must for obtaining a graduate job offer.

Whatever option is best for you it is vital to remember that a degree without work experience may not be enough to secure your ideal job, regardless of any disability. Each of the schools have their own placement tutors who can provide support in finding a placement. The Careers Centre website lists internship opportunities in the vacancies section and the Careers Information Room contains a section devoted to Placement and Work Experience resources. See additional websites in Further Information.

### **Useful online resources**

Access to Work offers practical advice and government grants towards any extra employment costs that result from a person's disability [www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk](http://www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk)

- DANU is the Disability and Additional Needs Unit at Aston University [www.aston.ac.uk](http://www.aston.ac.uk)
- The Equality and Human Rights Commission offers comprehensive information and advice [www.equalityhumanrights.com](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com)
- Disability Toolkits information and support for disabled students seeking to gain work experience or go on placement [www.disabilitytoolkits.ac.uk](http://www.disabilitytoolkits.ac.uk)
- Remploy employment services and employment opportunities for people with disabilities and complex barriers to work [www.rempoy.co.uk](http://www.rempoy.co.uk)
- EmployAbility is a not for profit organisation offering advice on all aspects of the recruitment process and other key disability issues, they will also make recommendations regarding disabilityinclusive employers, offer internship and placement scheme opportunities and run specialist recruitment events [www.employ-ability.org.uk](http://www.employ-ability.org.uk)
- Employment Opportunities is a national charity that helps people with disabilities find and retain work as well as providing graduate recruitment advice. They will help with job searches, CV and application writing, interview techniques and ongoing in-work support [www.opportunities.org.uk](http://www.opportunities.org.uk) Graduate Prospects offer a range of resources on disability issues [www.prospects.ac.uk](http://www.prospects.ac.uk) SKILL:National Bureau for Students with Disabilities is the national charity promoting opportunities for young people and adults with any kind of post 16 education, training and employment [www.skill.org.uk](http://www.skill.org.uk)

## **Examples of online Resources**

<http://www1.aston.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/additional-needs/danu/>

The screenshot shows a web browser window displaying the Aston University website. The browser's address bar shows the URL <http://www1.aston.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/additional-needs/danu/>. The page header includes the Aston University logo and a navigation menu with links for Home, Study at Aston, About Aston, Departments, Birmingham, Research, Business Services, and News & Events. A search bar is also present. The main content area features a sidebar with a list of links, including 'Disability & Additional Needs Unit', and a main text block titled 'The Disability & Additional Needs Unit'. The text describes the unit's role in supporting students with disabilities and provides contact information for the Disability Co-ordinator.

Disability & Additional Needs Unit

Aston University  
Birmingham

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Study at Aston  
Undergraduate study  
Students with disabilities & additional needs  
Applying to Aston  
Campus & accommodation  
Disability & Additional Needs Unit  
Support we offer  
The Disabled Students' Allowance  
What our students think

## The Disability & Additional Needs Unit

To help you plan and prepare for university life, the Disability & Additional Needs Unit (DANU) is available to advise and support you. We treat all enquiries on a confidential basis.

DANU run a Personal Assistance Scheme which assists students with disabilities and other support needs to live, study and enjoy student life as independently as possible. Support workers can provide assistance with note taking, reading, transcription, photocopying, keyboard manipulation and mobility assistance. For example qualified British Sign Language interpreters and dyslexia support tutors can be provided.

DANU can also assist you by liaising with other departments in the University on your behalf, helping with applications for funding and providing support for Open Days and interview visits, as well as general advice and support throughout your studies.

Please contact the Disability Co-ordinator to arrange a visit or for further advice or information:

- email: [danu@aston.ac.uk](mailto:danu@aston.ac.uk)
- phone: +44 (0)121 204 4711.

Internet 100%



## Employability & Careers Service

### Students & Graduates

- How We Can Help
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- Making Yourself Employable
- Finding a Job
- Getting the Job
- Disabled Students
- Further Study
- Working for Yourself
- Work Experience & Volunteering
- MMU Professional Passport
- TalentPlus for Graduates
  - Frequently Asked Questions
  - Register for TalentPlus
- Resources
  - ← Search for Jobs
  - ← Careers E-Alerts
  - ← Careers Advice by Email
- Frequently Asked Questions

[MMU Homepage](#) » [Employability & Careers](#) » [Students & Graduates](#) » [TalentPlus for Graduates](#) » [Frequently Asked Questions](#)

## Frequently Asked Questions

- Who are TalentPlus?
- How much does TalentPlus cost?
- What are the eligibility criteria to come on the programme?
- If I am unemployed, Do I lose my benefits while on the programme?
- What is the demand like for places?
- Will I get paid during my placement?
- How much will I get paid?
- If I am unemployed, Do I have to come off benefits when I start a placement?
- Do I have to be a recent graduate?
- Will you guarantee me a placement?
- What expenses do I get?
- What happens if I get a job interview/offer a job during the programme?
- Will I end up just photocopying and making cups of tea?
- Do I lose my benefits while on the programme?
- I work in a job that isn't my chosen career, can you help?
- I live in Cheshire. Would there be any placements in my travel to work area?
- How quickly will you get me a placement?

### How to Apply

Please **register for our next Talent Plus Open Day** and we will contact you with the relevant details to make a booking.

We will be running this programme for at least 12 months so we hope to offer all eligible applicants a place on the scheme over the lifetime of the programme.



Talent Plus is a partnership project between MMU and **Blue Orchid**.

<http://skillcms.ds2620.dedicated.turbodns.co.uk/page.aspx?p=132&c=29#DLA>


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**Skill**  
National Bureau  
for Students  
with Disabilities



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### News



- [Equality and Human Rights Commission produces guidance on reviewing Disability Equality Schemes](#)
- [The Seventh International Conference on Higher Education and Disability](#)
- [Graduate Talent Pool](#)
- [Access to Work extended to Work Trials](#)
- [Join the Higher Education Debate](#)



## Jobseekers

If you have a disability or health condition and want to start or return to work, Remploy can help you make the most of your ability. Our range of employment services are designed to help you get the job that's right for you.

We focus on developing strong relationships with local employers, identifying their needs and future vacancies. We'll then work with you to prepare you for those jobs.

You'll have the support of a Remploy Employment Advisor. Be it job search advice, training and development or work placements, we'll work with you to

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### Contact

Jobseekers  
0845 601 5878

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### Writing a CV

Your CV should show an employer that you have the skills and abilities they are looking for in a particular role, so you should always make your CV. [▶ Writing a CV.](#)

# Employment Opportunities

Changing lives through employment

Part of  **Shaw Trust**

A<sup>^</sup> A<sup>~</sup> I

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- ▷ Home
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- As a Corporate Partner
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### For Students & Graduates

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- Key Contacts
- Latest Success Stories
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- Training Courses

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- Graduate Recruitment
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Offering internships

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How will it work?

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What should I do next?

FAQs

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<http://tomcat4.prospects.ac.uk:8080/forum/index.php>




the UK's **official graduate careers** website

# Graduate Forum

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Welcome to Graduate Forum. To talk to graduates online on the message board, please select a topic below. Nan, our resident careers consultant will contribute to many of the discussions. If you are not sure what to do, click on [Rules of use including terms and conditions below and select How to use this forum from the topic list.](#)

The time now is Thu Nov 19, 2009 10:49 am

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Jobcentre Plus - Looking for a job

Part of the Department for Work and Pensions

Home > Customers > Disabled People and Carers > Looking for a job

## Customers

▶ Looking for a job


**Helping you find and keep a job**

**Looking for a job**

If you are looking for work, a Jobcentre Plus Disability Employment Adviser might be able to help you find something that is suitable. There are also other places you can look for job vacancies.

- Online - visit the [search for a job page](#) on this website for details of vacancies. Even if you're not looking for a job straight away, you could take a look at opportunities like work programmes or training.
- On the phone - 0845 6060 234 (textphone 0845 6055 255) to keep in touch with the latest job vacancies.
- A Welsh-language service is also available.
- See 'Useful contacts' for more numbers and opening hours.
- Touch screens - when visiting your Jobcentre Plus office why not try out a [Jobpoint touch screen](#)? Search through job vacancies, print off the ones you're interested in, and follow the instructions on how to apply.

[Know your rights when looking for a job](#)




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**jobcoach**

## Employers

### ► Diversity

#### Diversity

Jobcentre Plus offers a wide range of services to support employers seeking to recruit and retain people with disabilities and to assist people with disabilities to return to and remain in work.

**Disability Employment Advisers (DEAs)** in our Jobcentres can offer help with finding work and advise customers and employers about a range of specialised support available for disabled people. They can also provide information to employers about how to become a Disability Symbol user.

The **Disability Symbol** is a recognition given by Jobcentre Plus to employers agreeing to meet five commitments regarding the recruitment, employment, retention and career development of disabled people.

If you are reviewing your approach to employing disabled people or trying to create a more diverse workforce, becoming a disability symbol user may help. You will be making it clear to disabled people that you welcome applications from them and are positive about their abilities, and to your existing employees that you value their contribution and will treat them fairly should they become disabled.




#### Useful Information

[£1000 cash back on your new recruit](#)

[Checking the Status of Migrant Workers](#)

[Jobcentre Plus Publications](#)

[Disability Discrimination Act - New Duties](#)

 [Access to Work Information for employers \(261kb\)](#)



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## **Guidelines to assist in arranging work placements for disabled undergraduates with a visual impairment**

Providing students with the opportunity to experience the working environment of their chosen area of study is an important component of many courses.

Work placements can be especially important for students with a disability as they encourage independence, aid the development of socialisation and allow students to build personal strategies to overcome barriers whilst putting their academic knowledge into practice.

Getting the right message across to employers who will potentially offer a placement will provide confidence and improve working relationships. Discussions with employers have shown that they are often willing to offer support. For example

“If we don’t take a chance then we become a polarized society where we avoid taking on people with challenges”.

“We can be guilty of looking at people and seeing the disability. We can learn more about how to work with disabled people from providing a placement than we can from attending a training session”.

Employers are often unsure of the facts around visual impairment including what it would cost them to offer a placement and what a student on placement can offer in return.

It should not cost an employer anything to provide a placement and statistically the students are less likely to take time off sick or have accidents in the workplace. Less than 5% of visually impaired people have no useful sight and all of the students have many skills to offer.

One company said, “Having had such a positive experience we would certainly contemplate taking on another work placement student with a disability in the future”.

All of the employers approached made a point of saying that they would like to receive information about the skills people have to offer and what they would be capable of doing independently, other than just answering the phone. They also wanted to make it clear what they would be looking for from either a work placement student/potential employee. All said the most important was:

- Confidence to put across their skills
- Confidence to put across their equipment needs
- A ‘can do’ or ‘have a go’ attitude.

A public service organisation has said they would like to see a pro-active situation where they are approached more frequently about the possibility of placements.

The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy has developed a set of guidelines aimed at Supporting disabled physiotherapy students on clinical placement. In addition

aDShe, the association of Dyslexia Specialists in Higher Education has produced guidelines for Quality Assurance in Specialist Support for Students with SpLDs in Higher Education. These two documents could assist colleges greatly in their preparation for students with a visual impairment and other disabilities to successfully complete a work placement.

### **Point Of Contact**

It is recommended that one member of staff within the university is identified as the single point of contact for staff, students and the employers providing the placement. It is acknowledged that in some universities this role may be split between several staff members in which case it would be advisable for one person to accept responsibility for the role of co-ordinating the placement activities and oversee the co-ordination and liaison to ensure that all areas are effectively addressed. This role would ideally be suited to a member of staff who has experience of working with students with a visual disability.

The role of co-ordinating the placement activities would include:

- Pre placement discussions with student to establish their equipment, travel and support needs
- When appropriate, provision of advice on and overseeing of the student's access to the Disabled Students Allowance (DSA)
- Facilitate the development of students' personal strategies
- Provide specific opportunities for students with disabilities to discuss issues of disclosure and their implications for work placements, positive and negative views and the students' rights and responsibilities. Discussions with employers offering work placements have shown that employers are usually keen to support the student's needs. However, they require the student to confidently put across both their skills and their equipment needs. The student may need to be encouraged to consider and prepare their reply.

The placement discussions should be in private as not all students will be comfortable discussing their particular issues in front of other students.

### **The Placement**

Data protection requires that the student give permission prior to any information being communicated to the placement organisation.

Many students with disabilities lack confidence due to fear of discrimination and/or because of previous negative experiences. The effect of this can be reduced if staff members are aware of students' issues and are accepting and non-judgmental. Providing encouragement and support helps to establish an atmosphere of trust and safety.

Some universities provide personal assistants and support workers. In practical situations it may be necessary for the university to assist the student in obtaining similar support in the placement.

In some situations support workers may need to be a flexible arrangement and only required initially to facilitate mobility around a new environment. They may be unnecessary once the student is familiar with routes and staff members.

Personal assistants and support workers must be organised in advance of the student's placement and any confidentiality issues that may arise must be considered.

### **Pre Placement Visit**

Students should be encouraged to visit the placement so as to consider their needs in regard to travelling to and from the place of work any other associated journeys. Mobility and orientation requirements in the workplace also need to be established.

The placement visit may include a discussion with the employer on accessible media and equipment needs. The student should be prepared to confidently put across any equipment needs.

The visit should be followed by an exchange of ideas between the student and the university liaison tutor regarding accessibility requirements, equipment needs and strategies for managing a range of situations. If necessary the students' DSA assessment may need to be revisited at this point or another source considered.

Students with disabilities require prior planning and anticipatory action in order to perform to their potential and on as level a playing field as possible. Mobility and orientation training will take time to organise as will the delivery and training of any additional equipment. The benefits of a pre placement visit will enable the student to orientate more quickly and be able to begin working more effectively and contribute to the host organisation.

### **Potential Barriers to Meeting Students' Needs**

The university liaison tutor should be prepared to advise both the student and the placement providers on:

- Disability/visual impairment awareness training if required
- Legal responsibilities under the DDA
- Grievances and complaints
- Termination of an unsatisfactory work placement.

### **Negotiation and Modification**

The university may not necessarily be involved in the negotiation of accessible resources or other reasonable adjustments for individual students. It is nevertheless important for the university liaison tutor to be aware of the adjustments negotiated and to advise on available support if necessary. This involves good communication and co-operation between all parties including the student.

Discussions with employers offering work placements have shown that employers are usually keen to support the student's needs. However, if the student is unable or unwilling to confidently put across their needs, then they are unlikely to be realised and as a result may not be met. A compromise may be necessary although this must be with the student's agreement.

Work patterns could adversely affect a student's ability to be effective in the workplace. This could be due to the student needing to work shorter hours or take additional breaks, or it could be the effect of inflexible hours on travel arrangements. Through negotiation there are usually ways in which these can be modified to make them more accessible.

It is not unusual for staff members at host organisations to experience some anxiety when they discover they will be supervising students with disabilities, particularly if they have no prior experience. This can be reduced if staff members in the department have already discussed the issues and considered strategies prior to the student arriving. Providing disability/visual impairment awareness training for the host organisation can assist in reducing staff anxieties and provide information on assistive technologies. Knowledge of assistive technologies and alternate formats will allow staff to understand how the student is able to work and in which areas they could need additional support. Some of the equipment, for example a CCTV may be expensive and bulky. It is important that the host organisation be aware of the need to arrange for appropriate space and secure accommodation.

If the necessary and/or appropriate resources to provide support for a student are not available other options should be sought. The DSA assessor could be contacted for advice or in other circumstances there are various charitable organisations that may be able to help.

The presentation of written materials does not always have to be paper based. It would be helpful and more inclusive for all staff if the process of producing materials was in an electronic format. Electronic formats can be adjusted by the individual to suit their needs. Where paper based materials are received by the host organisation OCR software installed onto a computer linked to a scanner would enable the student to read printed documents. However, hand written documents may present a problem for students who do not have useful sight.

Visually impaired students, along with many other people will benefit if written information is prepared with accessibility in mind. Each person will have different needs so what will help one person may not be helpful for another so it is always worth checking with the individual student. As a general rule:

- Where possible, produce information digitally.
- Keep the layout simple and clear.
- Use a clear sans serif font e.g. Arial.
- Use text colours that provide a clear contrast.
- Use headings levels in word processed documents to aid navigation.
- Don't use italics.
- Don't use underline.
- Don't add a shadow effect on text.
- Don't right aligned text.
- Use matt paper.

## **Student Responsibility**

The student needs to be aware that they should actively participate in the negotiation of any modifications that are made. Discussions with employers offering a work placement have shown that employer's value constructive feedback on adjustments they have made. It is important that the student understands the importance of giving feedback.

Students should make use of networks, links and individuals that are identified for support purposes. Additional support can be more difficult to arrange if it is felt that the student didn't bother to access previous arrangements.

Although it is the student's responsibility to ensure they have made adequate travel arrangements they are initially likely to require support. Most visually impaired students will walk to a placement or use public transport. In a busy or remote environment this will be difficult. If the student is not familiar with the route they will need mobility training and support. Both the university liaison tutor and the host organisation need to be aware of the problem and be prepared to suggest a suitable route. If the student has a guide dog, Guide Dogs for the Blind can provide mobility training in advance. In some cases where public transport is not convenient or where the student is on a community based placement, students will be able to access funding from the DSA to pay for taxis.

Most visually impaired students will require reasonable adjustments to access information and to produce their own written records. This may involve a reader, a CCTV, a computer with access technology and a digital note taker. Students should take the responsibility of having personal strategies in place and ideas about how best reasonable adjustments might be made

## **Employer Suggestions for Information Website**

## **Employer No. 1 - 25/11/2009**

### **Information for potential employers offering a placement the following would be useful:**

- Access for work information.
- Information about the type of equipment that may be needed and where from.
- Information about software upgrades.
- Information on the amount of time it could take to get measures in place.
- Information on what would be useful to aid mobility, e.g. lighting, rails, coloured edges of steps.
- If their route into the office or building needed to change what would help someone to find an alternate method.
- Employers need to be aware of just how much students value their independence.
- An e-learning programme on VI awareness training – website or CD.

### **In addition to the information listed above a potential employer/ placement would be looking for:**

- Information on the skills a student may have.
- Confidence to put across their skills.
- Confidence to put across their equipment needs.
- Qualifications.
- An interest and knowledge about the role.
- A 'can do' attitude.
- Commitment to the job and company.
- Trust and respect.

## **Employer No. 2 - 27/11/2009**

### **Information for potential employers offering a placement the following would be useful:**

- Information on the skills a student may have.
- Advice on enabling people to get through security and into the building.
- As visual impairment can mean anything from low vision to blindness, information on sight classifications (a scale and its implications)
- VI awareness training.
- Information about the type of equipment that may be needed to enable people to work independently.
- In particular we would be concerned about the compatibility of any specialist software with the particular software we are obliged by our parent company to use.
- Information on the amount of time it could take to get measures in place.
- Our Health and Safety officer has concerns about the safe mobility of the student. Information on what would be useful to aid mobility, e.g. lighting, coloured edges of steps.
- Another very important concern is the amount of time our employees would need to spend training and supporting the student, particularly if he or she was totally blind. Since our recent redundancies, most employees already feel that they don't have sufficient time to do their work.

### **Employer No. 3 - 27/11/2009**

“If we don’t take a chance then we become a polarized society where we avoid taking on people with challenges”.

“Having had such a positive experience with ..... we would certainly contemplate taking on another work placement student with a disability in the future”.

#### **Information for potential employers offering a placement the following would be useful:**

- Motivation.
- Vi awareness training for their colleagues before the student started to alleviate fears and create an understanding of the students needs and how they worked.
- Hazards – health and safety advice including the closeness to the screen.
- Health and safety on the stairs.
- What type of lighting would be appropriate in the room.
- Information about the type of equipment that may be needed to enable people to work independently.
- Information on the amount of time it could take to get measures in place.
- Access to work information – how much will the equipment cost and who will pay for it.

## **Employer No. 4 - 25/11/2009**

“A student must have the confidence to put across what their skills are and what equipment they would need to do the job and a ‘can-do’ attitude”.

### **Information for potential employers offering a placement the following would be useful:**

- Information on the amount of space that is actually required to accommodate a wheelchair in the office.
- Information on the amount of space that is actually required to accommodate a guide dog and what other facilities would need to be available.
- Information on the different eye conditions and their implications.
- Is it possible to use bespoke systems with assistive technologies?
- Links to where information is available on equipment.
- Links to where information is available on funding/grants to make the environment more disability friendly long term.
- The amount of time it would take to get the necessary equipment in place.

## **Employer No. 5 - 25/11/2009**

**Information for potential employers offering a placement the following would be useful:**

- Information on who funds the equipment necessary for a student to work on a placement.
- Information on sight conditions and their impact on the working environment.
- Information about assistive / enabling technologies.
- Information about the type of equipment that may be needed.
- Etiquette – how to relate to someone who is visually impaired or has other disabilities.

## **Employer No. 6 - 25/11/2009**

“We believe that as an organisation we can be guilty of looking at people and seeing the disability not the person. We can learn more about how to work with and serve people with disabilities by providing a placement than they can from attending a training session”.

### **Information for potential employers offering a placement the following would be useful**

- A link on where to find more information on Access to Work funding.
- Link on where to find more information on any grants / funding available for businesses to adapt their working environment to become more disability friendly.
- Information on the possible assistive technologies and other equipment to aid a real understanding in how people access information and therefore how they work and what they can do.
- Information on sight classifications (a scale and its implications).
- Advice on enabling people to get through the security and into the building.
- VI awareness training.

**Website - Information to Assist Employers Offering a Placement**



## Work Placements For Visually Impaired Students

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[Mobility](#)

[FAQ](#)

[Screen Readers and  
Magnification Software](#)

[Other Enabling Software](#)

Many employers who have not offered a work placement to a student with a visual impairment and other disabilities before can be concerned about not knowing what to expect. This page has been created to answer some of the questions asked by employers offering a work placement.

### Blind and Visually Impaired

Being blind usually means having either no or severely limited useful vision, whereas visually impaired usually means the person has degrees or types of useful vision. To demonstrate the effects of some eye conditions the San Antonio Low Vision Club website includes pictures called [seewhatisee](#).

The RNIB have produced a list of many of the different eye conditions and describes the effects at [rnib](#). The American National Eye Institute also gives information and an A-Z of eye disorders at [health](#).

It is important to realise how much students value their independence. Allowing people more independence, amongst other benefits encourages productivity. Each person will have different needs so what will help one person may not be helpful for another so it is always worth talking to people individually.



## Work Placements For Visually Impaired Students

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### Mobility

Health and Safety officers often have concerns about the safe mobility of the student. The following is a general list of possible aids to mobility.

#### General Practice

- Leave doors either wide open or closed. When a door is partially open visually impaired people are less likely to see the edge of the door and may walk into it causing an injury
- On the stairs or in corridors there could be a keep to the right ruling. This will prevent unnecessary collisions
- When the route someone is following, whether it's to get into the building or moving from room to room involves a change of direction, pointing out some sort of landmark is helpful. Examples of what can be used as a landmark are large plants, a post, the corner of the building, a bench or even the sound of a water fountain. However, care should be taken that landmarks are large enough not to become tripping hazards.

## Improving the Environment

- Lighting – a constant level of light along a route can be very important although it should be diffused rather than glaring. Almost all staff benefit from good lighting, not least because it gives a greater sense of security
- Surfaces should be firm, slip-resistant in wet and dry conditions and should not be made of reflective material
- Any unevenness can cause problems for some wheelchair users and some visually impaired cane users
- Steps and stairs – the edges of each step should be defined in some way, for example a different colour
- At the top of steps or stairs – a texture contrast on the floor would be helpful
- Large areas of glass - visually impaired people are less likely to see the glass and may walk into it. Some sort of design or marking on the glass could help
- Doorways – doors or doorframes should be painted in a colour that contrasts with the wall.



## Work Placements For Visually Impaired Students

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### Frequently Asked Questions

#### Question

Who pays for the student's assistive or enabling technology to be used in the workplace?

#### Answer

When a student begins their course at a university or higher education college they can apply for a Disabled Students' Allowances which provides support towards the costs of specialist equipment including what will be needed on a work placement. More information can be found at [disability support in higher education](#). The college where the student is studying may also provide for the students basic equipment needs.

#### Question

How long will it take to get the necessary equipment in place before the student can begin work?

#### Answer

This will depend on what equipment is necessary, the college where the student is studying will be able to give you more information.

**Question**

I am concerned about the Health & Safety aspects and Employers Responsibility when a student works with their nose almost touching the screen.

**Answer**

This is a very common complaint when working with visually impaired people. You should discuss your concerns with the student and the college where the student studies. It may be that the student should consider increasing the magnification settings on their assistive technology or using a larger monitor. If the situation is unresolved it may be worth considering that an LCD screen gives off quite a lot of heat whereas older style CRT monitors do not. Swapping a LCD monitor for a CRT will reduce some of the immediate possible risks.

**Question**

My technical services department have several questions, who can I ask?

**Answer**

The first answer is the college the student attends as they will be able to answer most of your questions or point you in the direction of someone who can. Many other organisations who work with people who are blind, visually impaired or print disabled in some other way, including companies who provide assistive technology equipment can be approached for support with all types of technical or pricing information. Other organisations have useful FAQ's pages on their websites. [The Royal National College for the Blind](#), [RNIB](#), [British Computer Association of the Blind](#), [Dolphin Computer Access](#),

[Sight and Sound Technology](#) and [Freedom Scientific](#).

**Question**

What are alternate formats?

**Answer**

Alternate formats are when materials are produced in someone's preferred reading medium, this could be standard print, large print, Braille, DAISY, MP3, electronic or tactile diagrams.

**Question**

Is it possible to use assistive technologies with a custom or bespoke IT system?

**Answer**

It's not possible to answer this question without trying it. Most of the time it is possible especially if it is a Windows based system, however, the only way to be sure is to ask the college where the student is studying to try it for you.

**Question**

How much space is actually required to accommodate a guide dog and what other facilities would need to be available?

**Answer**

Guide dogs are extremely well trained and will stay under the desk where the student is working. It will need a bowl of drinking water and there must be some provision for the

dog to relieve itself during the day. Guide Dogs staff will be happy to discuss this in more detail if there are any questions. More information can be found at <http://www.guidedogs.org.uk>.

**Question**

My staff would be more confident if they were to receive some Visual Impairment awareness training prior to the student's work placement. How and where can I get the training?

**Answer**

[The Royal National College for the Blind](#) along with the RNIB and a few other organisations can provide this for your staff. Again the college where the student is studying will be able to put you in touch with someone.

**Question**

How much space is actually required to accommodate a wheelchair in the office?

**Answer**

It is important to ensure that anyone who uses a wheelchair has enough space to manoeuvre as well as work at their desk. All measurements will vary from person to person as well as whether they are using a manual or electric wheelchair so it is worth speaking to the student directly or the college that the student attends. According to Islington Inclusive Mobility, as a general rule:

Length of space for wheelchair and user:

conventional seating is 1250 mm

leg outstretched is 1500 mm

Width of wheelchair (with elbows) is 900 mm

Seat height of wheelchair 460-490 mm  
Seated height of wheelchair user 1300-  
Knee height of wheelchair user 500-690 mm  
Eye level of wheelchair user around 960-1250 mm  
Minimum passage width for a wheelchair is 900 mm  
Manoeuvring space for wheelchair 90° turn 1200 mm x 1200 mm  
Manoeuvring space for wheelchair 180° turn 1600 mm x 2000 mm

**Question**

What are assistive technology upgrades and are they necessary?

**Answer**

As with all software, new versions are needed to be able to work with the new versions of Windows and any other new software that is being used. Later releases often also introduce new functionality allowing people ease of use and more independence. Very occasionally users can get a free upgrade to a new version so it's always worth checking what new versions have to offer.

**Question**

We would like to offer a permanent position to someone with a disability, where can we get more information on financial assistance to do this?

**Answer**

[Access to Work](#) can provide financial support and advice.

**Question**

Is there funding available to make the environment more disability friendly in the long term?

**Answer**

Information and advice is available from a variety of sources including Business Link and Directgov - the UK Government website. Some useful websites include: [businesslink.gov.uk](http://businesslink.gov.uk), [information for employers](#) and [DisabledPeople](#)



## Work Placements For Visually Impaired Students

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### Screen Magnification Software

Many people with low vision struggle to use a computer even though they can see the screen and use a mouse; they just need it to be enlarged so that they can focus on it properly.



There are many magnification packages available for use with computers. Each of the magnification packages offers different levels or types of support ranging from basic screen magnification to the ability to enlarge the text, change the colour of the text and the colour of the background, adjust the contrast and brightness and even highlight individual words. Two computer screen functions that can be difficult to see are the mouse pointer and the cursor. Many packages include the ability to enhance the mouse pointer and the cursor. There are other functions that can also be enhanced. Software containing many of these functions can be used to reduce eyestrain. Some of the many magnification packages available include:

- Lunar
- MAGic
- Zoomtext



A common problem encountered by many magnification users is

that they can miss some of the text. When a screen is magnified the entire screen is not displayed at one time. If text is centred or right aligned the person may see a blank area after the left margin and assume it is a blank line. Magnification users have to learn to scan from left to right to check they are not missing some of the text. Using a larger screen can allow the user to reduce the level of magnification slightly resulting in a bit more of the page being displayed at one time.

## Screen Reading Software

People unable to see or focus on a computer screen cannot use magnification although they are able use Screen Reading software.



The software reads the text on the screen using a computer generated or synthesized voice. The software can be used to access most computer programs including the internet, email, word processing,

spreadsheets and databases.



Some of the many screen reader packages available include JAWS, Hal and Windows Eyes.

## Software Providing both Screen Magnification and Text Reading Facilities

Some software is capable of providing both magnification and screen reading facilities. This software is useful for people who can use magnification although would benefit from speech as a backup to reading the text, or if they can only focus on a screen for a limited amount of time.



Some of the many magnification and screen reading packages available include Supernova and Zoomtext



Some packages are available on a pen drive. This means that users are able to use their screen magnifier or screen reader on any computer by installing an authorisation file from the pen drive onto that computer. This facility is especially useful for people who need to work on different computers.

## **Please Note**

It is worth noting that text-to-speech is not the same as Screen Magnification or Screen Reading Software and will not offer the same features.

Having proper assistive technology does not necessarily mean everything will be accessible; accessibility is dependent on whomever created a document or website to have designed it properly and not included elements of scanned or facsimile text.



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### Enabling Technology

For people who are blind or visually impaired the term assistive or enabling technology is commonly used when referring to equipment that enables people to read typed letters, read books or use a computer independently.

There is a range of equipment available as each person will have different needs.

### Closed Circuit Television (CCTV)



CCTVs, sometimes referred to as video magnifiers, enable people with low vision to magnify and view pictures and read printed materials. The picture or printed material is placed under a camera and the magnified image is displayed on a linked screen.

Materials placed under a camera on a fixed stand are moved across and down while the user reads the page or views the image. Cameras on a fixed stand can also be used when someone is handwriting a list or

letter.

Portable CCTVs are also available where the camera can be taken to the material to be viewed rather than the material taken to the camera.



These can be used to magnify almost anything within reach including labels on packages.

All CCTVs enable the user to view text as black letters on a white background or white letters on a black background. Colour CCTVs are useful for viewing materials in which colour is important including maps and photographs.

## Digital Voice Recorders



A useful device frequently used by people who are visually impaired is a digital voice recorder. Voice recorders are usually accessible by people who are blind or visually impaired, easy to use and useful in a variety of situations.



Voice recorders are usually pocket sized and come with an internal speaker and a built-in microphone. They have many uses, including, making notes for a shopping list, recording dictation, recording notes in a lecture or meeting. They can even be used to listen to DAISY books, MP3 music and PodCasts.

Many digital voice recorders include a file management system where the recorded files can be separated into folders making it quicker and easier to find and access individual files when needed. Many can even be plugged into a computer where recorded files can be moved onto the computer, or music files or PodCasts downloaded onto the voice recorder or the recorded sound files.

## Optical Character Recognition (OCR) software



OCR software when installed onto a computer linked to a scanner can enable someone to read printed documents. A printed document with typed text can be placed in the scanner and converted into word-processed text displayed on the screen. Once converted the text can be read, edited, saved and printed.

OCR is around 95-99% accurate in terms of character recognition. There are some factors that can affect this. Using photocopied text will reduce the accuracy as there tends to be faded or undefined areas which will prevent the software being to recognise some of the letters.



Hand written documents present a problem, even with neatly printed script the accuracy rate is likely to be no better than 80%.

Some of the many OCR packages available include Kurzweil, OmniPage, TextBridge, ABBYY and ReadSoft.

