Guidance for Staff Working with Visually Impaired Students

Visual impairment is the term used to describe a loss of sight that cannot be corrected using glasses or contact lenses. There are two main categories of visual impairment:

- Registered partially sighted, which means the level of sight impairment is moderate
- Registered blind, which means a severe sight impairment where activities that rely on eyesight become impossible

Students with visual impairments will experience varying degrees of sight loss; the majority will have some sight which may be useful for different things for each individual. For many, the visual impairment will not be obvious to others, even when someone is registered blind.

How does having a visual impairment impact on study?

Support required will vary depending on the student's individual circumstances. However, students with visual impairments may need support in the following areas:

- Finding, organising, transcribing and reading materials (reading speed may be slower than their peers, even when transcribed)
- Negotiating areas with inflexible lighting
- Participating in practical activities such as lab work or field work
- Note taking, in particular from boards or presentations, or in a darkened room
- Orientation, travel and route finding around Campus

Supporting and teaching students with visual impairments

- If, during a lecture or class, new information is written on the board an oral explanation should be given at the same time
- Provision of directed reading lists in advance to enable materials to be transcribed if need be
- Provision of all information such as lecture notes and handouts in advance, in an accessible format, according to individual requirements
- Extended library loans
- Permission to record lectures
- Reserved seating in lectures to ensure the student can sit close to the board if required
- Ground rules should be established for group work as it may be difficult for the student to interact and see from body language when it might be their turn to contribute
Reasonable Adjustments

These adjustments should be available to students with a visual impairment:

- Regular meetings with tutors to review adjustments and ensure that a student's support requirements are being met
- Support with identifying key texts, above those provided by directed reading lists, to enable the student to choose what reading is essential
- Flexible lighting that can be adjusted to accommodate a student with a visual impairment (some of whom may prefer bright light and others dim light)
- 24 hours' notice of change of venue whenever possible, given via an accessible format. This is to ensure the student can find the venue and arrange human support if necessary
- Rest breaks may be needed due to eye strain and fatigue
- On occasion, extended deadlines may also be required

The Equality Act (2010)

If a consultant ophthalmologist has registered an individual as blind or partially sighted, then they will automatically meet the definition of a disabled person under the Equality Act (2010). In such cases, there will be a legal obligation for the University to make reasonable adjustments and not treat the individual less favourably for reasons relating to their impairment.

Key Support Actions to remember

- Make directed reading lists available in advance, to enable the student to access and organise the materials as needed
- Keep timetables and venues consistent so that the student can easily find their way and any support workers will be able to attend as agreed
- Instigate strong ground rules to ensure everyone can participate in discussions even if they are unable to see visual cues
- Describe all visual material, and anything written on a board
- Give written feedback in typed format