Guidance for Staff Working with Physically Impaired Students

Students with physical impairments may have difficulties with mobility, manual dexterity and speech. Some will use a wheelchair all or some of the time. They might need support with personal care. Some physical impairments are fluctuating in impact and, as with all disabled students, it is important to talk to the student about what is most useful to them.

How do physical impairments impact on study?

A student with a physical impairment may have difficulty with managing the distance between different learning activities, with carrying materials, notetaking, practicals and may take longer to ask or answer questions. Many students with physical impairments may need a Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan (PEEP).

Supporting and teaching students with physical impairments

Many principles of inclusive teaching are beneficial for students with physical impairments. Particular examples are highlighted below:

- Written feedback (in an accessible format) is useful as it avoids the student needing to write notes while discussing matters of relevance
- Provision of lecture and supervision handouts in advance so any electronic notes can be made during the lecture/supervision
- Extended library loans
- Permission to record lectures
- Reserved seating in lectures to ensure the student can find an accessible seat
- Timetables to accommodate the time it takes to travel between different learning activities
- Consistent timetables and locations for all teaching activities

Reasonable Adjustments

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

- Regular meetings with tutors to review adjustments and ensure that a student’s support requirements are being met
• 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 fatigue
• On occasion extended deadlines may also be required
• Support with practicals which may include an assistant, additional assistance with set-up
• Preparation well in advance for fieldwork to ensure the field work is accessible and to enable the student to prepare

Human Support

Students with physical impairments may use a range of human support. This support (often known as Non-Medical Help) is usually funded through Disabled Students’ Allowances or the University. Support can be coordinated through Student Disability Services and may include notetaking and/or recording, library assistance, laboratory support, and/or practical support

The Equality Act (2010)

The Equality Act protects people with physical impairments when their impairment is substantial and long-term. In such cases, there will be a legal obligation to make reasonable adjustments and to not treat less favourably.

Key Support Actions to Remember

• Provide sufficient time to discuss needs with the student before/during their initial teaching session
• Allow sufficient time on the timetable for students to move between teaching venues
• Check that teaching rooms are accessible in advance - check that seating arrangements and routes into the room allow access for wheelchair users. Check for heavy doors and kerbs. How much of the journey is outside buildings? Will extra time be needed if it rains?
• Check the need for equipment and special reserved space in the room or near the room. Will a particular form of seating be required?
• Consider the time that will be needed for completing assignments - include research time. Can work be dictated onto tape or an oral presentation be given?
• Think about examination arrangements - will the student require extra time or an amanuensis? This should be agreed well in advance of the date of the examination.
• How will fieldwork/teaching practice/laboratory work be carried out? Will the student need the help of an assistant?