

# **Essential Reading Lists Guidelines for Staff**

Under the Equality Act 2010 institutions have a duty to anticipate and make reasonable adjustments for disabled people to ensure they are not placed at a substantial disadvantage compared to non-disabled students.

The duty to make adjustments arises where a provision, criterion or practice, a physical feature or the absence of an auxiliary aid or service puts disabled students at a substantial disadvantage compared with students who are not disabled.

Guidance from BIS in the 2016/17 Guidance for new DSA (Disabled Students' Allowance) Students states that,

'The learning environment should be as inclusive as possible, so that the need for individual interventions is the exception, not the rule. Institutions should engage in a continual improvement cycle that develops inclusive practice, with the aim of reducing the number of individual interventions required.' (p.3)

Where a student's disability has an impact on their reading skills, either on their reading speed, reading accuracy, their speed at absorbing and understanding information or their ability to track and follow text, the University has a duty to support those students and make reasonable adjustments. Therefore, if the essential reading list is produced with this in mind, the University can meet its duty under the Equality Act 2010. There follows some examples of the issues disabled students may experience and guidelines on the production of an essential reading list.

## **Deaf and hearing impaired students**

In general, people learn a language through hearing the spoken word and being exposed to this almost constantly as a child. Those people who are born deaf or who become deaf before they begin to develop speech, will not learn language this way. Each word is usually taught individually in what can be a very time-consuming process. When learning to read a language, deaf or hearing impaired people do not have the advantage of learning something that they can already speak and hear.

Obviously deaf or hearing impaired students in higher education, have achieved the necessary academic standards to participate on their course, but this can still mean that reading, research and academic study is a difficult and lengthy process.

## **Blind/visually impaired students**

This includes any form of visual impairment that affects the clarity of a person's vision or the visual field. There are various levels of visual loss and some conditions may be degenerative. Approximately 4% of people registered blind have no vision; however, some can distinguish between light and dark.

Common difficulties associated with reading for visually impaired students include difficulties reading at speed, fatigue, loss of concentration, eye pain, losing the place when reading, issues with tracking the text etc.

Depending on the circumstances, there are many different aids and strategies available to help students read and absorb information – e.g. enlarged print/diagrams; Braille; electronic versions of text (for magnification and screen reading purposes); recorded versions of the text etc.

Both the impact of the disability and the strategies adopted by the student can have an impact on the reading speed and/or the speed a student can absorb information.

### **Students with dyslexia**

Some dyslexic students have a slow reading speed, particularly when reading unfamiliar text. Dyslexia can affect the way in which written text is processed and remembered. Additionally, students may have a tendency to misread words, omit the endings from some words, miss out words or swap the word/letter order when reading. Other students experience difficulties in tracking their place in the text they are reading. Consequently it may be necessary to re-read text many times to gain a suitable level of understanding.

### **Producing an essential reading list – what this may involve?**

Producing the essential reading list involves identifying the reading/resources to ensure the student can fully participate in the course and achieve the learning outcomes whilst being mindful of the volume of reading/information and how this is accessed. The following may be considered throughout the process:

- Reducing the number of texts on the reading list to just the 'essential'
- Selecting relevant chapters/sections from course related text books
- Selecting alternative text books that use plainer English
- Making the student aware of information that is presented in alternative layouts – e.g. mind maps, flow diagrams etc.
- Prioritising texts which are available in alternative formats
- Making the student aware of texts in the library that are available in an electronic format
- Producing a 'reader' that contains copies of relevant chapters, sections of text books, journal articles etc.

Further recommended reading can be identified separately. This will assist a student to prioritise their reading and be better placed to 'read around' the subject matter at times when there is less academic pressure and/or they have access to assistance from a support worker.

The benefits are enormous for some students, for example:

- greatly reduced anxiety and/or confusion regarding the volume of reading
- ability to prioritise reading
- access to information in their preferred format
- access to vital course information in a timely fashion
- decreased likelihood that the student will require course work extensions

## **Provision of text in an alternative format**

The process of supplying a concise and timely essential reading list is also of benefit to staff in Library and Computing Service when they are required to provide text in an alternative format for disabled students. Library staff are required to approach individual publishers for each text before the alternative format is supplied if an e-book is not currently available. This can be a time consuming process and if students do not receive their course related materials at the same time as other students, they can be placed at a severe disadvantage compared to their peers.

In order to help Library Staff provide texts in an alternative format, please provide the essential reading list as soon as possible. The information required is the author, the full title of the book, the year of publication, the edition, the name of the publisher and the 13 digit ISBN number. In most instances publishers want to supply the latest edition of a book. Older books published in the 70s, 80s and 90s and even early 2000s are not available electronically but the publishers still have to be approached. If they do not have an electronic copy, publishers generally grant permission to scan the book. At busy times it can take about 2 weeks to scan 1 book.

## **References:**

Business, Innovation and Skills (2016). *DSA Guidance for new DSA students 2016/17*. Retrieved from <http://www.practitioners.slc.co.uk/policy-information/guidance-chapters>

Equality and Human Rights Commission (2014). What equality law means for you as an education provider - further and higher education. Retrieved from [http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/publication\\_pdf/What%20equality%20law%20means%20for%20you%20as%20an%20education%20provide%20further%20and%20higher%20education.pdf](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/publication_pdf/What%20equality%20law%20means%20for%20you%20as%20an%20education%20provide%20further%20and%20higher%20education.pdf)