Factsheet 11: Using Support Workers in Higher Education (Academic and Practice Based Settings)

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Background

This document provides a template for use by disabled students and universities with regard to the role of support workers in academic and practice based settings. It is not intended to be definitive but you can use it as a base for the development of local documentation. Your Disability Service may already have established procedures in place.

It covers a range of issues that should be considered when disabled students are negotiating their support requirements.

Point on terminology: whilst this document uses the term ‘support workers’, some institutions/agencies/disabled people may refer to such personnel as ‘personal assistants’, ‘non medical helpers’ ‘resource workers’ or more specifically in terms of a proscribed role e.g. scribe or reader.

Advantages of using a support worker

The DSA assessment may recommend that a student uses a support worker. There are many advantages to this method of accessing the curriculum. It should be noted, however, that not all students access this type of support – that is their decision.

Employing a support worker can often prove to be an efficient and effective way to access the curriculum. It means that a person, rather than equipment, provides the interface between students and their study. Development of this working relationship can often enhance the student’s self-confidence.

No matter how many and varied a student’s study strategies may be, there are occasions on which the assistance of a non-disabled person is much more cost-effective in terms of time and effort (for example: speedy visual scanning to collect relevant information can compensate for a student’s dyslexia and/or visual impairment). Remember that the student remains in control of the work being undertaken.

Examples

1) A Deaf student asked his support worker/note taker to attend a practical class even though he knew that he was not intending to attend. This is inappropriate.

A student who has dyslexia asked her support worker to read over the draft of an essay to advise on spelling and grammatical errors and organisational and structural issues. She did not ask for comments on content. This is appropriate.
Once he had taken handover from the nurses on the medical ward, a visually impaired student used his support worker to locate patient notes and to read particular extracts of these as he indicated. This is appropriate.

2) A student used her support worker as a model in practical sessions and never worked with the other students in the group. This is inappropriate.

The role of the support worker

A support worker’s role is to enable a disabled student to gain improved access to the educational or work based environment. The tasks that a support worker undertakes will depend on the student’s requirements. These could include:

- Reading/scanning written material
- Retrieving information from resource centres/libraries
- Lip-speaking (specialist training needed)
- Signing (specialist training needed)
- Operating Palantype equipment: converting verbal information into text on a screen (specialist training needed)
- Note-taking in theoretical and practical sessions
- Accessing electronic information and exploring the internet (particularly if encountering inaccessible websites or .pdf documents)
- Transferring/converting electronic information into different forms of media e.g. MP3, DAISY, digital memory stick
- Describing diagrams
- Describing the physical environment
- Describing specific practical techniques (may need some training)
- Driving
- Guiding
- Acting as an escort: providing assistance in getting around the local environment
- Carrying out instructions given by the student

Example

A member of academic staff placed two articles on the University’s virtual learning
environment (VLE) in .pdf format; these formed the basis for an assessment involving a critique of the research methods. A student was unable to access these articles as they were not compatible with assistive software and the publisher’s security settings prevented them from being saved in Word format. His support worker printed off the articles, scanned them and used optical character recognition (OCR) to convert them into Word format. After proof reading, the articles were sent to the student who was then able to independently examine and analyse the text using his assistive technology.

Even after a student has received training on appropriate assistive technology and has accessed available support systems, there may still be tasks which remain difficult or impossible for the student to perform. The most effective way to overcome these barriers to learning could be by the employment of a support worker.

The process of accessing text based information, described in the previous example, takes longer. Remember that if it not possible for all materials to be presented in an accessible form at source, then you need to allow plenty of time for this type of conversion to be undertaken. Under the legislation, it is regarded as reasonable to allow a disabled student who needs this kind of support to have access to the materials before they are issued to other students.

In terms of inclusive practice, all students should have access to materials in advance.

- Do you always check the access requirements of your students when putting material onto your University’s VLE?
- Do you build in extra time for conversion?
- Do you ensure that all of your materials are as accessible as possible and compatible for use with assistive technology?
Factors to be considered

Once the student’s particular specific access requirements have been identified, this will, in turn, determine the kind of activities that the support worker might be asked to undertake.

Accessing visual information

As for non-disabled people, there is no single solution that will effectively meet all the reading requirements of a disabled person. Some students are able to access some text in the following ways:

- Changing fonts
- Enlarging text
- Using electronic or hand-held magnifiers
- Scanners with optical character recognition (OCR) software, speech output
- Assistive software (such as Read and Write, ZoomText or Claroread)
- Braille and other tactile systems

These methods may be essential for a student to study effectively on the programme. There may be other tasks, however, which can be more efficiently undertaken by a support worker:

- Reading hand writing often poses a challenge. There is little technology available which can overcome this barrier. Enlargement does not make it easier to read and this option is of no help to someone who cannot access text visually. In this instance, therefore, a support worker is likely to be the only solution.

- Accessing .pdf files. It should be assumed that this file format remains essentially inaccessible. Support workers can convert .pdfs into accessible formats if the student is unable to perform this task. As noted above, this process takes longer.

- Accessing PowerPoint slides. Many lecturers do place their presentations in advance on University VLEs. They do not always realise, however, that these files may be inaccessible. In this case, a support worker can convert the slides into Word or into another accessible format. (NB inclusive practice requires all materials placed on VLEs to be originally created in accessible formats)
• Reading reference or background material. Students rarely need to read everything and they should be encouraged to be selective in order to use time efficiently. A support worker can read selectively, skip through documentation to give an overview, or find areas of particular interest. The following tasks can be effective methods of enhancing disabled students’ access to text:

  o Reading verbatim (if absolutely necessary)
  o Skim reading documents
  o Locating relevant sections of articles/books/websites
  o Locating relevant articles/books in learning resource centres
  o Carrying out online literature searches
  o Reading research material selected by student (possibly digitally recorded for future reference)
  o Reading documents that cannot be electronically scanned, such as tables, overprinted material, coloured text, or text in complex layouts
  o Finding relevant information in files/patient records and reading these
  o Describing diagrams, X-rays, photographs or graphical representations
  o Providing information and sorting papers
  o Paper filing
  o Enlarging text on a photocopier
  o Processing documents with a scanner
  o Converting .pdf files to accessible formats
  o Converting text into Braille
  o Converting materials into accessible formats and storing in portable form e.g. on to a digital memory stick

Example

A student has a visual impairment. To enable her to make a successful start on the programme, and be able to participate fully, she needed programme books and materials to be sent in advance. She was able to have an assistant for a set number of hours a week who sourced accessible Ebooks and when these were not available, helped with scanning materials into accessible formats and with reading texts aloud (either live or onto a digital recorder).
Do you provide guided reading for your students?

Whilst it is acknowledged that students need to develop the ability to research and explore literature for their own personal development, there will be areas of the programme where an indication of specific reading materials would be appropriate. This constitutes a reasonable adjustment for disabled students (allowing extra time to access the material via a support worker). Inclusive practice requires all students to receive materials in advance.

Accessing and producing visual information

A student’s study programme may involve completion of documentation by hand, giving presentations or the use of equipment or computer systems which cannot be made accessible (such as many electronic patient record and appointment systems in the NHS). A support worker could:

- Complete writing tasks
- Complete documents and forms by hand
- Act as a note-taker in theoretical/practical sessions
- Read from or use computer systems which cannot be made accessible
- Assist in the preparation and delivery of presentations (e.g. using PowerPoint/reading from/ writing on flip-charts)
- Provide observation, for example, in academic, practice-based or social settings
- Under the student’s direction, locate and assist in the set up of equipment in practical or practice-based settings

Accessing auditory information

Some Deaf and hard of hearing students can access the auditory environment via a hearing device (hearing aid(s) or cochlear implant) or by lip reading. It is important to note that lip reading has limitations. It is very tiring and when the student is looking at the speaker’s lips s/he cannot simultaneously look at a screen or practical demonstration. Other students will need auditory information to be converted into a visual form. In this context, the role of a support worker becomes that of a general communicator and could include tasks such as:

- Lip-speaking (in class or when communicating with practice-based colleagues and patients)
• Signing (limitations for this as for lip reading)
• Providing an accessible commentary for visual presentations such as DVDs (if a written transcript is not available)
• Operating Palantype equipment (converting verbal information into text on a screen)
• Providing access to websites which have no explanatory text attached to visual materials
• Answering and making telephone calls
• Describing the auditory environment
• Note taking in theoretical/practical sessions

Training would be required or a specialist support worker needed for some of these tasks.

Example

A Deaf student had a full time lip speaker whilst on practice based placement. Although he was able to lip read, the multiethnic patient population meant that many individuals had unusual lip movement patterns which made understanding difficult. The lip speaker facilitated faster and more effective communication during assessment and treatment sessions.

Travel and attendance at meetings/events

When travelling, especially in remote or unfamiliar areas, it may not be practical or safe for some disabled students to undertake the journey without assistance. A support worker could:

• Provide additional support during orientation and mobility sessions
• Act as a guide for travel to meetings or on unfamiliar journeys
• Guide the student at meetings or conferences
• Identify and/or introduce the student to key people
• In exceptional circumstances and with the specific agreement of the support worker, act as a driver if the student needs to travel where public transport is inadequate

Working relationship with the support worker

The relationship between the student and the support worker must be conducted on a professional basis. The student should take and retain overall control. It is best
practice for the student to have regular support workers in order that good working relationships can be established. In reality, however, this is not always the case and some students have unsatisfactory experiences.

Example

A student was allocated three different support workers. She was able to develop a satisfactory relationship with two of these who supported her in the academic setting but unfortunately they were not available during her practice-based placement. The third support worker did not act in a reliable or professional manner. She was often not contactable, turned up late or not at all and yet was very demanding, expecting the student to sign her time sheets even if she had not fulfilled her duties. This caused additional and unnecessary stress to both the student and her practice-based educator.

You should be aware of issues that may have a bearing on the quality of the relationship between the student and the support worker. This could include factors such as the person’s voice (particularly if reading is a key role) and general behaviour as well as her/his availability and ability to adopt a flexible approach. During negotiations, matters such as temperament and preferred ways of working should be considered. If the student has an assistance dog, the support worker should not have any allergies and ideally, should like animals. S/he must understand and respect the nature of the interaction between the student and the dog (e.g. not to pet the dog whilst it is working and not to feed it).

Support workers employed in the practice-based setting must be aware of the importance of issues such as time keeping, professional behaviour and patient confidentiality. The student and/or practice-based educator may have some responsibility to ensure that the support worker clearly understands these elements of the role.

Estimation of the time required with the support worker

- The number of hours the student requires the support worker each week needs to be estimated
- This issue is usually addressed during the DSA assessment
- The time required may vary at different stages of the student’s study programme, particularly when practice based placements are being undertaken.
- It may be possible to estimate an average weekly time over a month.
'Down time' should be considered i.e. when the support worker must be available, but is not working, for example between patient appointments.

Some students may need a higher level of support in the early stages of the programme.

Support requirements should be reviewed at regular intervals throughout the programme and the support worker’s hours adjusted accordingly.

Example

Prior to her first practice based placement, a partially sighted student made the assumption that she would need a full time support worker when working on an orthopaedic ward. After a pre-placement visit and various discussions between the Practice Educator, student, university liaison tutor and disability support tutor, it was agreed that a much reduced input was more appropriate. In order to aid with familiarisation, the support worker would be employed for the first two days of the placement and then for two hours each morning to enable the student to access clinical notes and to locate patients.

Other issues

You should remember that the support worker’s role is to assist disabled students to access the learning environment; responsibility for all decision-making relating to the study programme should remain firmly with each individual learner.

Ideally, the student should meet the support worker prior to the beginning of their working relationship in order to discuss roles and responsibilities. Unfortunately, this is not always possible or is not common practice in some Universities which can cause problems.

- Are you aware of your Institution’s policy and processes in relation to the allocation of support workers?
- You may need to liaise with the local Disability Service.
- If you know what is supposed to happen, you may be able to guide the disabled student more effectively particularly if s/he has never had a support worker before.
Unless agreed in advance, all communication with other people should be initiated and undertaken by the student. It is important for you and the student’s peers to understand the nature and parameters of a support worker’s role. It is the student’s responsibility to communicate this to the relevant people with guidance and support from you as necessary.

**Example**

At the beginning of the academic year, a student who is hard of hearing introduced her support worker to her tutors and to give a brief explanation of the role. When undertaking a pre placement visit to her next practice based setting, however, she requested that, in the first instance, her support worker should identify and introduce her to appropriate staff because she believed that she would be unable to locate them easily.

The above is an example of best practice. Unfortunately, many students do not take the trouble to introduce support workers to their tutors who are often puzzled by the presence of an unknown person in the room.

The student should consider whether the presence of a support worker might be intrusive, for example, in practical or practice based settings. The student’s support requirements should be balanced against the needs of others and with considerations relevant to the general situation.

**Example**

A Deaf student, who was a good lip reader, was allocated a Spanish speaking patient who needed an interpreter. The interpreter, unfortunately, had a strong Spanish accent which affected the student’s ability to lip read and, consequently, he needed to use the services of his lip speaker. He decided that it would be inappropriate to ask the patient to have yet another person present in the treatment cubicle and that the communication would be too slow and inefficient. As a result he negotiated with his Practice Educator that the Spanish patient should be allocated to another therapist and he took an alternative patient from the waiting list.
Obtaining the services of a support worker

Support workers are obtained from a variety of sources. Local conditions vary and it may be necessary to explore a range of possibilities. Support workers have been employed from:

- Agencies linked to the University
- Students' academic peer group
- Students' social network
- Bank staff from the clinical area in which the student has a placement
- Volunteers from external voluntary organisations of/for disabled people. These may provide recent graduates or people interested in going to university who want some experience of the educational environment. These would not generally be full time support workers but can supplement support already in place.
- In house volunteer schemes: possibly students themselves or recent graduates

Support workers can be employed via the University or agency or, directly, by students themselves.

Employed via institution/agency

Most University Disability Services now recommend that students obtain support workers employed by the institution (often via agencies). The advantages of this system are that the institution takes responsibility for recruiting, managing and paying the support staff. If a support worker leaves, is absent or is proved to be unsuitable, the institution will make arrangements for a replacement. As the university, and not the student, employs the support worker, this reduces the student’s administrative duties. The student should find out whether the institution employs support workers by asking a Disability Adviser.

Private agencies also specialise in providing support workers and they act as the employer in the same way as the university. A well known example of a private agency is Randstad who are the preferred provider for the Open University:

Web Link

http://www.randstad.co.uk/candidates/Study_support_for_students_with_disabilities.aspx
If a student requires a specialist support worker such as a sign language interpreter, contact should be made with a specialist agency; the university may, however, undertake this on the student's behalf. Social services or local organisations (e.g. dyslexia organisations) may hold registers of qualified individuals.

**Employed directly by student**

If students decide to employ their own support workers, they have total control over who assists them in their studies. They can also set standards and procedures for the way in which they want the support to function.

Operating their own personal assistance, however, involves a great deal of organisation and students should use support workers employed by the institution. If they do choose to employ their own support workers, however, students must be able to explain their requirements and take on the responsibility of being an employer.

As a minimum, the following steps should be taken:

- Researching sources of support workers
- Preparation of job description
- Advertising
- Interviewing
- Checking references
- Work agreements – there is a legal requirement to provide a contract of employment
- Discussion of specific duties

**Web Links**

Information on employment paperwork can be found at: http://www.businesslink.gov.uk/

Information on employment contracts for employees on can be found at: http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Employment/Employees/EmploymentContractsAndConditions/index.htm

Responsibilities should be agreed such as advising of cancellations and the notice period acceptable to both student and employee. The student must have a back-up plan in case of last minute cancellations. For example, if the student is suddenly unable to attend a particular session, the support worker could incur unnecessary
travel, childcare and other costs. If the support worker is unwell, the student may need to use an alternative method such as recording a lecture. The support worker would then word process the notes once back at work to ensure continuity of support.

Record keeping

Accurate and complete records must be maintained at all times. This should include a record of the student’s specific requirements, the negotiated role of the support worker, any modifications made to support arrangements and the codes of practice agreed to by both the student and the support worker. Comprehensive records must be kept regarding the times that the support worker is used by the student and of payments made.

This is essential if the student chooses to employ the support worker directly.

Training

Support workers should undertake some training to enable them to carry out their role effectively. This may include health and safety elements and some disability-related training. If they are employed via the institution or an agency, this training is usually provided in house. If, however, the student employs the support worker directly, this could have financial implications as fees for training are not covered by the DSA.

If the student has to undertake what may be regarded as unusual activities as part of the study programme, more specific training will be required. In the case of AHP programmes, support workers will need to be familiar with a student’s requirements in relation to practical and clinical elements of which they may not have had previous experience.

Possible sources of training include:

- Informal: on the job
- Formal:
  - Student
  - Academic staff
  - Practice Educators
  - Disability Service personnel
  - AHPSS
Reviews

In the interests of maintaining high quality standards, regular reviews of support services should be undertaken. The evaluation process should involve both the student and the support worker.

Specific times should be identified and allocated for the completion of such reviews. These could be carried out by the student on an informal basis and more formally by the local Disability Services/Access Centre as appropriate. Academic and practice based staff may need to be involved in some of the discussions. Following each review, future strategies should be agreed and implemented, including modifications to the support programme as appropriate. A record of such agreements should be kept and used as a reference point at future reviews.

Support workers and practice based placements

Some students will require a support worker to enable them to participate fully in the practice based environment. The general principles outlined above do apply; there are, however, some specific, work-related issues that should be addressed. Disabled students’ support requirements are likely to vary according to the environment in which they are required to operate. There are significant differences between the academic/university environment and that of a practice based placement. Given that students are required to undertake their clinical education in a variety of settings, the local conditions in every placement will differ and so each will present new challenges to disabled students in terms of their access requirements. The constant need to address these issues during an undergraduate programme is extremely stressful and academic and practice based staff should be aware of the impact of this stress on a disabled student’s general performance.

The role of a support worker in the practice based setting

The role of a support worker is to:

- Provide the interface between the student and the practice based environment.
- Enable the student to gain full access to the environment, remembering at all times that the student retains control of the work being undertaken and over decisions relating to the nature of the support provided.
- Enable the student to gain improved access in general and being prepared to undertake a wide range of tasks which could include: reading, guiding, communication or describing the physical environment.
Depending on local arrangements and regulations relating to confidentiality of patient-related information, a support worker can be used to provide specific assistance in the clinical environment. For example to:

- Act as guide within the hospital site until the student gains self-confidence and independence
- Describe the visual and/or auditory environment, including equipment, until the student becomes familiar with the surroundings
- Provide access to information such as medical notes, charts, and X-Rays
- Describe the visual and/or auditory aspects of a patient’s physical condition to enable the student to work towards making a clinical diagnosis
- Act as a note-taker
- Act as a lip-speaker
- Act as a sign language interpreter
- Make and receive telephone calls
- Observe and provide verbal and/or visual feedback on the demonstration of practical techniques
- Provide access to equipment (e.g. monitors and therapeutic machines)
- Locate and transport equipment and other items from one clinical area to another

Support workers may initially require input from practice based staff if this environment is new to them. Staff should note that there are limits to the support worker’s role; the student and the Practice Educator should be aware of these limitations.

Obtaining the services of a support worker in the practice based setting

- The mechanisms for this vary from place to place. As noted above many universities employ individuals who can act as support workers for students. Some of these personnel may be available for work based placements. The student should have investigated this possibility well in advance of the placement.
- Some hospitals/practice based settings have members of staff who may be able to act in this capacity or who work part time and may be willing to come in for extra hours.
- A key part of the process is for the Practice Educator (or Therapy Services Manager) to identify a member of staff in the Human Resources Department who can facilitate the process.
- Different organisations have different systems for accepting support workers onto the premises. Many require such personnel to sign honorary contracts to enable them to work with the student in the presence of patients. This is a common procedure although some organisations do erect unnecessary barriers to students being accompanied by support workers.
Example

One NHS Trust demanded that in order to be allowed to assist a student on placement a support worker had to produce a curriculum vitae, 2 references, a CRB check and to undertake in-house training. This created a major barrier and meant that the student had no alternative but to manage the placement without support (other than that which could be provided by the Practice Educator). This could be seen as discriminatory practice; it was certainly a barrier to full participation and placed considerable additional strain on both the student and the practitioner.

- If a member of staff can be identified who is willing to act as a support worker and is already in post at the Trust, many of the above issues do not arise.
Example of a Code of Practice for Students Using Support Workers

Support workers are expected to agree to certain terms and conditions in relation to their employment (see attached document). These terms and conditions have been drawn up to protect both you and the support worker and to ensure that the support provided is appropriate.

Students who wish to use a support worker must abide by the following Code of Practice:

You should:

- Keep all information between yourself and the support worker with whom you work strictly confidential.
- Respect professional boundaries and maintain a professional relationship with your support worker at all times i.e. do not enter into inappropriate personal relationships with the support worker.
- Arrive promptly at the agreed location for your sessions with the support worker.
- Read your emails regularly as this is the main method by which the academic staff and members of the Disability Service communicate with students and support workers.
- Advise the local Disability Service if you have any concerns about the nature and quality of the assistance provided by your support worker.
- Not ask your support worker to attend classes or other sessions at which you are not going to be present or expect him/her to remain after you leave a class, unless prior arrangements have been made with the local Disability Service.
- Inform the local Disability Service if your Support worker fails to turn up for 3 consecutive appointments.
- Inform the support worker at least one day in advance if you are unable to attend a support session otherwise you may be charged accordingly.
- Not ask your support worker to exceed the hours specified in the contract or ask for any significant changes to the nature and/or location of the work without the agreement of the Disability Service.
- Not divulge any confidential information about your support worker to any other party without the support worker’s agreement.
- Not abuse the system by making requests for inappropriate support.
- Ensure that you check and sign your support worker’s timesheet before it is passed to the local Disability Service for processing.
Guidelines

- You will be given a contact number for the support worker in order that you can make arrangements to meet with her/him. Please respect the confidential nature of this information.
- The support worker will not ask the lecturer any questions on your behalf unless an agreement has been made beforehand.
- It is your responsibility to inform the lecturer if your support worker is having difficulty in keeping up with the class. You should ask her/him to slow down or for clarification.

Working with academic/practice based staff

- You should take the responsibility for informing the academic and practice based staff that you will be employing a support worker and explain briefly the nature of her/his role relating to the type of support you require.
- If you are new to employing a support worker and feel that you need guidance/support in communicating this role, you should ask someone from the Disability Service to assist you.
- You should also inform the academic and practice based staff that the support worker will require copies of any handouts, Power Point presentations and any other resources in advance of teaching sessions (if these are not already available electronically for all students).
- You are entitled to ask for these resources at the beginning of the session, or if these are not available, request a meeting with the member of staff at the end of the session to discuss any areas requiring clarification.
- If you have difficulty with any of the above, please refer to the local Disability Service or subject area Disability tutor as soon as possible after any incident.

The Disability Service may review or withdraw support from a student who does not abide by the above Code of Practice.
Example of a Code of Practice for Individuals Contracted to act as Support Workers

As a professional working for students enrolled at the University, you should adhere to the following Code of Practice which has been drawn up to reflect your professional status and to guarantee that appropriate respect for all parties involved is maintained at all times. This code is designed to protect the student and the support worker and to ensure that the support provided is appropriate.

You should:

- Keep all information between yourself and the student(s) with whom you work strictly confidential
- Not divulge any confidential information about your student to any other party without the agreement of the student, unless there is justifiable concern regarding the personal safety of the student and then only to appropriate professional agencies
- Dress and conduct yourself appropriately in all situations (this is particularly important in practical and clinical situations) and remember to wear your identity badge
- Respect professional boundaries and maintain a professional relationship with the student at all times i.e. do not enter into inappropriate personal relationships with the student
- Arrive promptly at the agreed location and be prepared for your sessions with the student
- Convey faithfully the subject, content and spirit of the learning or clinical episode. Support workers are responsible for communicating information accurately and should endeavour not to make too many omissions
- Complete the session to the satisfaction of the student within the pre-agreed time
- Provide the notes taken in the student’s preferred format within the pre-agreed time frame
- Not give advice or offer personal opinions in any teaching situation
- Not function in any situation where your impartiality could be questioned
- Practise in situations where you have skill, experience and competence to do so
- Maintain accurate, self-signed timesheets of the nature and amount of support provided to the student. This timesheet should also be countersigned by the student before being passed to the local Disability Service for processing
Guidelines

- You will be given a contact number for the student(s) you will be supporting in order that you can make arrangements to meet with them. Please respect the confidential nature of this information.
- Read your emails regularly as this is the main method by which the Disability Service communicates with support workers.
- Wait for up to twenty minutes for the student to arrive at the assignment (lecture/seminar). After this time you are at liberty to leave if the student does not appear and you have not received any communication from or about her/him.
- Do not take notes if the student is not present or before the student has arrived, unless prior arrangements have been made with the local Disability Service.
- Do not take notes if the student leaves the room.
- Inform the local Disability Service if a student you are booked to support fails to turn up for 3 consecutive appointments in the same subject area.
- Do not ask the lecturer any questions on the student's behalf unless an agreement has been made between you and the student beforehand.
- Inform the student if you are having difficulty in keeping up with the lecturer. It is the student's responsibility to convey this information to the lecturer and to ask her/him to slow down or for clarification of the subject. If you need to do this on the student's behalf you should obtain the student's agreement beforehand.

If you have any difficulties relating to the way in which the sessions have been organised, please, in the first instance, discuss this with the student. S/he should be encouraged to inform the local Disability Service of any difficulties which you may be experiencing.

Absence

- Inform the Service Co-ordinator of any planned absences at least one week in advance.
- In the event of sickness, inform the Disability Service/agency with the maximum possible notice.
- Absences during term time due to holidays are not permitted.
Working with academic/practice based staff

Academic/practice based staff should have been briefed that they have a student who will be employing a support worker. It is not your responsibility to do this.

Similarly they should have been informed that the student employing the support worker will require copies of any handouts, Power Point presentations and any other resources in advance of teaching sessions for her/his support workers (if these are not already available electronically for all students).

You are entitled to ask for these resources at the beginning of the session, or if these are not available request that you can meet with the lecturer at the end of the lecture to discuss any areas requiring clarification.

If you have any difficulty with any of the above, you should refer to the local Disability Service or subject area Disability tutor as soon as possible after any incident.

Contact Us

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Acknowledgment

The Allied Health Professions Support Service (AHPSS) was launched in 1991 in response to the closure of the Royal National Institute for Blind People's (RNIB) School of Physiotherapy which catered exclusively for visually impaired students. AHPSS's remit was to provide support to disabled allied health profession students in mainstream higher education in the UK. It also offered information, advice and specialised disability awareness training to academic and practice-based staff.

In 2002, AHPSS staff were invited by the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy (CSP) to join a team of specialists to produce a training manual specifically designed to provide guidance for practice based staff in supporting disabled students on practice based placements. The document: "Supporting Physiotherapy Students on Clinical Placement", was published in 2004 and received very positive feedback from all stakeholders.

By 2007, it was evident that the document needed updating in response to UK legislative and technological changes and the increasing use of online information. Following discussions with CSP staff, it was agreed that the AHPSS team (Jane Owen Hutchinson, AHPSS Manager and Karen Atkinson, Senior Lecturer and Manager of the RNIB Resource Centre at the University of East London), would take on this project.

Between 2007 and 2010, considerable time was spent in obtaining feedback from a wide range of stakeholders regarding the content and format of the future document. Whilst it was unanimously agreed that it should be available in both hard copy and electronically, all staff identified the importance of being able to access some of the specific guidance on disability management from the AHPSS website.

"Into Physiotherapy" was published by the CSP and RNIB in 2010. Thirteen related information sheets were subsequently uploaded onto the AHPSS website (between 2010 and 2013), at which point the AHPSS was decommissioned by NHS London. As a result of the positive feedback these fact sheets received and requests from a number of organisations, Jane Owen Hutchinson and Karen Atkinson have given permission for these materials to continue to be available online.