



Disability Support and Inclusive Teaching and Assessment

Student Services

**DISABILITY AND
DYSLEXIA SUPPORT**



Learning and
Professional
Development Centre



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Disability and Dyslexia Support*

1. Introduction

Disability Support and Inclusive Teaching and Assessment is a collaborative project between Disability and Dyslexia Support (DDS) and the Learning and Professional Development Centre (LPDC) at Keele, which aims to more widely embed inclusive disability support into teaching and assessment practices at Keele. Overall the project aims to:

- Raise awareness about the ways in which different disabilities may affect students during their time at university and the barriers learners may face in learning and teaching environments;
- Increase staff understanding about how to design and deliver inclusive learning and teaching environments, activities, resources and assessments; and,
- Champion the wider benefits of an inclusive teaching approach for all students.

2. Disability, Discrimination and the Equality Act 2010

The Equality Act 2010 defines disability as a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on a person's ability to carry out day-to-day activities.

Over 14% of new Keele students have a disclosed disability in the 21/22 academic year. All public bodies (including Higher Education Institutions, HEIs) have a **statutory duty** under the Equality Act to:

- Advance equality of opportunity and good relations between disabled & non-disabled persons;
- Eliminate discrimination and harassment;
- Encourage participation by disabled persons in public life; and,
- Take steps to meet the needs of disabled persons even where this involves more favourable treatment and may be perceived to cause some level of disadvantage to non-disabled persons.

Direct discrimination is where a person is treated unfavourably because they are disabled, e.g. a computing department rejects an application for study from a visually impaired individual as they wrongly assume that all visually impaired people cannot use computers. On the other hand teaching practices can cause **indirect discrimination** to occur when required adjustments are not made for students who need them, e.g. a lecturer uses a video in a session and fails to take into account the needs of a student who is deaf (i.e. does not ensure that the video has subtitles).

It is a statutory duty upon all teaching staff to ensure that their teaching and assessment practices do not discriminate against students with disabilities, either directly or indirectly.

3. Inclusive Learning and Teaching

Inclusive learning and teaching may be defined as:

...the ways in which pedagogy, curricula and assessment are designed and delivered to engage students in learning that is meaningful, relevant and accessible to all ... [embracing] a view of the individual and individual difference as the source of diversity that can enrich the lives and learning of others (Hockings, 2010, pg. 1).

An inclusive approach to learning and teaching requires university staff to take into account that:

- There is **great diversity in the student body** in terms of students' educational, cultural and social backgrounds;
- Students have **multiple identities** which influence how they study; and,
- The **nine protected characteristics** outlined in the Equality Act 2010 (of which disability is one) are protected by law against discrimination, including within university teaching settings.

Inclusive teaching is thus premised upon promoting and ensuring equity in the learning environment and overcoming barriers to participation in learning.

Inclusive teaching places responsibility upon university staff to make choices about their teaching approaches to ensure that they are supportive and beneficial to the greatest number and range of students, in order that all learners may achieve their full potential (Hockings, 2010; Morgan & Houghton, 2011). Figure 1 outlines the Equality Act 2010 nine protected characteristics.



Figure 1 – Nine protected characteristics outlined by the Equality Act 2010

Genuinely inclusive learning environments encourage and draw upon the contributions of all students and support students with individual needs, without singling them out.

4. Disabled Students Allowance

Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) is a grant paid to students which has traditionally supported individual learner needs through covering costs such as specialist IT equipment, non-medical helpers (e.g. specialist tutors and mentors) and extra travel expenses, amongst other things. As a result of recent reductions by government to DSA allowances, many new students will no longer be entitled to less specialist non-medical support. The practical impact of the shift away from supporting individual learners via the provision of DSA related support mechanisms, is that there is now greater expectation and responsibility upon universities and their staff, to ensure that they are fulfilling their statutory duties in respect of the Equality Act 2010.

Figure 2 is adapted from a model produced by the Department for Education (DfE) illustrating how it believes universities should organise and deliver provision for disabled students, with **inclusive learning and teaching environments, activities, resources and assessments for all as the optimum support approach**. Although there will always be a need to provide individual support for some disabled students, a genuinely inclusive approach, has as its central premise, that anticipating need and embedding good practice through thoughtful design and delivery, can reduce the need for individual reasonable adjustments, especially where only low level support is required.

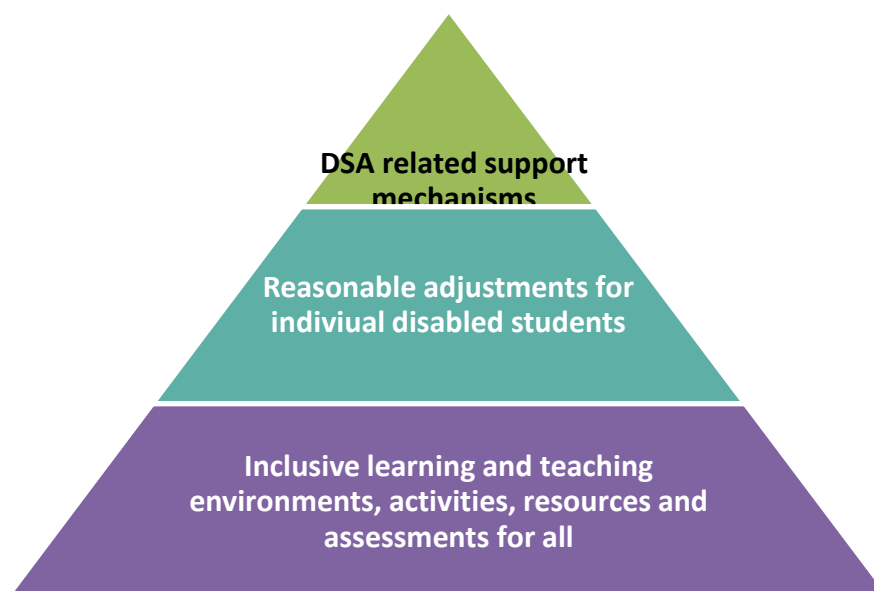


Figure 2 – A model for supporting disabled students in HE (adapted from DfE, 2017, pg. 16)

A disabled student who learns in a genuinely inclusive learning environment, may need no further adjustments to enable them to study effectively.

5. Reasonable and Anticipatory Adjustments

Reasonable adjustments are **accommodations** or **alterations** which are necessary to enable disabled students to access and engage with learning and teaching, e.g. adjustments to physical teaching environments (buildings, classrooms), teaching and learning processes (activities, resources, practices), as well as assessment types and processes. Failing to make reasonable adjustments for disabled students is considered discriminatory under the Equality Act 2010.

The duty to make adjustments is anticipatory and owed to disabled people in general, rather than a duty that is only activated once a disabled student seeks access to a particular course. This doesn't mean that HEIs must anticipate the needs of every potential student, they must however:

- **Plan ahead and anticipate the requirements of students** with different disabilities and the teaching and assessment adjustments that might need to be made for them;
- **Take reasonable and proportionate steps to overcome barriers** which may impede disabled students and their participation in learning; and,
- **Have procedures and practices in place** which ensure that disabled students are given equal opportunities to demonstrate their abilities against set learning criteria.

The Equality Act outlines three requirements to make reasonable adjustments:

- Where a **provision, criterion or practice** puts disabled students at a substantial disadvantage compared with those who are not disabled, to take reasonable steps to avoid that disadvantage;
- Where a **physical feature** puts disabled students at a substantial disadvantage compared with people who are not disabled, to take reasonable steps to avoid that disadvantage or adopt a reasonable alternative method of providing the service or exercising the function; and,
- Where **not providing an auxiliary aid or service** puts disabled students at a substantial disadvantage compared with students who are not disabled, to take reasonable steps to provide that auxiliary aid/service.

Making reasonable adjustments is not only about ameliorating disadvantage, or providing some level of access for disabled students. Making reasonable adjustments it is about providing access to resources, benefits of study and a learning and teaching experience which approximates that of non-disabled students, as far as is reasonably practicable.

The onus is always on the university to justify its approach to reasonable adjustments, rather than on the student to justify the need for an adjustment.

When deciding what is 'reasonable' the following factors need to be considered:

- The **impact of the disability on the disabled student(s)** and whether the adjustment(s) will be effective in overcoming the difficulty faced in accessing learning and/or the service provided;
- The **nature of the HEI**, its size, resources and financial costs involved. The issue of resource is judged against the HEI as a whole rather than against individual departmental budgets;
- The extent to which it is **practicable to make the adjustment(s)**; and,
- The **impact on other students**, although reasonable adjustments must be made even if they could cause some level of disadvantage to non-disabled peers.

Examples of anticipatory adjustments include:

- A university decides to install microphones and induction hearing loops in all lecture theatres anticipating the needs of students with hearing loss.
- An English department arranges training for staff in designing accessible presentation slides (PowerPoint, Google slides, Keynote, etc.) which will support learners with dyslexia, visual and hearing impairments.
- A faculty introduces a VLE policy that all teaching resources must be uploaded to the Virtual Learning Environment 48 hours ahead of teaching as they know that this is one of the most common disability-related adjustments.
- A Medical school conduct a full review of the accessibility and inclusivity of the assessment methods on their programmes and devise plans for a range of alternative assessments and assessment choices for students, which will enable students with different disabilities to demonstrate achievement of learning outcomes and competence standards and lessen the need for case-by-case adjustments.
- A Law department conducts an audit of all teaching spaces to check accessibility for wheelchair users and others who may require additional space, e.g. visually impaired students with a guide dog.
- A Pharmacy department has identified that students with dyslexia are more likely to make negative comments about the format and layout of course materials. A decision is taken to introduce a standardised template for presentation slides and other course handouts with accessibility built in by design.

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- A Sociology lecturer developing a new module decides to include several short film clips for students to explore in seminars. The lecturer decides to only use film clips with subtitles and to create transcripts of content for videos without subtitles, anticipating the needs of students with hearing impairments.
- A student with Crohn's Disease is often late for seminars/lectures and needs to take frequent breaks. All tutors permit the student a degree of flexibility in their attendance/punctuality.
- A student with a moderate hearing impairment relies upon lip-reading during seminars. All tutors are required to: face the class at all times when talking; ensure that their face is adequately lit at all times; allow the student to sit close to the front of class; and, have tables set up in a horse-shoe shape so the student can see other students who are talking.

Examples of reasonable adjustments include:

- A student with dyslexia is permitted 25% extra time in exams, must have all exam materials printed on lemon coloured paper, is permitted to use a word processor and needs to sit in a separate room.
- A school arranges viva-style oral exams for a student with arthritis in their hands experiencing a severe episode of pain.
- A student with severe social anxiety disorder who experiences extreme stress talking in front of peers is permitted to carry out oral presentations in a separate session with the tutor only.
- A student with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome is permitted to take afternoon-only exams and not more than one per day.
- A student with chronic heart disease who finds walking up stairs and for long distances tiring has all classes scheduled on the ground floor and within close proximity of one another when classes are back-to-back.
- A student with dyspraxia experiences difficulty following lab-based instructions. Their poor motor coordination is also a problem in some experiments. The university carries out a risk assessment and arranges for a support worker in practical sessions to carry out the experiments under the student's instruction. The teacher also produces step-by-step lab instructions which are provided to the student in advance.
- A student with a visual impairment uses text-to-speech software and as such requires that all PowerPoint presentations, course handbooks and other class materials are fully accessible for screen-reader software, including alternative text captions for pictures, diagrams, etc.

6. Competence Standards

A **competence standard** is defined by the Equality Act as an academic, medical or other standard applied for the purpose of determining whether or not a person has a particular level of competence or ability. Or in other words it is: *'...a particular level of competence or ability that a student must demonstrate to be accepted on to, progress within and successfully complete a course or programme of study'* (ECU, 2015, pg. 4). **Competence standards must be objectively justifiable and a proportionate means to a legitimate aim.**

Whilst HEIs are not required to make reasonable adjustments to competence standards themselves or Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) which meet the definition of a competence standard, they do have a duty to develop non-discriminatory competence standards/ILOs for programmes and assessments. Furthermore, the means by which an individual disabled student is enabled to demonstrate their competence, or is assessed against a competence standard, can be adjusted so that they are not disadvantaged in demonstrating their achievement (ECU, 2015).

The following scenarios may help to explain competence standards:

- The ability to attend a Geography field trip which necessitates hiking, which may not be possible for students with mobility difficulties, is unlikely to be a genuine competence standard and students are likely to be able to gain the knowledge and skills from the trip in another way with reasonable adjustments.
- In a (largely theoretical) Chemistry degree, the ability to manipulate test tubes & visually identify chemicals might not be a competence standard and a student may be supported by a practical lab assistant. In a Pharmacy degree the same tasks may be competence standards required to become a pharmacist.
- The requirement for Law students to demonstrate particular levels of knowledge of defined areas of law in order to obtain their degree is a competence standard.
- The requirement to deliver oral presentations could disadvantage students with several different disabilities. Unless the specific competence standard being assessed is oral presentation skills and this is objectively justifiable for the course, it is likely that adjustments can be made to allow students to demonstrate competence in another way.
- The requirement that a student completes a test in a certain time period is not a competence standard unless the specific competence being tested is the ability to do something within a limited time period.

7. Disability and Dyslexia Support Services at Keele

Disability and Dyslexia Support (DDS) services at Keele work with schools, programme teams and **Disability Liaison Officers (DLOs)**, to ensure that all recommended reasonable adjustments and study support is in place to fully enable disabled students in their academic studies. Any student who discloses a disability should be referred to DDS as soon as possible so that their needs can be assessed and support put in place early on during their studies.

When a student with a disability comes to DDS, their learning needs will be discussed and if necessary, an application for DSA will be completed which funds an independent assessment of need and some additional support. DDS will identify reasonable adjustments, which are then added to eVision under the Module Leader tab. The relevant DLO in the school/department is notified and is sent more detailed information about the adjustments for the student via email.

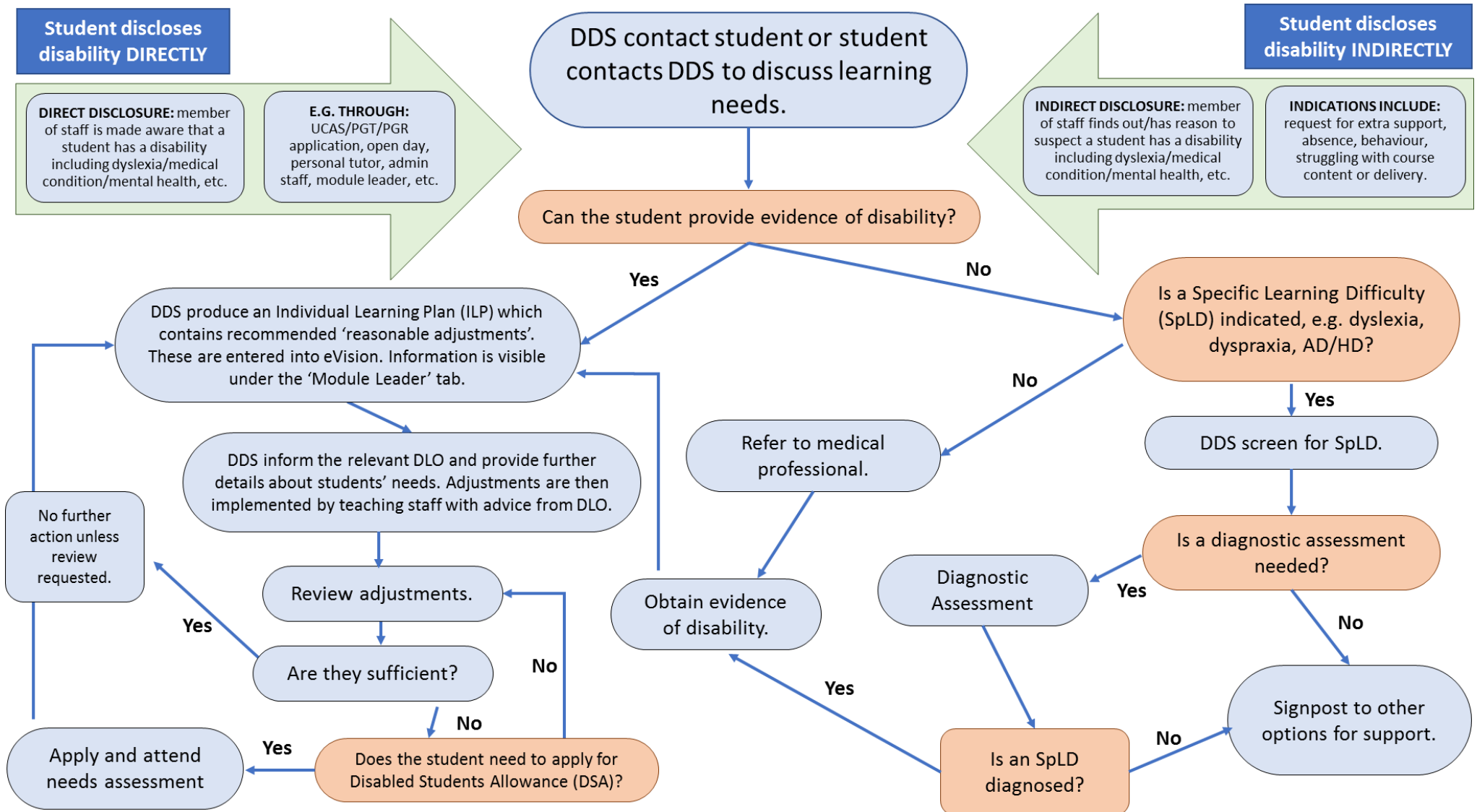
The role of DLOs is to ensure that all teaching staff in their school/department have the information they need to action teaching and assessment adjustments, maintaining confidentiality at all times and ensuring that sensitive data is shared in an appropriate need-to-know manner.

8. Confidentiality and Disclosure of Disabilities

Confidentiality is extremely important in supporting students with disabilities as sensitive personal information is being disclosed and discussed. A student may disclose a disability prior to arrival or during their studies at Keele.

If a student discloses a disability, either directly or indirectly, the university can reasonably be expected to know that the student has a disability. If the university can reasonably be expected to know that a student has a disability, then the duty to make reasonable adjustments stands and adjustments must be put in place, even if a student has not formally disclosed their disability to DDS. If a student has disclosed their disability to DDS but opted not to disclose their disability to teaching staff in their school/department, there is still a duty upon staff to make anticipatory adjustments to teaching and assessments to ensure they are inclusive for all learners.

9. Flow Diagram of Disability Support at Keele



10. What Steps Should You Take Now?

It is the responsibility of all teaching staff at Keele to be proactive in their duties in respect of the Equality Act. Here are some steps you can take to ensure that you are meeting your statutory duties towards disabled students:

- **Find out if you have any students with disabilities registered on the modules** that you teach on, either via the Module Leader tab on eVision or by talking to the module lead.
- **Find out what teaching and assessment adjustments are required** to enable any disabled students on your modules to participate fully in learning, including talking to your DLO to find out more detailed information about any adjustments required.
- Where you are the module leader, **communicate sensitively and in a need-to-know manner**, information related to reasonable adjustments to others teaching on your module.
- **Speak to your DLO and/or Head of School** to familiarize yourself with disability-related procedures within your own school/department.
- **Contact DDS** if you need further advice about planning and implementing reasonable adjustments.
- Remember that you can always **discuss a student anonymously** without using any names if you are concerned about a student, think that a student may have an undisclosed disability or are unsure how to best support a particular student.
- As appropriate and in a sensitive manner, **encourage students to disclose their disabilities** to DDS to enable them to receive the support they need. If students are reluctant you could help in this process, e.g. by drafting an email or making a phone call to DDS with their consent.
- You may wish to **make contact at the start of term**, inviting any students with concerns about their learning needs to come and talk to you in confidence. This will reassure students that you are open to their needs, supportive and willing to make accommodations where necessary.

Most importantly: take a proactive and anticipatory approach to enhancing the inclusivity of your teaching approaches to support students with a range of disabilities. Please see our Top 10 Inclusive Teaching Tips for a range of practical steps you can take.

11. Bibliography

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- Hockings (2010) [Inclusive learning and teaching in higher education: a synthesis of research](#)
- Morgan and Houghton (2011) [Inclusive curriculum design in higher education: Considerations for effective practice across and within subject areas](#)
- Thomas and May (2010) [Inclusive learning and teaching in higher education](#)

12. Further Resources

This introductory guide is just one of several resources which have been developed as part of the **Disability Support and Inclusive Teaching and Assessment** project to support the embedding of inclusive practices into teaching at Keele. Further resources in this series include:

- Supporting Students with Dyslexia, Dyspraxia and Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
- Supporting Students with Autistic Spectrum Disorders and Asperger Syndrome
- Supporting Students with Visual Impairment
- Supporting Students with Hearing Impairment
- Supporting Students with Epilepsy
- Supporting Students with Mental Health Difficulties
- Supporting Students with Mobility Difficulties
- The Role of Disability Liaison Officers
- Top 10 Inclusive Teaching Tips

All of these resources can be found on the **Disability Support and Inclusive Teaching and Assessment** webpage: www.keele.ac.uk/inclusiveteaching



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