

IncludeAll – Enhancing Practice

Students with mobility issues

What are the key issues?

Mobility issues are highly individualised but the impact is always the same; the individual experiences difficulty in accessing learning environments that would otherwise be considered accessible.

One of the key underlying issues that is often overlooked is that mobility issues are often associated with pain that, of course, can be mild to severe, transient or permanent or, indeed, debilitating. Pain is often controlled using medication that can severely impact on concentration levels, mood and ability to participate.

A significant number of people with mobility issues receive ongoing medical treatment. This may require temporary absences for appointments or, on some occasions, longer-term absences for recuperation.

Many mobility issues are hidden; some are a consequence of other underlying impairments such as multiple sclerosis, diabetes or motor neurone disease. Some mobility issues are life limiting such as muscular dystrophy.

The issues then are not simply about physical access to learning environments, although that is highly important, but may be more to do with developing a clearer understanding of the needs of individuals and the impact on their lives.

What are the implications for teaching and learning?

The first and most obvious implication is the organisation and management of the learning environment. When teaching, you are the manager of that environment and it is your responsibility to ensure that it is organised appropriately. This may mean ensuring that general teaching is organised in ground floor locations where possible in order to minimise the impact of stairs etc. although this is not always possible.

Our Estates department very much take account of accessibility when refurbishing and this includes teaching rooms. However there may still be a need to ensure appropriate furniture is available.

Rooms should be organised to allow free movement and, if appropriate, consideration should be given to prioritising seating in order to allow individuals to fully participate. With specialist rooms, consideration should be given on how the student may best access this which may, on occasion, involve a risk assessment.

To allow for the effects of medication it is important that the pace of your delivery is appropriate; that notes, hand-outs, session briefs are provided in advance where possible, in order that the student can fully prepare for the learning experience and that instructions are given clearly and simply. Please note that making things simple to understand is actually a difficult task and in no way should this be considered to be “dumbing down”. Of course, learning outcomes need to be maintained at the appropriate academic standard so the real challenge is how you facilitate the opportunity for the student to best demonstrate their achievements.

As mentioned elsewhere in the toolkit, it is important to establish a good rapport with students and be able to listen and respond to their individual needs. This is, in essence, what the Law requires us to do when we are considering individual reasonable adjustments. Attendance at sessions that support active listening skills and empathy can be of great value here.

Students may take more time getting to and between lectures and seminars.

What really works well?

- Getting to grips with the concept of managing your learning environment(s) is essential in dealing with students who have mobility issues e.g. move freely around the space; sit in a position that best facilitates their view.
- Allow recording of your delivery where appropriate. Students often find an audio recording helpful to enable them to return to their study at a later date.
- Post materials on Blackboard ahead of the learning session and keep them in an accessible format (preferably Word) so that the text can be formatted for individual needs (see the Inclusive By Design section).
- Make some arrangements for students to catch up if they have to have a necessary absence because of their mobility issues.
- Be flexible about assessment arrangements, understanding that, for some students, pain may be a huge barrier to the more formal examination arrangements we have in place.

Further hints, tips and background reading

- Developing an inclusive curriculum for students with mobility impairments - www2.glos.ac.uk/gdn/icp/imobility.pdf
- Disability, mobility impairments and students with disabilities - www.disabled-world.com/disability/education/students.php

- STEM Disability Committee - <http://www.stemdisability.org.uk/portal/supportstaff.aspx>
- Muscular Dystrophy Campaign: Trailblazers on Higher Education in 2013 www.mdctrailblazers.org/did-you-know
- Birkett, D. (2013) 'They just looked startled to see Storme zoom in': when will university drama departments wake up to the needs of disabled students. [online]. *Guardian*; 30 September 2013. Available from: <http://www.theguardian.com/education/2013/sep/30/disabled-students-university-drama-departments> [accessed 20 May 2015]



Checklist for reflection: Mobility

Have you considered the physical layout of your learning environment and how it may be adapted to meet the needs of individual learners with mobility issues?	✓
Have you noted the adjustments contained in any Learning Support Agreements and taken action to ensure they are in place?	
Have you ensured that students with mobility issues are comfortable in your learning environment and ensured that they have access to all resources you may be using?	
Have you made your resources available in an accessible format on Blackboard?	
Where possible, have you sought out ground floor teaching space to make your sessions more accessible?	
Have you considered how you will support individual students when they are absent for a reason to do with their mobility impairment?	
Have you considered alternative assessment strategies for individuals who experience discomfort when having to sit for long periods of time?	
Have you considered the pace of your delivery when face with students who have concentration difficulties because of pain and/or medication?	

Reflection into action



Having reflected on the above, my key priorities for making my teaching more inclusive are:

Changes I would like to introduce	By when	Indicators that it has made my practice more inclusive

This document is part of an inclusive practice 'toolkit' - *IncludeAll*. The whole Toolkit, as one complete document or as separate documents, can be found on the University website at www.staffs.ac.uk/inclusivepractice.

It is split into four sections: Core Concepts; Inclusive by Design; Enhancing Practice; Checklists for Self-reflection.

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