

THE ADMISSION OF DISABLED STUDENTS AND THOSE WITH SPECIFIC LEARNING DIFFERENCES

1 Introduction

1.1 In line with its widening access policy and admissions policy statement the University is committed to broadening opportunities to enter higher education and both welcomes and admits students with a wide and diverse range of qualifications and backgrounds.

2 Principles of Admission

2.1 Each application is considered on its merits and on an individual basis. The University will assess an application from disabled applicants using the same admissions criteria that apply to all applicants. This assessment is a process in which consideration of academic suitability is normally separated from discussion centred on the applicant's other needs which will be a separate but parallel activity.

2.2 These principles apply to all modes of study and to all students irrespective of background.

2.3 It must not be assumed that support in place for one course is appropriate for another. Where an individual wishes to transfer to an alternative course within the University or to progress to a higher level a new assessment may need to be undertaken, in the context of the new application.

3 Background

3.1 The Equality Act 2010 makes it unlawful to discriminate against people who are disabled:

- In the arrangements it makes for deciding who is offered admission as a student;
- As to the terms on which it offers to admit the person as a student;
- By not admitting the person as a student.

3.2 Aberystwyth University is committed to providing an environment where everyone is valued as an individual, and where students and staff can work, learn, flourish and develop their skills and knowledge in an atmosphere of dignity and respect. Promoting equality is an integral part of the way the University conducts and delivers its activities. The University's Statement of Intent, as detailed in its Strategic Plan, states:

"We believe that anyone who has the capacity to benefit from a university education should be enabled to do so.....We are committed to ensuring that Aberystwyth is a welcoming space for staff and students of all backgrounds....."

4 What is meant by disabled person?

4.1 A disabled person is a person who has an impairment which has a significant, adverse and long-term effect on the person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities and includes for example:

- A sensory (visual/hearing) impairment
- A mental health issue
- A mobility impairment
- A dexterity impairment
- Asperger's syndrome or other autism spectrum disorders
- Chronic medical condition (e.g. diabetes, epilepsy, asthma)
- Chronic pain/chronic fatigue
- Specific learning difficulties (e.g. dyslexia, dyspraxia)
- Any other condition which has a long term and adverse effect on study

5 Provision of Reasonable Adjustments

5.1 Universities must take reasonable steps to adjust existing practices, criteria or provisions where disabled students may be put at a substantial disadvantage when compared with those who are not disabled. This is known as the “reasonable adjustments duty” and applies also to removing or altering a physical feature which puts a disabled person at a substantial disadvantage. Provision of auxiliary aids or services (for example, the installation of a hearing loop for deaf students) may also be a reasonable adjustment depending on the circumstances.

5.2 In assessing reasonableness many considerations may be relevant including the following:

- The effectiveness of the step to prevent the disadvantage;
- The type of education or other benefit, facility or service being provided;
- The resources of the University;
- The effect of the disability or specific learning difference on the individual;
- The practicality of the steps;
- The financial and other costs of making the adjustment;
- The availability of grants or loans e.g. Disabled Students’ Allowances;
- Health and Safety;
- The relevant interests of others, including other students-where the adjustment would result in significant disadvantage to those others;
- The extent to which aids and services will otherwise be provided to disabled people.

5.3 Where an individual requires the provision of aids and services which would ordinarily be funded by the Disabled Students’ Allowance and where students have no recourse to such funding, the University may provide support from its own resources, which are limited. Any support provided by the University will be in respect of its function as an education provider. The University will not provide support which would ordinarily be provided by other statutory organisations such as Social Services or the Health Authority. It is therefore important that requirements are discussed with the University’s Student Support Department as early as possible in the admissions process.

5.4 The University may reasonably require further information to assess what, if any, reasonable adjustments it can make. This may take the form of medical evidence, an Educational Psychologist Assessment or a Study Needs Assessment. Study Needs Assessments for UK students are usually funded by the Disabled Student’s Allowance (DSA) where the awarding body provides such a fund.

6 Competence standards

6.1 There is no duty to make adjustments to competence standards i.e. academic, medical or other standards applied for the purpose of determining whether or not a person has a particular level of competence or ability. This is designed to protect academic standards. However, competence standards are different from the methods by which the University assesses whether an applicant has achieved the requisite standards for entry to the course. Adjustments will be made to interviews, tests and other methods of assessment, and alternative methods of assessment may be provided.

6.2 The University reviews from time to time its competence standards to ensure that they are a proportionate means of achieving the requisite academic or professional standards.

6.3 There may be cases where an applicant, because of the application of a competence standard to a particular course, cannot be admitted to that course and in appropriate cases, an alternative course may be offered

7 Role of the Admissions Office

- 7.1 The Admissions Office is responsible for the transmission of the decision to the applicant and for informing the applicant of any entry conditions that need to be met. Decisions are made in a timely manner and on a rolling basis as the applications are received and considered for entry.
- 7.2 The Undergraduate Admissions Office is committed to making decisions within five to ten days of receipt of the application from UCAS, provided the information required for making the decision is available.
- 7.3 The Postgraduate Admissions Office is committed to making decisions for the majority of Postgraduate Taught (PGT) courses between 2 and 4 weeks of receipt of the completed application, provided that both references and other documentation required for making the decision is available. Straightforward academic decisions (e.g. if the entry requirements are clearly met) will be made quicker than more marginal decisions (e.g. non-graduates with relevant experience or graduates of non-cognate disciplines) or some that require an interview and/or review of creative works as part of the standard selection process for specific courses.
- 7.4 Decisions for Postgraduate Research (PGR) programmes usually take 6 weeks from receipt of the completed application, provided that both references, the research proposal and other documentation required for assessment is available. Such decisions are more complicated than decisions for PGT applications as each research programme is an individual research project. All such decisions are subject to interview. Decisions on applications that are being considered for funding usually take longer as the need to assess the entire pool of applicants is required.

8 Role of Student Support

- 8.1 Accessibility Advisers within Student Support are responsible for the co-ordination of support for disabled students and those with specific learning differences or chronic health issues. Advisers provide specialist guidance and support to all prospective and current students and their families and also to University staff in their interactions with students. In addition, Advisers co-ordinate disclosure of applicants and students' needs in accordance with University policy and the wishes of the individual.

9 Disclosure

- 9.1 Applicants are encouraged to disclose a specific learning difference, disability or medical condition at an early stage to enable the University to consider, in advance, general access arrangements, individual specific adjustments and any additional support or specific arrangements which may need to be made.
- 9.2 The information provided will not be used to unlawfully refuse a place on the relevant course and will be treated as sensitive, personal data as defined by the Data Protection Act 1998.
- 9.3 The University appreciates that it is the applicants' choice and decision concerning the extent of disclosure and the need for confidentiality and applicants' permission will be sought regarding the extent of the disclosure within the University. Its anticipatory duty notwithstanding, the University may be limited in its ability to provide reasonable adjustments where students choose not to disclose or choose to disclose within limits.

10 Opportunities for Disclosure

- 10.1 There are opportunities for disclosure and to discuss appropriate support arrangements at an early stage in the application process.

10.1.1 Pre-application

The University holds three Open Days for pre-applicants, their parents and friends. Accessibility Advisers are available for general advice and individual consultation at Open Days.

10.1.2 Application

Disabled applicants and those with specific learning differences are identified from the undergraduate application form by:

- Disability code
- Personal statement
- Information provided by referee
- The appropriate section on the application form

10.1.3 After Offer

The Accessibility Advisers contact applicants by email to invite further disclosure and to discuss any requirements applicants may have. Successful applicants are encouraged to attend a University Visiting Day (travel expenses are paid). Disabled applicants are encouraged to use this opportunity to meet with the Accessibility Advisers by appointment to discuss any individual requirements.

10.2 In addition, Accessibility Advisers are available throughout the application process to discuss individual needs. This may be in person by arrangement or by telephone or email.

11 Complex Needs

11.1 In some instances applicants may disclose a need for significant support requirements. In such cases experience suggests that a case conference on site with the applicant is the most efficient and effective means of proceeding.

11.2 In discussion with the applicant, representatives from the relevant academic department, Student Support (Accessibility Advisers), Accommodation Office and Health and Safety may be invited to attend as appropriate to the individual circumstances. The applicant is encouraged to bring existing support workers or members of the family/friends to join the discussion.

11.3 The Case Conference will identify those reasonable adjustments which, by law, the University is required to make. At the conclusion of the Case Conference, a statement of understanding will be prepared in which the mutual expectations and respective responsibilities are recorded.

12 Where Needs Cannot Be Met

12.1 While the University is committed to admitting disabled students or those with specific learning differences, there may be individual cases where the specific needs of applicants are such that there are no adjustments that the University could reasonably make to prevent the particular applicant from suffering substantial disadvantage in relation to the course and /or access to benefits, facilities or services.

12.2 For example, it is often difficult to obtain licensed deaf signers or Welsh-medium note takers within a reasonable distance of Aberystwyth. Engaging such auxiliary services may not therefore be reasonable on financial grounds and hence not reasonable adjustments to make. Furthermore, adjustments which could be construed as reasonable in the context of a degree course may not be reasonable for admissions to short courses provided by the University's life-long learning programme.

12.3 Where needs cannot be met and having explored all possible alternatives, the only reasonable option may be for the University to withdraw its offer. In such circumstances a recommendation will be made to the designated PVC by the Director of Student Support. The designated PVC will

consider the recommendation and if he/she agrees will inform the applicant of the decision to withdraw the offer.