



**Northumbria
University**
NEWCASTLE

Disability and dyslexia support

Disabled Student's Support Recommendations
(DSSR) Reports: A Guide for Faculty Staff



STUDENT SUPPORT AND WELLBEING

northumbria.ac.uk/ssw

What are the University's legal obligations to disabled students?



The Equality Act 2010 (and formerly the Disability Discrimination Act) states that a person has a disability if he or she 'has a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on [their] ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities'.

It is unlawful, under this Act, to:

- Discriminate (directly or indirectly) against disabled students
- Harass or victimise disabled students

In addition, crucially in this context, the University has a statutory duty to make 'reasonable adjustments' for disabled students where a provision, criterion or practice puts disabled students at a substantial disadvantage compared to those who are not disabled. The 'reasonable adjustment' may be to remove or alter the provision, criteria or practice or to provide an auxiliary aid or service to the disabled student to remove or reduce the disadvantage.

'Reasonable adjustments' apply not only to physical features such as doors and stairs but also to learning, teaching and assessment methods. However, there is no requirement to make 'reasonable adjustment' to the application of competence standards or to academic or other prescribed standards.

What is a DSSR report?

The DSSR report is the formal notification from the Disability and Dyslexia Support Team to Faculty staff about a student's disability. The Disability and Dyslexia Support Team is located within Student Support and Wellbeing, which is part of Student and Library Services.

The DSSR report contains the relevant team's recommendations for what Faculty staff need to do to support each disabled student - the 'reasonable adjustments' mentioned above.



The purpose of the support recommended is to remove/reduce the disadvantage that the student may experience in accessing their programme of study because of their disability. It is intended to 'level the playing field' but not to give them an advantage over other students. The student is asked to sign the DSSR report to confirm that they have agreed the content of it, that they have read the leaflet 'Disabled Student's Support Recommendations (DSSR) Reports: A Guide for Students' and that they give permission for the DSSR report to be sent to their Faculty.

What about confidentiality?

The DSSR report will be sent electronically to the Student Progress Team in Student Central. They will then arrange for it to be circulated to all of the tutors working with the student. It will also be re-circulated as necessary as the student progresses through their programme. If the student wishes to limit which of their tutors receive the DSSR report, they can do this, but it is made clear to them that this may limit the support available to them if other tutors do not know about what support the student needs.

The DSSR report remains confidential between the student, Student Support and Wellbeing and relevant staff within the Faculty. Other departments and teams may also be given access to some, or all of the information, in a DSSR report - for example University Library staff may be forwarded information in cases where a disabled student has significant Library support needs.

As the DSSR report contains information about disability, which is 'sensitive personal data' as defined by the Data Protection Act, it must be stored securely by both Student Support and Wellbeing and the Faculty. It must also be disposed of confidentially by the Faculty when the student completes or leaves their programme. A copy will be kept securely by Student Support and Wellbeing for six years after that date.

What does the Faculty need to do when a DSSR report is received?

The Student Progress Team needs to contact each disabled student to arrange a meeting to discuss the DSSR report. Faculties will decide whether it is a Student Progress Manager or another member of the team who meets with each student. However, in some cases (particularly the more complex cases – see next page), we would recommend that it should be a Student Progress Manager who meets with the student. Other relevant Faculty staff – such as programme leaders or tutors – may also be invited to the meeting, depending on what works best within each Faculty.

In some cases, the DSSR report will indicate that a member of staff from the Disability and Dyslexia Support Team should also be invited to the meeting with the student. This request will be made in the more complex cases, where we feel that a joint meeting with the student would be most likely to ensure the student's requirements are met. In such cases, the DSSR report will indicate which member of staff from the Disability and Dyslexia Support Team should be invited to the meeting. We would recommend that any such joint meetings are managed by a Student Progress Manager, rather than by any other members of the team.

If the DSSR report does not indicate that a member of staff from the Disability and Dyslexia Support Team should be invited to the meeting, Faculty staff are still very welcome to invite us to attend a meeting if you feel that this would be helpful in an individual case.

What do we need to do at this meeting with the student?

The meeting with the student should focus on the content of the DSSR report and on ensuring that the student understands how to access the support that they require from the Faculty.

While it is expected that Faculty staff will make every effort to put this support in place, there may be occasions where elements of the support may not be possible. If this is the case, this should be explained to the student and alternative ways of delivering the recommended support should be explored.

It is also possible that some or all of the recommendations may already be complied with by current good practice in inclusive teaching, learning and assessment methods on your programme (for example, a DSSR report recommendation to provide a student with all handouts in an accessible format and in advance becomes redundant in a Faculty in which this is standard practice for all students). Where this is the case, this should be explained to the student.

The student should be advised about the Late Authorisation process, and what they should do if they need to make a Late Authorisation request that is disability-related.

The student should be given a named contact point (with full contact details) within the Faculty for any queries relating to their support.

It is recommended that a written record is kept of the meeting.



Are these recommendations or requirements?

They are strong recommendations. Complying with the law (see the section on 'legal obligations') is not optional and these DSSR report recommendations are made to the Faculty to help provide a strong steer on effective ways for the Faculty to meet its legal obligations. If, therefore, Faculty staff do not follow a recommendation set out in the DSSR report, they should be aware that, in the case of a complaint or appeal, they may be required to justify to oversight bodies why an alternative approach has been taken and why this alternative approach still meets the legal requirement to make 'reasonable adjustments' for the individual student.

In some circumstances, it is possible that these DSSR report recommendations are not the only means of complying with the University's legal responsibilities to the disabled student.

Not needing to provide handouts in an accessible format and in advance to an individual disabled student if such handouts are already provided as standard to all students, is an example of a situation in which a Faculty might consider that a particular recommendation in a student's DSSR report does not need to be actioned. However, in this situation, the Faculty must be very clear that the needs of the student are genuinely being met, and should talk to the student to ensure that this is the case. It is often useful to make a written record of any decision to deviate from one of the recommendations in a student's DSSR report, in case this approach is later challenged.

The Disability and Dyslexia Support Team is always available to provide advice to Faculty staff if there is any doubt about individual recommendations in students' DSSR reports.

Are the recommendations in the DSSR report likely to change at any time?

During their courses, disabled students will be contacted by the Disability and Dyslexia Support Team to check on how their support is going and to ask whether they feel it would be useful to meet to review the DSSR report. Also if, at any time, the student feels that their support needs have changed or that their DSSR report needs to be reviewed, they can contact the Disability and Dyslexia Support Team to arrange an appointment for this purpose.

If a student is eligible for, and has applied for, Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) funding (which pays for some elements of disability support) but their DSA Assessment of Needs report has not been received by the University at the time of agreeing their DSSR report, there will also be the opportunity to review the DSSR report once the DSA Assessment of Needs report is received. Any additional/different support identified in the Assessment of Needs report will be added to the DSSR report at that stage and the updated DSSR report forwarded to the Faculty.

What are the student's responsibilities to help to make sure that these recommendations work?

As an independent adult learner, it is very important that the student takes responsibility for their own learning and also for helping Faculty and other staff to support them effectively. As set out in section 4d of the DSSR report the student needs to be proactive in accessing support. It is certainly our experience that support is more effective when all parties take responsibility and work together.

Is there anything specific the Faculty needs to do in relation to the recording of lectures and other sessions?

It is University policy to allow disabled students to audio record lectures and other sessions where this is recommended in the DSSR report. It is helpful to the student and less onerous for the tutor if each tutor gives blanket permission for all of their lectures and other sessions to be recorded when the DSSR report is received rather than the student having to ask permission at the start of each lecture/session.

Good class management practice requires tutors to advise the group of students as a whole that the session may be being recorded by a disabled student or disabled students but the disabled student(s) should not be identified.

In the rare circumstances that lecture content or group discussion becomes confidential then instruction should be given for recording to stop until such time as confidentiality is no longer an issue, at which point the recording can re-start.

How do these recommendations fit in with good practice in learning, teaching and assessment?

As learning, teaching and assessment methods become more inclusive within a Faculty, the Faculty will find that it needs to make fewer individual 'reasonable adjustments' for disabled

students. For example, if a Faculty provides clear and directed reading lists, in advance, for all students, then a DSSR report recommendation to provide such a reading list for an individual student is no longer necessary.

In general terms, the types of learning, teaching and assessment methods that enable disabled students to access their courses will be of benefit to all students and will be of particular benefit to other key groups, such as students whose first language is not English.

Is there anything else the Faculty can do to make it easier to implement these recommendations?

The Faculty should employ inclusive learning, teaching and assessment methods to minimise the need for individual adjustments – an example may be to make sure all lecture notes are placed on the e-learning portal in advance of lectures for all students rather than having to remember which disabled students need them and make the notes available to them.

How does the DSSR report link to the Late Authorisation and Personal Extenuating Circumstances processes?

Late Authorisation

Sometimes disabled students might require a late authorisation for disability-related reasons; for example, if a disabled student has a condition which flares up in the week leading up to a deadline. Late Authorisation may often be a 'reasonable adjustment' that a student requires from their Faculty, and therefore Faculties should always take account of students' DSSR reports, or any information that a student provides in their Late Authorisation claim about their disability, when considering claims.

Personal Extenuating Circumstances (PECs)

Students can submit a claim to their Faculty for 'personal extenuating circumstances' which have significantly affected their assessed work. These claims are submitted after assessed work has been completed. This would be relevant if, for example, a student has experienced a serious mental or physical illness or a serious personal trauma, and they feel that this has affected the work they have just completed or submitted. The circumstances would normally be unforeseen and unpreventable.

PECs should not normally be used for a disability for which a student has a DSSR report in place, because, in that situation, their disability support requirements would normally be foreseeable and other types of support would have been put in place for the student. PECs could, however, be used in circumstances where there was an unforeseen and significant flare-up or deterioration in a condition (for which medical evidence would be required) or where a disability had been previously undiagnosed.

If the student's disability is a long-term mental health condition, is there other support available?

The Disability and Dyslexia Support Team provides practical support. The Counselling and Mental Health Support Team provides therapeutic support: **northumbria.ac.uk/counselling**

Who should I contact if I have any questions about the DSSR report?

For any questions, please contact the Disability and Dyslexia Support Team.

Tel: 0191 227 4127

Email: sv.disability@northumbria.ac.uk





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Contact Us

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