

Introducing the Common Framework for Supporting Disabled Students

The Common Framework has two parts: a Statement, and an online Handbook.

The Common Framework Statement was approved by Education Committee and the Conference of Colleges in Trinity term 2014, and took effect in Michaelmas term 2014. It outlines the principles underpinning our approach.

The handbook is currently being developed. It will contain more detail about the application of the principles and provide links to resources, policies, and examples of good practice to support colleagues in enhancing support for students with disabilities. Meanwhile, current information is available from the Oxford Students website, with other useful resources located on the Proctors' website.

In recent years the University has seen a significant increase in the number of students declaring a disability and in the complexity of the disabilities being reported, in line with experience across Higher Education.

This welcome increase in diversity of the student population prompted the formation of a working group whose role was to consider how to ensure that the provision for disabled students was coordinated and monitored effectively across the collegiate University. The working group proposed a Common Framework, following extensive consultation, to record existing policy, identify and build on good practice, and define more clearly the roles and responsibilities of all those providing support to disabled students.

Working group on the provision for disabled students

Common framework for supporting disabled students

Common framework statement

1. Context and Background

Responsibility for meeting the needs of disabled students is shared across the collegiate University, with four parts taking a leading role: the Disability Advisory Service, the colleges, departments/faculties, and the Proctors. Together, they support disabled students throughout their University career, including the admissions process, teaching and learning, examinations, and wider social and recreational provision. The particular roles and responsibilities of the constituent parts of the University are identified in the Common Framework, but the guiding principles that underpin the Framework are relevant and applicable to all.

This Common Framework has been developed in the light of wide consultation across the collegiate University, led by the Working Group on the Provision for Disabled Students. It defines, and builds on current good practice, and sets out the guiding principles that underpin the procedures for supporting disabled students. It aims to improve the sharing of information, clarity of the roles and responsibilities of each body, and the consistency of provision.

The statement will be supported by a detailed Handbook which will provide further discussion of the key parts of the Framework summarised in this Statement and detailed guidance on the interpretation and application of the points outlined below.

This framework was ratified in Trinity term 2014.

2. Definitions

The following key terms are used in this Framework: **disability**, **competence standards** and **reasonable adjustments**. These terms are underpinned by the Equality Act (2010), details of which are included in the Handbook. The Act requires all universities not to discriminate against disabled students. This includes a duty to make reasonable adjustments to ensure that disabled students are not put at a substantial disadvantage in comparison with students who are not disabled.

3. Principles and Objectives

a) Guiding Principles

The collegiate University shall apply the following guiding principles in respect of its disabled students:

- i. That the collegiate University will seek to demonstrate exemplary inclusive practice in relation to disabled students.

- ii. That the collegiate University will comply with all applicable legislation,¹ and follow the guidance outlined in University policies and relevant external publications,² noting the requirement to make reasonable adjustments insofar as they do not compromise the integrity of academic competence standards.

b) Operational Principles

Procedures relating to disabled students should be informed by our guiding principles and the following high-level objectives:

- i. That the collegiate University will adopt an **anticipatory**³ approach, in line with requirements of the Equality Act, and think ahead about the range of adjustments that might reasonably be made for potential students without needing reference to individual student cases.
- ii. That the collegiate University will use and further develop efficient **communication** systems to share information about disabled students in order to provide coordinated support. This will be carried out in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 and will also recognise the requirement to respect confidentiality and the need for sensitivity during the legitimate sharing of information. (Further information about the use of student personal data is at www.ox.ac.uk/students/data).
- iii. That the **Disability Advisory Service** (DAS) will play a central role in assessing student need and making recommendations for reasonable adjustments to remove disability-related barriers including working in collaboration with, and providing advice and guidance for, students, colleges, departments and other relevant sections of the collegiate University.
- iv. Each College⁴ and faculty/department should designate a senior member of staff to take a lead role in disability-related matters (known as the '**Disability Lead**'). This person should have strategic oversight of provision for disabled students within their college or department and will report to the relevant responsible body as set out below.⁵ The Disability Lead will hold sufficient seniority to ensure that provisions for disabled students are made; s/he should normally be a full member of the responsible body. Each college and faculty/department may also appoint one or more members of staff to coordinate and oversee implementation of provision for disabled students (the '**disability coordinator**'). This person, or their delegate, must also be in a position to ensure that adjustments necessary to meet the day-to-day needs of disabled students are put in place.
- v. That a **collaborative** approach will be adopted by those staff supporting disabled students to facilitate the smooth and coherent implementation of reasonable adjustments. Within this collaborative context, the lead responsibility for maintaining oversight throughout a student's studies will be taken by colleges in the case of undergraduates, and by departments/faculties in the case of graduates, in close consultation with DAS.

¹ Equality Act (2010), Data Protection Act (1998), Technical Guidance of Further and Higher Education (2012).

² Education Committee Guidance – Framework for Supporting Students with Disabilities; University's Equality Policy (Sections 1 and 6), University's Strategic Plan; Oxford's Access Agreement with OFFA; QAA Code of Practice

³ Meaning that the collegiate University will think in advance (and on an ongoing basis) about what disabled people with a range of impairments might reasonably need. Further guidance on anticipatory duty is provided by the Equality and Human Rights Commission: <http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/advice-and-guidance/service-users-guidance/the-duty-to-make-reasonable-adjustments-to-remove-barriers-for-disabled-people/>

⁴ Where reference is made to a college this includes Permanent Private Halls

⁵ This would normally be Governing Body in colleges, Departmental Committee in MPLS/MSD or the Faculty Board in other divisions.

- vi. That the names, contact details and functions of those acting as disability leads and co-ordinators in colleges and faculties/departments will be made easily available to disabled students.
- vii. That the collegiate University will ensure ample opportunities are available for students to disclose disabilities and engage in collaborative and timely assessment of their support needs, and will encourage and support them to develop autonomy, independence and self-agency in managing their disability.
- viii. That colleagues working directly with disabled students will have access to **training and support** in order to carry out their roles effectively.

4. Handbook

An accompanying Handbook on support for disabled students identifies inclusive and anticipatory provision as well as the requirements and processes for assessing and implementing individual reasonable adjustments; the roles and responsibilities of different constituent parts of the collegiate University as they relate to disabled students; the training and support available to those involved in supporting disabled students; and the approach taken to monitoring and evaluating provision. The Handbook will be kept updated to promote and share good practice among those supporting disabled students in different parts of the collegiate University.

5. Annual Review

- i. In line with the overarching objective to monitor and evaluate disability-related provision regularly, all responsible bodies of the collegiate University will be asked to incorporate a process for such monitoring into existing evaluation procedures. They will use the current quality assurance cycles within Conference of Colleges and divisions to ensure complementary processes of monitoring, review, identification of difficulties, and enhancement are followed in relation to the Common Framework.
- ii. This review process will seek to provide full information with regard to current provision and present a set of targets, with an appropriate time-frame, to address any areas where work is needed to support realisation of the guiding principles.
- iii. The information gathered through this review process will be used to share good practice across the collegiate University and to meet legislative requirements and the expectations of relevant external bodies.

6. Commencement Date

The Common Framework was agreed in Trinity term 2014 and adopted by colleges, departments/faculties and others within the University involved in provision for disabled students at the start of the 2014/15 academic year.