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Nottingham
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Report

Three Months to Make a Difference - Disabled Students' Commission

Working Group Response

[Sponsors: Stephen McAuliffe, Deputy Registrar

Professor Sarah Sharples, Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion]

[September 2020]

Background

Advance HE, on behalf of the Disabled Students' Commission (DSC) and funded by the Office for Students, set out COVID-19 related challenges for disabled students requiring urgent action from Higher Education Providers (HEPs). The report, ['Three Months to Make a Difference'](#) highlights these challenges in seven areas and provides recommendations as to how HEPs can urgently address them.

In response to this, University of Nottingham convened a working group to ensure that the institution's activities, and preparations for the 2020/21 academic year are congruent with the recommendations set out in the report. The working group met five times between 31st July and 29th September 2020.

The University is committed to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and has made a pledge to ensure all students and staff feel safe and supported at all times. This document presents the University's response to the recommendations and actions that have been taken to ensure disabled students are included in all aspects of University life.

Seven key areas of challenge for institutions and policy makers to address:

- Provide disabled applicants with support and guidance that is reflective of the COVID-19 pandemic in the clearing process.
- Ensure ease of access to funding for individual level reasonable adjustment.
- Ensure student support meets and considers the requirements of disabled students during the pandemic.
- Consider disabled students when making university campuses and accommodation COVID-19 secure.
- Facilitate disabled students' participation in welcome and induction weeks and ongoing social activities.
- Ensure blended learning is delivered inclusively and its benefits are considered in long-term planning.
- Embed accessibility as standard across all learning platforms and technologies.

Working Group Members

Sponsor and Chair: Stephen McAuliffe, Deputy Registrar

Sam Hawkins, *Liberation Officer University of Nottingham Students' Union (UoNSU)*

Deborah Webb, *Head of Specialist Processes, Student Services*

Andy Winter, *Campus Life Director*

Maxime Ryder, Students' Union's Disabled Students Officer, was also consulted as part of this process.



Action Plan and Response

The following table presents a summary of UoN's response to the recommendations set out by the report. Where relevant actions have been consolidated to indicate joint activity and response.

Ref.	Action	Response	Future Considerations
Provide disabled applicants with support and guidance that is reflective of the COVID-19 pandemic in the clearing process			
1.	Provide specific guidance and support for disabled applicants prominently on the HEP's website.	The University's website provides specific guidance and support for disabled applicants. Information on disclosing disability and access to disability support were included in communications to applicants and current students. Student Services are monitoring queries they receive and have increased staffing to offer efficient support to disabled students.	Student Services will continue to monitor the number and types of queries raised by disabled students. Other areas of the departments will be regularly informed of queries and be prepared to respond to them e.g. estates, accommodation, libraries. managers and nominated contacts.

2.	Ensure that virtual clearing open days include information on accessibility and support for disabled students.	The virtual open day, Virtually Nottingham , includes videos introducing Disability Support Services and the team. It also included content on accommodation, welfare services and campus life.	At present, students can access support via calls routed through skype for business. Long term, the University is developing a live chat function for students to communicate with support services through the website.
3.	Provide (where possible) face-to-face visit/tours for students with mobility and visual impairments	The University was unable to offer face-to-face visits for students starting in 2020. However, face-to-face tours will be considered for applicants starting in 2021/22. Disability Liaison Officers (DLOs), Mental Health Advisory Service (MHAS) and Disability Advisers discussed specific needs with disabled students. The Pre-Entry Disability Disclosure process for offer holders was managed virtually by Disability Support Services	Campus life will examine the provisions for running face to face visits for 2021/22 academic year.
Ensure ease of access to funding for individual level reasonable adjustment			
4.	Ensure that information, advice and guidance (IAG) provided to disabled students is reflective of the pandemic (eg, learning delivery method and how reasonable adjustments are	Offer holders and current students are able to request remote study via the University's website. This request covers a broad range of reasons including disabled students shielding and those who may be living with someone who is vulnerable. Email communications were sent to all applicants and students requiring reasonable adjustments. These communications provided contact details for Disability Support Services. Where required, Disability Support	Infosys are reviewing campus solutions to ensure that reasonable adjustments are visible to academics in the academic work centre.

	<p>being made for disabled students)? What support can disabled applicants expect on starting their course particularly if they are continuing to shield?</p> <p>Does IAG for parents cover the HEP's response to the pandemic?</p>	<p>Services are contacting students to review reasonable adjustments. They have also ensured support plans are available to students and Schools directly.</p> <p>Associate Faculty Pro-Vice-Chancellors are working with Schools to ensure the needs of disabled students are met locally.</p> <p>The Library has provided remote access to study resources.</p> <p>As well as study support, the University recognises that disabled students may experience delays in receiving Disability Support Allowance and will fund interim support where necessary.</p>	<p>Support can also be made available to disabled students through the Students' Union. Due to an organisation review, the SU is unable to comment on the exact service that will be provided, but the Liberation Officer will continually monitor their provision to ensure accessibility and equity are prioritised.</p>
5.	In the event of delay to reasonable adjustments, outline expectations of the student and their academic department.		
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Ensure student support meets and considers the requirements of disabled students during the pandemic			
7.	Ensure that student wellbeing services reflect the changing needs of disabled students as a result of the pandemic.	<p>Wellbeing services offered to students have been considered across broad areas. A cross section of these activities are detailed in this response.</p> <p>Financial Support- Students can complete a Covid Crisis Form to access financial support. There is also a referral process from Disability Support Services to the Funding Team where appropriate. Disability Support Services is retaining a pool of 5-10 laptops for students without access to technology.</p> <p>UoN Sport - Measures have been implemented to enable access to sports facilities and services for disabled users. These include planned routes, access information on the website and in communications, and moving equipment to enable those with physical impairments to exercise in a more accessible space. Disability awareness was included in staff training. Staff are available to provide a tour of the new facility on request.</p> <p>Assessment - Disability Support Services and DLOs are and will continue to support student assessment needs in line with the University's Assessment Principles.</p>	

		Prost Graduate Researchers – The Researcher Academy created a repository for research specific advice and guidance related to COVID-19.	
8.	Effectively communicate, in a range of fora, policies and processes that are changed or newly introduced in response to the pandemic.	<p>An extensive communication plan has been developed for new and returning students. This features routes to support and references Disability Support Services.</p> <p>The University's welcome site, Extraordinary is what you make it, extensively details the information students require for the start of the academic year.</p> <p>External Relations will regularly review information on the University's website, particularly the COVID-19 pages, to ensure changes to policy and process are reflected.</p> <p>Disability Support Services has worked with the Education Workstream to support the implementation of teaching and learning related principles in Schools.</p>	
9.	Create a roadmap outlining support for students who are recovering from COVID-19 or have experienced hardship and trauma as a result of the pandemic.	<p>The following support routed have been identified and made available to students affected by COVID-19:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Students have been made aware of their Personal Tutors, DLOs, and Disability Advisers for 1:1 support. ■ MHAS is prioritising students support and will refer students to counselling services. Counselling are ensuring that there are processes in place to identify and respond to referrals made outside MHAS. 	

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Students isolating or in quarantine can access support through the coronavirus pages. ■ Extenuating Circumstances Exceptional Regulations are in place to reflect COVID-19 related challenges. ■ The University will also consider applications for financial assistance for students experiencing hardship as a result of the outbreak. 	
Consider disabled students when making university campuses and accommodation COVID-19 secure			
10.	Specify the support that will be available for students shielding in university and privately managed accommodation at the start of the new academic year and in the event of future lockdowns	<p>The University does not advise that students shielding live in halls of residence. Provisions are in place to facilitate students moving into self-contained flats where necessary. Isolation facilities are available in halls with en-suite rooms and the Jubilee Conference Centre.</p> <p>Care packages have been prepared for students who are self-isolating. A centralised reporting system is in place for those who experience issues on campus. Disability Support Services will also identify issues through the remote study request form.</p> <p>It is recognised that the need to shield or isolate may incur increased accommodation cost for students. Financial support for this will be considered within the hardship fund.</p>	There will be functions in campus solutions and tableau allowing key staff to identify students with remote study requests who are living in halls.
11.	Communicate how spaces on campus have been adjusted for social distancing	<p>The University's welcome site, Extraordinary is what you make it, communicates how the campus has been adjusted for social distancing.</p> <p>The safety and hygiene pages details the measures the University is</p>	Estates will review transport arrangements and enhance cleaning

		<p>taking, guidance on face coverings and links to various support services. The site also contains the University of Nottingham Community Pledge. Students are encouraged to sign the pledge to demonstrate their commitment to their safety and the safety of others.</p>	procedures.
12.	<p>Identify and review any unintended consequences arising from making a campus COVID-19 secure. For example, face-masks are a barrier for D/deaf students and people who use lip reading</p>	<p>Where required, the University has clarified COVID-19 related policies with local areas. Unintended consequences will be reviewed and addressed accordingly throughout the academic year.</p> <p>The Hidden Disabilities Sunflower Lanyard Scheme has been introduced as part of the University's pledge to ensure the safety of students. Sunflower lanyards are available to students with a hidden disability or those exempt from wearing a face covering. Students can also obtain an electronic 'Access Card' to indicate that they need additional support in a range of university settings. Sunflower lanyards and access cards can be collected from libraries or Disability Support Services. Disability Support Services will also maintain a stock of visors.</p> <p>For local support, individual Schools and areas have made provisions for protective wear and have considered disabled students in this process. DLOs will follow up with disabled students on building routes and accessibility. They will also review Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans with students.</p>	

Facilitate disabled students' participation in welcome and induction weeks and ongoing social activities			
13.	Ensure disabled students, particularly those who may be shielding can fully participate in induction	Campus life assessed a cross section of School induction plans to ensure students can participate. Schools were provided with guidance and links to disability support as part of this.	Considerations and duty on accessibility to feed into Estates Workstream for continued activity.
14.	Students' Unions should ensure they provide a range of face-to-face and online activities to enable disabled student participation	<p>The Students' Union will continually work with Events Team and Welcome Committee to ensure accessibility and inclusion are priorities for the welcome programme.</p> <p>The Wellbeing Fair and brand-new Diversity Fair were held as face-to-face events. Virtual provisions will accompany any physical event to ensure equal opportunity to engage.</p>	
	<p>Ensure blended learning is delivered inclusively and its benefits are considered in long-term planning.</p> <p>Embed accessibility as standard across all learning platforms and technologies.</p>	<p>The Education workstream, supported by the Associate Faculty Pro-Vice-Chancellors, have been assisting Schools in developing their curriculum to be delivered in COVID-19. This includes ensuring students can receive information online in a timely manner and being able to discuss issues related to learning with their personal tutors. Teaching materials will be available on Virtual Learning Environments prior to sessions. Where learning delivery is asynchronous, materials will be available to students at their convenience.</p> <p>Prior to starting the academic year, the Educational Excellence Team conducted a student evaluation of online learning which included</p>	<p>Evaluation surveys will be further developed with direct questions on reasonable adjustments to help identify support for students with disabilities.</p> <p>The Recovery Board is reviewing a paper about an Engagement Monitoring System for</p>

		<p>questions on disability. No concerning responses were identified from this.</p> <p>The Quality and Standards Committee and Recovery Boards will continue to monitor and evaluate the impact of online learning and student engagement.</p>	<p>student engagement.</p>
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