

### **Funding for disabled learners in Further Education**

'The support of disabled learners in Further Education is paid for through funding units. Colleges receive funding depending on how many disabled learners attend the college and which courses they undertake. Funding is then allocated to the college.'

### **England and Wales**

Colleges receive money from their funding bodies to pay for additional support needed by disabled students or students with learning difficulties. The college can use these funds to provide general resources for use at the college, for example additional teaching for dyslexic students, an interpreter for deaf students, materials in alternative formats, specialist computer software and depreciation costs on hardware. Therefore, disabled students can generally expect their disability-related needs to be met.

### **Scotland**

The SFEFC gives extra money to colleges where there are disabled students who need extra support.

### **Northern Ireland**

The Additional Support Fund is aimed at individual students. It is intended to augment provision already made by colleges for students with disabilities from other budgets.'

(Skill, Funding for disabled students in further education, November 2002, available from <<http://www.skill.org.uk>>).

### **Higher Education**

Disabled learners undertaking Higher Education courses in Further Education colleges are entitled to direct funding through the Disabled Students' Allowance. This grant is not means tested and is paid to both full-time and part-time learners. It covers three areas:

- Non-medical helper allowance (e.g. interpreters, personal assistants)
- Equipment allowance (e.g. assistive technology)
- General allowance (e.g. insurance, Braille paper, extra photocopying)

Learners need to apply for this grant through their LEA and usually are required to undertake an assessment of need. More information can be seen here:

<[http://www.dfes.gov.uk/studentssupport/students/stu\\_students\\_with\\_d.shtml](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/studentssupport/students/stu_students_with_d.shtml)>

## Inclusive Learning and Teaching: ILT for Disabled Learners

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## An Introduction

The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 (SENDA: Part 4 of the Disability Discrimination Act) places an obligation on all education institutions to make reasonable adjustments to ensure that disabled learners are able to participate equally in all aspects of the educational environment. This obligation extends to online learning, the use of Information Learning Technology (ILT) and distance learning.

This series of leaflets aims to explain some of the issues and offers some guidance on using ILT with disabled learners. It also contains information for disabled staff and their managers. The content of each leaflet is described below:

### **An Introduction to SENDA**

This leaflet broadly outlines the obligations which SENDA legislation imposes upon colleges. It provides information on anticipatory duties, exemptions, redress, etc.

### **Being Prepared, Getting Started**

This leaflet aims to assist with information on curriculum audit (checking it is accessible), lesson planning, preparation, good practice in inclusion and enabling the classroom.

### **The Learning Experience**

This leaflet outlines the principles of inclusion and differentiation. It contains tips on good practice when using ILT with discrete groups of learners and in mainstream classes. It also contains pointers on making online learning accessible.

### **Reasonable Adjustments: Offering Equivalent Alternative Learning Experiences to Disabled Learners**

When differentiation and inclusive practices don't work effectively enough to ensure that disabled students can take part in learning equitably, alternative learning experiences may be needed. This leaflet makes a number of suggestions on ways of doing this using ILT and virtual learning experiences.

### **Technology-Based Assessment**

ILT and online learning usually include electronic assessment. This leaflet looks at using computer based assessment with disabled learners.

### **Alternative Assessment**

This leaflet outlines the obligations for colleges with regard to assessment and examination. It explains the issues surrounding the use of technology to support disabled learners undertaking mainstream assessments.

### **Assistive Technologies**

Many disabled learners use assistive technology to access learning and undertake assessments, and for communication with college staff and peers. This leaflet outlines the most commonly used items and explains their function, as well as the ways in which disabled learners might experience ILT.

### **Learning Platforms**

Learning Platforms, such as Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs), intranets and shared folders are increasingly used in colleges to support learning. This leaflet discusses the accessibility issues surrounding the use of these platforms as well as the content provided in them.

### **Staff Awareness and Development**

Staff development is a key part of the SENDA legislation as it is recognised that it is attitudes and people, rather than ramps and lifts (though these are obviously important), which will have the greatest impact on the learning experience of disabled people. This leaflet offers guidance on where to get training, online resources and useful staff development tools to use in colleges and community learning centres.

### **Disabled Staff and ILT**

Most people consider the needs of learners when they think or speak about the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA). However, disabled staff also need to consider using ILT to support their teaching. This leaflet outlines some of the potential benefits of using ILT and contains information about the DDA, funding, support and staff development.

### **Community-Based Learning: Using ILT to Support Disabled Learners**

Community learning centres, outreach centres and UK Online centres have obligations not only under SENDA, but under the Provision of Goods and Services Section of the DDA. This leaflet outlines the issues surrounding the legislation, using appropriate terminology, making your centre more accessible and further sources of help and information.

### **Work Experience and Work-Based Learning**

Issues around work-based and vocational learning for disabled learners are covered by SENDA as well as the **Employment** section of the DDA. This leaflet outlines the issues for colleges, work placement providers and employers. It offers guidance on help and support as well as further reading materials.

All the above leaflets are available from Ferl and TechDis. Online versions can be seen on the Ferl website <<http://ferl.becta.org.uk/publications/techdisferl>> and the TechDis website <<http://www.techdis.ac.uk>>. Alternative formats of these leaflets (e.g. Braille, large print, electronic) can be obtained from TechDis <[helpdesk@techdis.ac.uk](mailto:helpdesk@techdis.ac.uk)>.

### **Terminology**

Labels and descriptions are important and can reflect (intentionally or accidentally) the way people are viewed. It is important to give some consideration to the way terminology surrounding disability is used. A guide to acceptable terminology has been provided in the **Community-Based Learning** leaflet in this series.

### **What is disability?**

SEندا and the DDA describe disability as 'having a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on the ability to carry out normal day to day activities'. This can include a range of visible as well as hidden disabilities and illnesses. The British Council of Disabled People uses the following definition: 'Loss or limitation of opportunity to take part in the life of the mainstream community on an equal level with others, due to physical or social barriers.'

### ILT – What is it?

Information Technology (IT) refers to items of computing technology and the skills required to use these effectively, for example, word processing software and the use of keyboards.

Information and Communications Technology (ICT) refers to the use of networks, both internally and externally, to communicate and share information, for example, using the Internet and email packages.

Information Learning Technology (ILT) is defined as using IT/ICT to run the core business of sixth form and further education colleges – learning and teaching – as well as the management of the learning environment and business systems that support and enable effective learning. The fundamental competencies required for ILT start with skills in teaching, learning, learner support and management of resources and the skills necessary to make the best use of IT/ICT in these contexts.

### Using ILT to include learners

Disabled learners can benefit a great deal from ILT. Not only does it allow for distance and flexible learning, but learners can use a range of assistive technology to access resources which would otherwise present significant barriers to them. Particularly print impaired learners, like dyslexic and visually impaired learners, and learners with specific learning difficulties, can benefit greatly from the integration of ILT into teaching practice.

'There are many ways that ILT can help someone with a wide range of learning or physical disabilities. Word processing packages can be used to help someone with handwriting difficulties to present coursework and materials in an attractive format, spellcheckers can help those with dyslexia, digital cameras can record graphical evidence of achievement, speech browsers can read information on a computer screen and voice recognition software can help to record data directly into application software' (Ferl Practitioners' Programme pack).

### Some benefits of ILT for disabled learners:

- ease of contact between learners and staff,
- potential for adapting teaching materials,
- flexible learning,
- learners can access materials at their own pace,
- differentiation of learners.

### Excluding disabled learners through ILT

Although ILT offers great opportunities, it can also create barriers if lesson and curriculum planning does not consider the needs of disabled learners. The ILT revolution should be a vehicle for positive change for inclusion and widening participation.

Some factors which can exclude disabled learners:

- using or producing materials which are inaccessible and cannot be adapted,
- implementing an inaccessible VLE or intranet.

'Although access technologies and other supportive applications have the potential to increase accessibility for students with disabilities, other developments within tertiary education are threatening to jeopardise this access. A large number of university Web sites are not available in an accessible format and those using specialist scanning and input devices cannot access most of the popular VLEs.' (Seale, J. and Rius-Riu, M. (2001) An introduction to learning technology within tertiary education in the UK. ALT.) <[http://www.warwick.ac.uk/ETS/results/ALT\\_implemLTs.pdf](http://www.warwick.ac.uk/ETS/results/ALT_implemLTs.pdf)>

### ILT Strategies

Each college has been required to produce an ILT strategy. While ILT strategies should address the issue of inclusion and disabled learners, it is worth considering how this policy is applied in practice.

In the publication, 'Access all Areas', Phipps and Sutherland ask the following questions:

- 'What does your ILT strategy say about inclusive learning?
- What does your inclusive learning strategy say about ILT?
- What level of awareness do our ILT champions have about the needs of disabled learners and learners with learning difficulties?
- How much do our inclusive learning teams know about accessible and assistive technologies?

**Access All Areas is available from**  
<<http://www.techdis.ac.uk>>.

### Assessing the needs of the learner

Guidance on finding out if a learner or applicant is disabled is available from the DfES at <<http://www.lifelonglearning.co.uk/findingout/index.htm>>. One of the most important ways of supporting disabled learners is to identify and address their needs at the earliest possible opportunity. This assessment should, where possible, take place before the course begins and should be undertaken in conjunction with specialist learning support staff. The assessment should cover the needs of the learner while he or she attends classes, undergoes assessment and examinations, and participates in any field trips and work placements. It should also consider, where appropriate, any physical barriers in the college. Most colleges undertake such assessments early and have a clear communication strategy for ensuring the recommendations of such assessments are acted upon.

'At Dumfries and Galloway College, if a student declares a disability on their application form they are invited to attend a meeting with a Student Adviser and we talk through the implications of their disability on their learning and how we can adapt the course to their learning needs. We talk them through the types of support that can be offered (both physical support and equipment that can be loaned) and come to an agreement as to what is needed, which both the student and Student Adviser signs. This learning agreement is then passed on to the Social Inclusion Officer who ensures the needs are met.

We try to make all our courses available to learners with disabilities. Students applying for any of the Life Studies courses are interviewed and assessed by staff within that department. The majority of the students on these courses have special needs and the staff within this section are highly trained' ( Suzanne Jones, Dumfries and Galloway College).

### Obligations to learners

It is important to remember that when discussing accessibility and ILT, not **all** learning materials have to be accessible to **all** learners **all** of the time. Multimedia-rich and audio-supported learning resources are excellent for dyslexic learners and learners with specific learning difficulties (the largest groups of disabled learners in further education). You may never have the opportunity to teach a visually impaired or deaf learner and, therefore, while you need to consider the implications of your teaching materials on someone with a sensory impairment, you may not need to adapt your teaching and materials. However, if you do have a learner with additional learning needs, you will be required to make reasonable adjustments to provide an alternative equivalent learning experience. More tips on doing this can be seen in the leaflet in this series: **Being Prepared, Getting Started** and **Reasonable Adjustments: Offering Equivalent Alternative Learning Experiences To Disabled Learners**.