



Inclusive Learning and Teaching: ILT for Disabled Learners

These leaflets were written by: Dr. Simon Ball, TechDis; Chris Barber, RSC Yorkshire and Humber; Louise Buckel, RSC South East; Sal Cooke, Ferl; Eddie Gulc, RSC Eastern; Judith Mole, Direct Learn Services Ltd.; Allan Sutherland, TechDis.

To receive this leaflet in alternative formats, contact <helpdesk@techdis.ac.uk>. An electronic version can be found at <<http://ferl.becta.org.uk/publications/techdisferl>>.



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Disabled Staff and ILT

The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (2001) places an obligation on colleges to make reasonable adjustments in order to not place disabled learners at a substantial disadvantage in comparison with their disabled peers. However, there is also legislation which underpins the rights of disabled lecturers and practitioners. The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA) places an obligation on employers to make reasonable adjustments to ensure that the workplace is accessible to disabled employees. Particularly, they may not discriminate in the recruitment, selection, promotion and development of staff.

Currently, there is a large drive to embed ILT (Information Learning Technology) into curriculum delivery. This means that a great deal of effort and resources are being expended on providing staff development, training practitioners in using new technologies and utilising ILT to adapt and deliver content. It is important that disabled staff are included within this process and are encouraged in, rather than excluded from, gaining these skills. ILT can offer great advantages for disabled practitioners and they should be supported in making the most of these opportunities.

DDA Part 2: Employment

Employers and organisations with more than 15 staff have an obligation not to discriminate against disabled people in the work place. Specifically, they must not discriminate against disabled people in recruitment practices, personal development and promotion opportunities. Organisations have to make 'reasonable adjustments' to ensure that staff can be supported in their work.

In the context of this legislation, 'disability' is defined as: 'a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on a person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities; "long term" usually referring to a period of 12 months or more.' This means that staff who may not consider themselves to be disabled (for example, asthmatics, people with HIV or cataracts) are covered by the Act and are entitled to the protection and benefits guaranteed by it, where their condition has an impact on their everyday activities.

Support and Funding

It is important that disabled employees or potential employees inform their employer of their needs, so as to give them the opportunity to meet them. Advice on doing this can be found at <<http://www.natfhe.org.uk/down/DisableConfRep2001.pdf>>.

Access to Work is a scheme funded by the Employment Service to support disabled employees. The scheme can pay for equipment, adaptations and support workers (personal assistants, Sign Language interpreters, etc.). Early application for this scheme is encouraged. If a college or organisation only applies for support from this scheme after the employee has been in post for ten weeks, the organisation is obliged to make a contribution to the costs; if an application is made before this time, Access to Work will fund all the support.

'According to a DfEE survey, 44% of adjustments cost under £50 and 95% cost under £5000. Very few individuals will require expensive adjustments if they are to teach' (**Employing Disabled Teachers: A good practice guide for schools**, 1999, <<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/publications/guidanceonthelaw/dfeepub/jan00/030100/index.htm>>).

While the needs of learners have to be considered when purchasing and developing new learning technologies (such as Virtual Learning Environments, electronic whiteboards and college websites) the management of the college must also consider the implications for staff use as well. Buying an inaccessible

learning environment may disadvantage a disabled employee and therefore discriminate against them. On the other hand, making other modifications or involving disabled colleagues in procurement decisions may mean that the full benefits of ILT are open to them.

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.

While many practitioners would not consider themselves expert users of ILT, most staff in colleges use IT or ICT or both frequently, at work or at home. Applying these skills to teaching and learning is using ILT.

Using ICT and ILT may help in the following areas:

- Preparation of teaching sessions,
- Preparation of course materials,
- Communicating with learners,
- Flexible working arrangements,
- Teaching and presentation,
- Assessment,
- Administration.

Benefits of using ILT for practitioners

Using ILT should be advantageous for both learners and staff. While there should be a clear pedagogical rationale for incorporating technology into a teaching situation, ILT can offer specific benefits for disabled practitioners in face-to-face and distance learning. (More information on this topic can be seen in **The Learning Experience** leaflet in this series.)

The following are examples of where ILT can assist disabled staff:

- A blind history lecturer receives all learner assignments by email. This means that he can listen to them through a screen reader, rather than having them transcribed or scanned.
- A lecturer who is a wheelchair user has found interactive whiteboards very useful. Rather than having to turn her back to the class and use only part of the board, she can write on the interactive writing tablet from anywhere in the room, allowing her to move around the class. She can link to previously prepared documents and then save all the text written in the lesson and print this out for learners.
- A Deaf tutor asked a class to use a bulletin board for group discussions. With this he can monitor progress, check participation, allow the learners to work flexibly and then mark work according to the participation of individuals.
- A deaf lecturer took part in an online conference, which provided a staff development opportunity for all staff. The conference was text based and this ensured there were no access issues for her.

- A dyslexic tutor uses a palm top computer as an alerting device and memory aid.

Samina used to use handouts and videos to teach BSL (British Sign Language) to her learners. Winding the tape to the right place was a problem and would require some preparation before each class. Handouts were useful, but it was difficult to show movements and facial expressions with paper drawings. She now uses CD-ROMs which allows her to select a sign easily and show this again and again. There are also new BSL websites which she utilises for preparation and to recommend to learners for self-study.

Online/distance learning

Jane has arthritis which restricts her movement. After completing an online course, she decided to enrol on a Virtual Tutor Programme. She passed with distinction and now teaches others how to become online tutors. Teaching virtually, not face-to-face, means that she is free to attend alternative therapy appointments, and can manage her work around bouts of pain and discomfort. She feels that if she were forced to attend her place of work full-time she would have to resign.

Online learning can be a lifeline for lecturers with conditions which vary in severity and which mean that face-to-face teaching would be impractical or undesirable for the individual. Becoming an online tutor can be one option for entering or staying in teaching, particularly as online learning can be combined with face-to-face learning.

Clive is a lecturer at a mainstream college. He has a neurological condition which is unseen, but which can lead to significant disability. To look at him no one would suspect his condition; however, if he overexerts himself physically, e.g. by standing for long periods or lifting and carrying, his symptoms can worsen and include fatigue, a degree of blindness, numbness, imbalance and slurred speech. After teaching face-to-face for eight hours he is physically exhausted. Coping with the mental strains of work is no

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problem at all. Being an online tutor has helped Clive overcome most of the problems associated with the physical demands of the job. Mixing face-to-face and on-line teaching means he does not become over-tired. He has greater job security and his employers allow him to schedule his work so that he has no long face-to-face teaching days and can mix online teaching and one-to-one tutorials to space out the face-to-face teaching effectively.

Staff Development and Awareness

Excluding disabled practitioners from staff development activities constitutes discrimination. Many colleges are investing a great deal of resources in building and extending their ILT and online provision. If disabled lecturers are not included in this provision, they will have a skills deficit, which would be counted as discrimination, since this prohibits them from achieving promotion opportunities. ILT can improve accessibility to these training opportunities, and the full range of how this may support disabled practitioners should be investigated. It may be useful to include a disabled colleague in the development of such staff training opportunities.

The first point of contact within the college for ILT awareness and staff development should be the college ILT Champion. Most colleges have these and their role is to share information and knowledge throughout the college on ILT. They may also be able to assist in identifying existing resources and staff development opportunities in the college.

Useful Information

Employing Disabled Teachers - A good practice guide for schools

This guide, published by Skill, the National Bureau for Students with Disabilities, is aimed at schools but contains much useful information which can be passed on to employers and useful case studies of disabled practitioners. It can be downloaded from <<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/publications/guidanceonthelaw/dfeeepub/jan00/030100/index.htm>>.

Being in Teaching as a Disabled Person

This booklet is part of the Association of Disabled Professionals' Employment Series. It can be downloaded from <<http://www.adp.org.uk/PDF%20downloads/teachers.pdf>>.

Disabled Teachers Tool Bag

This toolkit, produced by the National Union of Teachers (NUT), includes information on support, legislation and other issues. It can be obtained from <<http://www.data.teachers.org.uk/action.lasso?-response=disability.html&-nothing>>.

National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education (NATFHE)

NATFHE has a disabled members group and produces a range of information for disabled lecturers. This is available from <<http://www.natfhe.org.uk/help/EqDable.html>>.

The Association of Disabled Professionals

<<http://www.adp.org.uk>>