

Good Practice Guide: Inclusive Teaching for Students Who Experience Mental Health Difficulties



Why make your teaching more inclusive, why make reasonable adjustments?

- The School's Strategic Objectives¹ encourage departments to "...lead in the provision of excellent disciplinary and interdisciplinary education", (ensure) that "...graduates are well informed, critical, analytically sophisticated and globally employable", and (ensure) that "...students and staff interact to build a dynamic learning community that reflects the School's distinctive identity."
- Reflecting on inclusion and reasonable adjustments in your teaching provides an opportunity to refresh your practice ensuring it is accessible to students with diverse study experiences as well as disabilities.
- Meet the needs and requirement of diverse student body including disabled students ensuring the School meets its legal 'anticipatory' duty to students under the 'Equality Act (2010)
- "... in the midst of rapid change in higher education, a crucial priority is to ensure that our students have the benefit of great teaching and a rewarding educational experience." Dame Minouche Shafik.

Mental Health Difficulties

Mental health difficulty is a broad term used to describe a continuum between 'relatively mild anxieties and frustration associated with everyday life, and severe problems affecting mood and the ability to think and communicate rationally'²; It is common for students to experience 'mental health difficulties' which may be long-term (have lasted or likely to last for a year or more) and may fluctuate.

Many people get better without formal/medical intervention, but for some individuals the problems become more long lasting and pervasive. The diagnoses likely to be considered as a 'mental health difficulty' include anxiety disorders, depression, bipolar affective disorder (formerly manic depression), eating disorders, personality disorders and schizophrenia. Many mental health difficulties can be stress-related in nature.

Impact on Study

- Difficulty with note-taking during lectures and working under timed exam conditions due to difficulties with focus, concentration, and/or memory;
- Challenges with starting academic work or being able to stop and move on to the next task, which may be linked to avoidance, time management, procrastination, motivation and perfectionism;
- Difficulty making decisions or communicating ideas clearly (verbally or in writing)
- Increase in symptoms around stress points in the academic year (eg examination and assessment deadlines);
- Difficulties with group work/ discussion, including strained interpersonal dynamics;
- Sensitivity to perceived criticism might make it difficult for the student to receive or utilise feedback.

Who can I work with to help my teaching and what resources are available to me?

- Your Department's dedicated Teaching and Learning Centre departmental adviser listed at <https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/divisions/Teaching-and-Learning-Centre/Support-for-LSE-Departments/Support-for-LSE-departments>
- Make use of the 'Assessment Toolkit' at <https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/divisions/Teaching-and-Learning-Centre/Assessment-Toolkit/LSE-Assessment-Toolkit>
- To discuss My Adjustments seek advice on reasonable adjustments and Central Exam Adjustments contact the Disability and Wellbeing Service <https://info.lse.ac.uk/current-students/student-services/disability-and-wellbeing-service>

FOR EXAMPLES OF REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS AND INCLUSIVE TEACHING EXAMPLES SEE OVER

¹ <http://www.lse.ac.uk/about-lse/Image-assets/PDF/Education-Strategy.pdf>

² IRISS Project, Students and Mental Health Resource Pack, Rethink/NUS, 1995.

Inclusive Teaching examples

- Structure contact hours strongly, opening with an outline, flagging changes in topic, offering recaps and concluding with major points. This helps students follow the logic of the session, and if their concentration slips they can more easily resume their engagement.
- For in-class activities, shorter, concretely achievable tasks can be most productive.
- Communicate deadlines well in advance and clearly describe academic tasks.
- Provide clear written feedback even when a face-to-face feedback discussion takes place. Students with impaired concentration can thus avoid having to record feedback while discussing it and can have a helpful point of reference for later.
- Proactively manage group discussions; offer clear tasks (you could specify student roles) and outcomes. This can help students understand when and why to make a contribution.
- Timetables should take account of medication needs and enable students to access support.
- Avoid penalising or making judgements because of disability related absences.

'inclusive learning and teaching recognises all student's entitlement to a learning experience that respects diversity, enables participation, removes barriers and anticipates and considers a variety of learning needs and preferences' [HEA]

Reasonable Adjustment examples

- Provision of reading lists that indicate to students those readings that are considered to be key to the course or particularly relevant to a session or theme within the course. It is not necessary for the whole reading list to be ordered or exhaustive, students should still explore all possible research avenues.
- Provision of examination adjustments such as extra time, a separate or familiar room with opportunity to familiarise in advance.
- Consideration of adjustments to examination scheduling.
- Permission to record lectures or take notes on a computer, and access to lecture capture.
- Library adjustments including extended loans.
- Provision of a specialist mentor via the Disability and Wellbeing Service (if needed) to help students develop strategies for managing their time, stress, the impact of their condition, maintain realistic study patterns and develop a healthy routine.
- Additional preparation and support for field work, presentations, and years abroad: to offset stress and to anticipate and identify further barriers in a timely way.