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Top 10 tips on ...

... Inclusive Assessment[1]

Assessment should give an indication of a student's level of achievement of the learning outcomes associated with the course, topic or skill being assessed. However, if a student has a disability, then the assessment may need to be modified so that the student can demonstrate their learning (DDA 2005).

1. Identify the learning outcomes (what you hope the student will know) being assessed.

- What is the best way a student can show the learning outcomes?
- Is there more than one way to demonstrate this knowledge/skill?
- Are you clear about which learning outcomes constitute a competence standard? These must apply equally to ALL students and may not be modified, though the process by which the student is enabled to demonstrate the competence standard can be adapted.

2. Identify the assessment criteria (how they can demonstrate knowledge) being assessed.

How will you judge the level of achievement of each stage of the assessment task?

- How will you distinguish exceptional performance from partial achievement of the learning outcomes?
- How have you communicated the criteria to the student?

3. Identify any part of the task which could pose specific difficulties for students.

List what a student will have to do to complete the assessment and try to anticipate difficulties, considering learning styles as well as disability.

- Does this task cater for students with different learning styles as well as different learning needs?
- Is there an alternative form of assessment which measures the learning outcomes just as well?
- What reasonable adjustments could be made?
- If you feel one of your students is likely to find the task difficult, discuss this with the person directly.

4. Consider ways that you could adjust the task.

How might you change the task itself to make it more inclusive and less discriminatory for all students?

- Special arrangements (eg extra time) or alternative assessments (eg presentation instead of essay) for a few select students only tend to reinforce the deficit view of disabled students.
- An inclusive approach should offer a range of assessments to *all* students: ie different assessment of the same learning outcomes.

5. Can the adjustments be built in to the curriculum rather than 'tacked on'?

Assessment should be built in to the curriculum and should reflect an equality approach to students rather than trying to fit students into existing assessments.

- Students generally do not want to be singled out for special treatment (see the SPACE Project).

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[1] Adapted from sources listed in Further Reading, and with assistance from Dr Val Chapman, Director, Centre for Inclusive Learning Support, University of Worcester.

- If an alternative assessment which assesses the learning outcomes is available, why can't it be made available to all students?

Some points to consider about relatively common disabilities[2].

Disability is a highly individualised experience. People with the same disability may have very different capabilities and/or needs, so it is always best to discuss any adaptations to practice, the environment or equipment directly with the disabled person themselves rather than making assumptions about what adjustments may be suitable.

- *Before considering how to make a reasonable adjustment for a student with special needs, read more detail about the specific condition concerned.*
- *While the DDA (2005) requires that reasonable adjustments be made to prevent disadvantage, in some cases such adjustments may not be feasible due to cost or the need to maintain academic standards.*
- *In each case, discuss any adjustments or specific needs directly with the student as early as possible.*

Some common disabilities are described below.

5. Visual impairment
- This term includes total blindness and partial sight, and students will experience different areas and levels of difficulty. For example, an adjustment in lighting for one student may adversely affect another.
- Concepts including visual related cues and information (eg space, scale and distance) may need some adjustment when being taught.
- Assessment modifications may include large print, Braille, recording of lectures etc. and a reduction in the amount of text to read.

6. Physical disabilities
- These may be 'temporary or permanent, fluctuating, stable or degenerative' (www.SCIPS.worc.ac.uk) and may also be associated with perceptual difficulties, and psychological barriers to learning.
- Simply accessing the learning environment may be difficult: check the building and room for accessibility. Also check rest and study support areas.
- Memory, speech and perception may be affected so information could be given in a variety of forms.

7. Dyslexia/dyscalculia/dyspraxia
- Dyslexia affects language and information (dyscalculia affects maths) processing while dyspraxia affects the brain's ability to plan sequences of movement (www.SCIPS.worc.ac.uk). Each one may affect students in a range of ways.
- Affected students may be creative and strategic with good abilities to solve problems, while not generally having linear thought processes.
- A personal learning plan can be helpful, with a holistic, concrete approach. Adjustments may include: providing modified colour print materials, multi sensory inputs, recording of teaching sessions and allowing students to take breaks.

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[2] Material in this section has been adapted from the SCIPS website and does not attempt to fully describe all characteristics of all disabilities (http://www.scips.worc.ac.uk/disabilities).

8. Mental health difficulties

- This can refer to any condition which results in emotional or psychological difficulties affecting the student's ability to deal with normal daily life. This may be temporary or permanent.
- 'Depression, stress and anxiety are the most common types of mental illness experienced by students' (SCIPS) along with low self esteem.
- Medication may influence a student's ability to participate, while they may also experience negative input from other students as well as exclusion from group activities.

9. Hearing impairment

- There is a huge range of difficulties from loss of certain pitches to total deafness from birth. The main point to consider is that hearing impaired students will rely on visual cues for information; therefore, facing the student when speaking and room-lighting need to be considered, as well as background noise.
- Students deaf from birth will have sign language as their first language, so second language difficulties will arise in written work.
- Group-work or tutorials may cause concerns for the student; eg it may be difficult to see all the other students face to face.
- Providing a written form of learning materials ahead of classes can be useful.

10. Autistic Spectrum Disorders

- This disorder affects the way the student relates to other people and his/her ability to read the emotional cues of others. Students may show a varied range of characteristics, but generally they will experience a level of difficulty in social interaction and communication.
- Associated learning difficulties can also include poor organisation, reliance on predictable routines, language difficulties including literal use of words and confusing relevant and irrelevant information (SCIPS).
- Adjustments may include: allowing more time from a student to settle in; help with moving between classes; support with organising study eg highlighted notes, an assistant in a lecture; providing summaries of information; additional communication.

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Further Reading:

Freewood, M. (2003), G. (2001) *Accessible Assessments: Staff Guide to Inclusive Practice.* Sheffield: Sheffield Hallam University. Available online from http://www.shu.ac.uk/services/lti/accessibleassessments/index.html.

Waterfield, J. & West, B. (2006) *Inclusive Assessment in Higher Education: A Resource for Change (The SPACE Project) .* The Student Staff Partnership for Assessment Change and Evaluation (SPACE project, HEFCE). Available online via: http://www1.plymouth.ac.uk/disability/Pages/Useful-Links.aspx.

SCIPS (Strategies for Creating Inclusive Programmes of Study), University of Worcester. Disability and inclusivity web resource. Available online from: http://www.scips.worc.ac.uk/.