

Focus on Inclusive Teaching

Mental Health Difficulties

"Support from my School could be improved by Lecturers being more aware and sympathetic of issues, such as mental health, and take time to look over a PLSP."

"I honestly don't think I could have remained at university if it wasn't for the support I received from the team and the help I received from all the staff in my school."

'Mental Health Difficulty' is a broad term which covers a wide range of issues. Some people experience short-term difficulties affecting their mood and general wellbeing, whereas other people may experience severe and enduring long-term mental health problems which impact on their ability to function in areas such as work, relationships and self-care. Long term conditions may include such diagnoses as anxiety, depression, bipolar affective disorder, personality disorders, eating disorders and schizophrenia.

People often experience mental distress during times of increased pressure or life changes, so it is not uncommon for students to experience mental health difficulties during periods of transition, such as starting or leaving University, moving house,

living communally with other students, approaching deadlines or exams.

Students' ability to engage successfully in their studies is impacted by a range of factors including the demands of the environment around them and the resources they have to cope with these demands. The environment may be seen in terms of the physical environment, but may also include cultural, religious, institutional or administrative aspects. Resources may be internal, such as personal resilience, self-esteem or ability to 'bounce back' from disappointment, or they may be external in the form of support networks and relationships. When demand outweighs the available resources, students often find themselves struggling.

This is where inclusive teaching strategies can help.

Possible Impact upon Study

- **Reading:** accuracy, speed, absorbing information quickly, comprehension may be affected.
- **Notetaking:** difficulties with focus, concentration and / or memory.
- **Oral assessments:** difficulties that affect word finding, flow of presentation and pronunciation.
- **Vulnerable to stress points in the academic year:** assessment deadlines and exams.
- **Planning, organising, ordering and structuring ideas in writing.**
- **Short-term memory limitations:** affect ability to remember instructions, reading, written work.
- **Making decisions / communicating ideas clearly:** verbally or in writing.
- **Group work / discussions:** can impact upon group dynamics.
- **Starting work / moving onto next task:** may be linked to motivation, procrastination, perfectionism, avoidance and time management.
- **Attendance:** frequent or unexpected absence.

Support for Students & Staff Supporting Students

Our [Mental Health Advisers](#) provide professional mental health support and where necessary will draw up a [Personal Learning Support Plan](#) which sets out individual reasonable adjustments to be implemented by the student's school and professional services.

An [e-learning package](#) provided by the Charlie Waller Memorial Trust is designed to give non-specialist staff the skills, knowledge and confidence to offer a first line of support to students who may have mental health issues.

[Mental Health First Aid](#) training is provided by our Mental Health Advisers. [Click here](#) to book a place.

Remember! You shouldn't hold serious anxieties about someone else on your own. [Click here](#) for information on [Dealing with a Mental Health Emergency](#).

To cut down on the number of individual reasonable adjustments required, consider a variety of learning needs and preferences to remove barriers to learning for all students. Some strategies are listed below however you may wish to add to these:

Inclusive Teaching Strategies

Lectures

- Clarify expectations regarding attendance.
- Use Panopto where possible or utilise an alternative format for disseminating the information.
- Provide copies of PowerPoint presentations or any handouts, lecture notes, discussion documents, seminar topics / notes in advance in electronic format / Blackboard.
- Number PowerPoint slides to assist with referencing during notetaking.
- Provide a synopsis at the start of a lecture and effective signposting throughout. At the conclusion of each lecture, review major points.

Presentations

- Extra preparation time and support / choice of turn / gradual progression with planned goals / use of flashcards or other visual aids / one-to-one presentation or use of Panopto can be helpful.
- Offer opportunity for smaller numbers to present to.

Group work

- Proactively manage group discussions and offer smaller groups.
- Offer clear tasks (specify student roles if necessary) and outcomes. This can help students understand when and why to make a contribution.

Fieldwork and study abroad

- Give clear detailed information in advance about fieldwork and year abroad study to allow the student to familiarise themselves prior to the event.

Placements

- Ensure good liaison for preparedness - draw up a plan for the placement at the beginning with the student highlighting important information and dates.
- Provide clear instructions and expectations and check understanding.
- Give instructions in both verbal and written format.
- Recognise and discuss possible anxieties / stress points.
- Where possible, control workload and avoid time pressure.
- Provide a map of the building.

