

Supporting disabled students with online learning

Many elements of online learning work well for disabled students, especially if staff creating teaching sessions make use of the accessibility features available in tools such as Blackboard Collaborate and Office 365. This guidance is aimed at teaching staff who are teaching students remotely. It covers basic information on how to create accessible teaching materials, as well as how to support students when working remotely.

Teaching inclusively

The University has created [guidance on delivering inclusive online learning](#). You can find additional resources to support online teaching on the [Digital Accessibility website](#). **It is strongly recommended that you read through the following resources in order to ensure your teaching materials and activities are accessible.**

- [Accessibility Fundamentals](#)
- [Documents and Presentations](#)
- [Spreadsheets](#)
- [Making emails accessible](#)

Online learning environments

The key tools the University uses for online learning have built in accessibility features, and you should make yourself familiar with these features. Further guidance on these features can be found as follows:

- [Blackboard Collaborate Accessibility Guide](#): This guide contains information on using in-built features which support accessibility, as well as advice on teaching specific groups of disabled students.
- [Office 365 Accessibility Checker](#): All the main apps on Office 365 include an Accessibility Checker, which you can use to identify any accessibility issues in the materials you create. This is particularly useful for Word documents and PowerPoint presentations.
- [Accessibility options in Teams](#): This provides guidance on how to use the accessibility features in Teams.

Considerations for supporting disabled students who are working remotely

There are a number of factors which will need to be taken into account when working with disabled students remotely.

Identifying student requirements

Your main source of information about individual disabled student requirements will be the student's Support Summary Sheet. Copies of the Summary Sheet should be available from the [Disability Contact](#) in your School.

In the event that you do not have access to the Summary Sheet, you can find basic disabled student information on Banner – check with your Disability Contact, or your Banner Superuser. If you have no access to Summary Sheets, or to any other information about disabled students, you can check generic [guidance on supporting disabled students by subject type](#).

Access to support

Be aware that some students will not have access to their usual support, especially one to one support. In particular, this may affect students who have:

- **Specialist mentoring support**, which would usually assist with organisation, time management, work planning and communication with Schools and Services.
- **Specialist study skills support**, which would usually assist with developing strategies which support learning, including how to take effective notes, how to structure work, how to reference, how to revise and exam technique.
- **Note-taking support**, a professional service to provide notes to students who are unable to take notes during teaching sessions.

Teaching staff can support students by:

- Giving additional advice and guidance to students outside teaching sessions, in order to clarify learning, or identify gaps in knowledge.
- Giving clear guidance on how and when you are available to offer further advice and support.
- Assisting students with [suggestions around planning work](#) or pacing work between deadlines.
- Providing basic notes or summaries of taught sessions where required.
- Providing [audio or alt text descriptions](#) of any images or videos used in teaching. Follow guidance for [describing complex images](#) such as graphs and diagrams

- Remembering that captioning is not automatically available when using online teaching tools, which may make it impossible for deaf or hearing-impaired students to access the content. Using [Microsoft Stream on Office 365](#) can help you automatically create captions when narrating a presentation
- Providing text documents in accessible Word format rather than PDF, which can be inaccessible to many disabled students who use assistive technology such as screen readers.
- Following guidance on [how to make your written materials accessible](#).
- Referring students to the resources available through [Study & Research Support](#) on the Library website.
- Recognising the remote support via Skype or phone may not work for all disabled students – check with the student first.

School staff can support students by:

- Giving consideration to extension requests, recognising that disabled students may be working differently, and may not have access to their usual support.
- Being flexible with online teaching delivery, recognising that not all online delivery tools are accessible to all disabled students. Consideration may need to be given to alternative delivery methods where the chosen delivery method remains inaccessible to students.

Further information

Please contact [Disability Services](#) if you require additional information or guidance on supporting disabled students remotely, or online delivery of teaching activities.