

ACCESSIBILITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING AT CARDIFF SCHOOL OF PHYSICS AND ASTRONOMY: FRAMEWORK DOCUMENT

September 2013

1 INTRODUCTION

The Cardiff School of Physics and Astronomy is committed to ensuring that all those who have the potential can participate and achieve their aims within the School. This document describes the policies, procedures and practices operating at the School to ensure that people with disabilities, in particular, do not face barriers to entry to its programmes of study, and to achievement of their potential once admitted. This framework forms part of the Inclusive Curriculum Project of Cardiff University.

For the purposes of this document and most legislation, a person is termed disabled if they have a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. This can include people with sensory impairments, mental health difficulties, specific learning difficulties (e.g. dyslexia or dyspraxia), various physical conditions (e.g. paraplegia, cerebral palsy, repetitive strain injury, arthritis, ME), hidden disabilities (e.g. epilepsy, diabetes, asthma), and long-term medical conditions (e.g. cancer, HIV).

Higher education institutions are bound by a number of statutory duties regarding disability. In particular, the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, as amended by the 2005 Act, requires academic institutions

- not to treat people with disabilities less favourably than those without a disability
- to make reasonable adjustments so that someone with a disability is not substantially disadvantaged as a result of their disability, and
- to anticipate the needs of people with disabilities and make adjustments in advance.

The University also has a Disability Equality Scheme and action plan available at www.cardiff.ac.uk/govrn/cocom/equalityanddiversity/disability/index.html which set out the steps it is taking to promote disability equality across the institution.

2 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

The Cardiff School of Physics and Astronomy is a diverse community with a shared commitment to promote and respect equality, dignity and diversity. These commitments apply to all staff, students and any other members of the School, and visitors to the School, and extend to every aspect of the School's internal and external activities.

The School is committed to ensuring that all applicants and students are treated equally, regardless of their age, colour, ethnic or national origins, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, family responsibilities, disability or impairments, or political or religious beliefs. However, the main focus of this document is the potential barriers that a student with disabilities might encounter in accessing our programmes, and the reasonable adjustments that might be made.

3 UNDERGRADUATE AND POSTGRADUATE TAUGHT PROGRAMMES

3.1 Admissions

Details of programmes of study offered are available from the School's webpages (<http://www.astro.cardiff.ac.uk/degreeprogrammes/>).

Offers are made to applicants on the basis of academic merit and potential alone. However, where extenuating circumstances have been notified to the School, offers may be made to applicants whose predicted grades fall below the usual offer level, where these grades have been affected by the extenuating circumstances.

The School is committed to offering an inclusive curriculum that anticipates the needs of its students. Applications from candidates with specific needs or disabilities are welcomed, and applicants are encouraged to contact the School's Disability Contact, Mrs Louise Winter, or the Admissions Tutor, Dr Phil Buckle, at an early stage so that adjustments to the admissions process can be made wherever these are reasonable. Documents to assist the application process can be supplied in different formats as required – please contact the School's Admissions Office. The School can provide information about programme delivery and access to the physical environment relevant to potential applicants with specific needs, either via this framework, or on particular aspects as required. We can arrange informal visits, during which applicants can view accommodation and meet academic and student support staff. All applicants are also most welcome to attend Open Days held at the School.

These measures ensure that the Cardiff School of Physics and Astronomy and the University are able to provide an admissions process that is accessible to all applicants and, thereafter, an accessible curriculum for students with disabilities or specific needs to whom offers are made.

Further information about the University's provision for disabled students is available from its Disability and Dyslexia Service at <http://www.cf.ac.uk/dysl/index.html>.

3.2 Open Days

Applicants who receive a conditional or unconditional offer of admission are welcome to attend one of the School's Open Days. All applicants are invited to notify the School of any disability-related needs that they, or an accompanying visitor, may have so that reasonable adjustments may be put in place.

In addition, where an applicant has disclosed a disability on his or her UCAS or application form, the Disability and Dyslexia Service may invite that applicant to visit the University and meet with a University disability adviser to discuss what arrangements might reasonably be made to ensure that the student will have equal access to the programme of study.

All students have the option of requesting an initial interview, to address any concerns they may have.

3.3 Enrolment and Induction

Students enrol electronically with the University before arrival in Cardiff, and with the Cardiff School of Physics and Astronomy in person during enrolment week at the commencement of each academic session. While every effort is made to minimise queueing for enrolment, we recognise that waiting in queues may be difficult for students with chronic fatigue or pain, and we are able to make alternative arrangements for enrolment where necessary (please contact the School's Disability Contact).

All students are notified of the Disability Coordinator details via the Student Handbook, and invited to contact relevant members of staff if they have any queries or support needs.

Soon after enrolment, all students who have declared a disability on their application form are contacted by e-mail by the University. They are also invited to meet with the Disability Coordinator to discuss their specific needs and the extent to which other staff may be informed of their disability. They are given a copy of the School's Procedures to Support Disabled Students, which is a short document intended to answer only the most pertinent and commonly asked questions about disability arrangements and disclosure in the School.

The Disability Coordinator is based in the School Office, and has the following functions:

- To receive student disclosures of disabilities
- Pass information to appropriate people within the School and in Student Services
- Pass information to Disability Coordinators in other Schools in which a disclosing student may study
- Hold appropriate documentation relating to student disclosures
- Provide students with clear information about the support offered by the School to disabled students, including the limits to that support
- To advise students of where further support may be obtained
- To remind staff in the School of the need to consider accessibility in the design of programmes and assessments, and to encourage staff to receive training as appropriate.

3.4 Delivery of Teaching and Learning

3.4.1 Programme structure

All undergraduate degrees are normally offered as full-time programmes over 3 or 4 years, with an optional 1 year period of Professional Placement, spent away from the University, after the second year. There is also a Preliminary Year available to students whose qualifications are not sufficient to embark immediately on the first year course.

3.4.2 Main methods of teaching

Students are taught through a combination of lectures, tutorials, laboratory sessions, computer-based teaching, projects and private study. The workload does vary from programme to programme and week to week, but a typical programme will have approximately 18 hours of formal teaching per week, with the expectation that at least the same amount of time will also be spent on private study and assignments, amounting to roughly 40 hours per week in total for the teaching weeks of the semester. Classes may be timetabled between 9.00am and 6.00pm.

3.4.3 Attendance requirements

Attendance at most lectures is not compulsory, though full attendance is strongly advised.

Attendance at certain laboratories and tests is compulsory and registers are kept. Occasional absences for good cause, including disability-related reasons, are permitted, as long as the student follows the correct procedure in a timely fashion. Information about the absence procedures of the School are publicised in the Student Handbooks, and these are backed up by the attendance procedures of the Senate Regulations of the University. Lack of engagement or non-attendance may result in deregistration, so it is vital that students keep the School informed of any ill-health or difficulty in attending, as soon as the situation arises.

3.4.4 Lectures

Typically, the duration of lectures is 50 minutes. A 10-minute 'turn-around' period is timetabled between lectures and other formal classes to allow students to move around the building/campus. Due to the very full timetable, it is not possible to modify timetables to allow longer gaps between classes.

The majority of lectures take place in lecture rooms in the Queen's Buildings, the home of the Cardiff School of Physics and Astronomy. However, some Joint Honours students may have lectures scheduled in other buildings, eg the School of Mathematics or the School of Music. In future some large classes may have some lectures in other locations, such as the Students Union. Mobility impaired students would need to travel between these sites by car and there are ample car parking spaces for disabled students at all these venues.

3.4.4.1 Audio-recording of lectures

All students have permission to audio-record lectures as standard, and lecturing staff are made aware of this policy and asked not to draw unnecessary attention to the fact that this might be taking place. Staff will wear a microphone if requested.

However, other methods of recording (e.g. photography, filming) are not permitted as standard. Special permission would need to be sought from the lecturer concerned, and in most cases, another method of capturing the relevant information can be found.

3.4.4.2 Materials to supplement lectures

Lecturers often use Powerpoint slides and/or other visual aids to support presentations and/or supply brief written lecture handouts to students. Some lecturers routinely make slides and handouts available in advance of a lecture in hard copy and/or by posting on Learning Central (the University's electronic virtual learning environment). This practice is not universal, and is a matter of personal preference for the teaching staff concerned. Any student with a disclosed disability who needs teaching-related material in advance and finds that it is not available from the Module Organiser should contact the Disability Coordinator.

3.4.4.3 Examples of reasonable adjustments relating to lectures

This 'large group' form of teaching may present difficulties for students with a range of disabilities, and every effort is made to put in place adjustments to minimise any disadvantage experienced. For example:

- Many lecture theatres are fitted with induction loops
- All large lecture theatres have wheelchair spaces available
- The University's Disability and Dyslexia Service is often able to arrange note-takers to make notes on students' behalf where appropriate
- The Disability and Dyslexia Service is able to arrange a signer/lip speaker to accompany a student where necessary
- Study skills support is available from the Disability and Dyslexia Service (e.g. to develop skills in note-taking)
- Handouts may be provided in alternative formats, e.g. on coloured paper, in large print or electronically
- Where lectures are longer than 1 hour (sometimes up to 3 hours), lecturing staff usually provide short breaks to allow students to visit toilets, eat and drink, stretch, or administer medication, all of which have occasionally been necessary for certain students. Students for whom this may be an issue should contact the lecturer in advance, or speak to the Disability Coordinator about any specific needs.

3.4.5 Academic and Personal Tutorials

Academic Tutorials are held weekly for 1st year undergraduate students, fortnightly in the 2nd year, and weekly in year three to support project work. In addition, individual personal tutorials are held termly throughout the degree. Academic tutorials consist of small groups usually meeting in the office of an academic member of staff. All tutorials take place on the Trevithick site, access details for which are given in Section 4. Audio-recording of tutorials may be permitted, as long as permission is requested of the Tutor and the other members of the tutorial group, whose interests must also be protected in the context of a tutorial session.

3.4.5.1 Examples of reasonable adjustments relating to tutorials

- Library assistance may be provided to help students to access reading materials
- Study skills support is available from the University's Disability and Dyslexia Service (<http://www.cf.ac.uk/dyslx/index.html>)
- As a short-term adjustment, tutors may be requested not to direct questions at a student in class where the School has medical evidence that to do so would place that student under unacceptable stress
- Where groups include a student with hearing impairment, tutors are able to make sure that all members can see each other's faces and that only one person speaks at a time

3.4.6 Physics Laboratories

All students will be timetabled to attend various laboratory sessions throughout years 1 and 2. These will generally be compulsory because they teach skills and impart learning outcomes that are deemed to be essential, by the Institute of Physics, in the education of a physicist.

Some aspects of laboratory design may make lab sessions difficult for some students with mobility problems or sensory impairments; for example, the fixed bench heights and seating may not be appropriate, or the equipment may not be safely operable by a student with a sensory impairment. In all such cases, wherever a suitable adjustment can be found, all efforts will be made to ensure the safe and comfortable participation of a student within the laboratory environment. This will be done with two basic priorities in mind:

- that all students should be able to achieve the learning outcomes for the laboratory session
- that all students and staff should be assured of their health and safety whilst in the laboratory.

It is anticipated that suitable adjustments will almost always be found, and that very rarely would there be an occasion where an individual student would be unable to participate for safety reasons.

3.4.6.1 Examples of reasonable adjustments relating to laboratories

- Where possible, lack of mobility or problems with pain may be mitigated by the provision of more suitable seating, or a work surface of appropriate height.
- Where a student has difficulty in the safe handling of equipment, he/she might be allocated a demonstrator to assist with those aspects of the experiment, or be partnered by another student.
- A student with a sensory impairment might be able to undertake the experiment in a side room, where the background level of noise and distraction is minimised, or with

the assistance of a demonstrator to indicate the occurrence of an alarm or display reading.

- An individual might be allowed extra time to complete the experiment, where the experiment is time-limited.
- An experiment might be video-recorded and made available for playback via Learning Central when required.

3.4.8 Assessment

In general, each module is largely assessed at the end of the final semester in which it is taught – this is the *summative* assessment that results in a module mark. Some modules include a mid-semester timed class test. Some Physics and Astronomy modules also include formative assessments, which are intended to assist a student's understanding and to provide that student and his/her tutors with an indication of progress to date, but which do not contribute directly to the final mark awarded for that module. Methods of formative assessment might include essays, reports, problem sheets, and on-line multiple choice tests.

Adjustments to summative assessment procedures, such as extra time in timed class and on-line tests, are permitted where this has been approved by the University for an individual student. Students may request extra time in assessments by applying via the Disability and Dyslexia Service (<http://www.cf.ac.uk/dyslxl/index.html>), who will make a recommendation to the University Registry. Any allowances apply to all University examinations and class tests.

3.4.8.1 Examples of reasonable adjustments in relation to assessments

It is recognised that the School's standard methods of assessment may place some students with disabilities and/or specific needs at a disadvantage. The University is able to make adjustments to procedures where these do not diminish the academic integrity of the assessment and the need to do so is supported by medical or other evidence.

One specific policy in the Cardiff School of Physics and Astronomy is that marks are not deducted for poor spelling or grammar, as long as the meaning is clear, in any written assessments which are time-limited and where access to such tools as spell-checkers is not possible. This is specifically helpful for students with dyslexia or hearing impairment who are required to sit written examinations or, for example, write up lab books and hand them in at the end of an experiment.

Other examples include:

- Extra time and/or use of a computer may be allowed for timed assessments where an application is supported by medical or other evidence
- Where use of a computer is permitted for timed assessments, specialist support, such as voice recognition software, may be permitted
- Alternative examination venues for students with disabilities or specific needs may be provided
- Provision of an amanuensis where the need is demonstrated
- Examination papers provided in alternative formats
- Examinations held in venues distant from Cardiff
- Extensions to coursework deadlines.

The above reasonable adjustments may also be made available for School-run class tests, when enough notice has been received for the School to make appropriate arrangements. The emphasis will always be on ensuring that an individual is not placed at a disadvantage because of their disability, taking into account the assessment method.

3.4.9 A Year Abroad or Professional Placement Year

Once any specific needs are made known to the School, the ability of proposed host institutions to meet those needs can be ascertained. Students are encouraged to discuss any specific needs with the Director of Undergraduate Studies at the earliest possible stage. The School's aim is to make sure that disabled students have the same range of choices as their peers, but the School may not be in a position to insist that all necessary adjustments are made by its partner institutions, and so early planning is key. If, despite our best efforts, none of the School's partner institutions are able to meet the needs of an individual student, or could not make sufficient guarantees to the School of the student's health and safety, the School may not be able to offer that student a place on a Year Abroad or Professional Placement (the alternative being a full-time programme in Cardiff). It should be emphasised that this has never happened in practice, but it remains a theoretical possibility.

Any problems experienced by students abroad are dealt with by a combination of personal tutors, the Director of Undergraduate Studies and the placement provider (where appropriate).

3.4.10 Individual Projects

All taught programmes in the Cardiff School of Physics and Astronomy include either a major individual project (Yr 3 undergraduate, 20 credits) or a research project (MPhys dissertation stage, 60 credits). Results for these projects have a significant impact on the outcome of the degree (i.e. the classification). It is vital that the School and the student look closely at the choice of project to ensure that all reasonable adjustments are made in good time, so that the student has an equal chance of completing the project successfully. The responsibility in this regard falls jointly upon the student and the project supervisor, to ensure that the requirements of the project are suitable for the student concerned, and will not leave the student at a disadvantage.

3.4.11 Group Projects and Team-Based Activities

Some taught programmes in the School include elements of group work. Results for these group projects have a significant impact on the outcome of the degree, and so full participation in, and accessibility of, these activities are vital. Most group activities involve the allocation of roles within the team, and it will be the responsibility of both the group and the supervisor to ensure that this process is consensual and takes into account the strengths and abilities of all members of the team. Where this process operates correctly, all members of the team are able to make a significant contribution, and to have this contribution recognised. This process is part of the learning experience for all group projects, and is an important learning outcome acknowledged by professional institutions. Each supervisor will ensure that the requirements of the project are suitable for each student concerned, and will not leave any individual student at an unreasonable disadvantage, either by reason of a disability or any other factor.

4 PHYSICAL ESTATE

4.1 University estate

The University's estate is made up of buildings that have been built and acquired over the last 125 years. Bringing them up to modern standards is not always possible, but all areas have disability aids that comply with part M of the Building Regulations and BS5588-8:1999 as far as is reasonably possible. Compliance with regulations can never be the answer to all accessibility issues, as each person is unique and may require differing solutions. Anyone with particular accessibility needs who is planning to visit us as a casual day visitor or to study at Cardiff should give us as much notice as possible. The day visitor will have ad-hoc arrangements made by staff to best suit their needs. Full time students will have reasonable adaptations made by our Estates department, after consultation with student support services and medical professionals, to suit their individual needs where appropriate.

4.2 Access to the Cardiff School of Physics and Astronomy

All of the areas used for delivering our taught programmes are located in the Queen's Buildings, except for joint honours students who will have to attend the School of Music (joint honours scheme UCAS code FG31) and the School of Mathematics (FW33).

The Queen's complex is made up of seven buildings (North, Central, South, East, West, West Extension and Trevithick), all of which can be accessed by wheelchair users, although not always by the main entrance. For example, there is no ramp access from Newport Road into the South Building because it is not possible to build a suitable ramp on the narrow pavement at that location. Instead there are several suitable points of access to the rear of the building. Level access routes around the campus are detailed on the Estates webpages at: www.cardiff.ac.uk/estat/accessibilityinformation/cathayscampus/index.html

All of the key areas requiring access by students can be accessed by wheelchair users via ramps, lifts, and purpose-built chair-lifts. These include lecture rooms (including the two lecture rooms outside the Queen's Buildings), computer rooms, laboratories, refectory, library, the Teaching Office, Registry, Research Office and Admissions Office. Disabled toilets are located around the buildings. In case of fire, refuge areas are clearly located on stairwells. Individual evacuation plans can be developed, which allow for horizontal evacuations into other buildings.

There is an Estates Access Consultation Group run by Estates, and members include academic and support staff and students with different types of disabilities. The aim of the group is to establish accessibility guidelines for improving access in existing buildings and for designs of new buildings and major refurbishments – more information is available at www.cardiff.ac.uk/estat/accessibilityinformation/estatesaccessconsultationgroup/estatesaccessconsultationgroup.html

4.3 Lecture Theatres

Most of the Queen's Buildings lecture theatres are fitted with induction loops, although students with impaired hearing are advised to contact Estates to determine whether the system is compatible with their equipment.

The larger lecture theatres have space reserved for wheelchairs, and adjustable height desks are available for use.

4.4 Trevithick Library

This is housed on the first floor of the Trevithick Building and is accessible by lift. Within the library computer workstations of different heights are available, with a variety of seating and lighting throughout the rest of the library. This newly refurbished area is a flagship library within the University. The staff are members of the Information Services team, and can give access to certain key resources such as specialist software and hardware for loan.

4.5 Parking on campus

Disabled parking passes are available for students with mobility difficulties. These may be issued for a single car park or multiple venues according to a student's needs.

5 STUDENT SUPPORT

5.1 Induction for new students: all programmes

The School runs induction events for incoming students to its undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. During the course of induction, students are given introductory

lectures on health and safety procedures, and IT services provided by the University and School. Students have the opportunity to raise any specific needs either directly at the time, or through contacting the Disability Coordinator (Mrs Louise Winter) or the academic member of staff with special responsibility for students with disabilities, the Chair of the Equality and Diversity Committee (Dr Annabel Cartwright).

5.2 Personal tutors

All undergraduate students are assigned a personal tutor who is normally a member of the academic staff of the School. Personal tutors advise on academic and personal matters in a confidential and informal manner. They monitor academic progress and supply references in support of applications for jobs or further study. Personal tutorials take place on a one-to-one basis, once per term. Meetings with their personal tutor provide students with an opportunity to raise any points of concern, and possibly discuss the level of disclosure of disability that the student would prefer, or make an appointment to do so.

Academic tutorials take place in groups of 4 or 5. The Academic Tutor (not always the same individual as the personal tutor) will not raise any sensitive issues within the tutor group, unless the student wishes to do so, but will allow private consultations to take place, possibly with the Disability Coordinator if preferred.

5.3 The Disability Coordinator

A member of academic staff is appointed to the role of Disability Coordinator in the Cardiff School of Physics and Astronomy. Currently this staff member is Dr Bernard Richardson, and his role is to provide advice on learning and teaching to students with disabilities or health problems. Unlike the role of the Disability Contact, which is largely procedural and administrative, the Disability Coordinator considers issues from the perspective of a professional physicist, and with an understanding of the learning and teaching issues that might arise for a physicist undergoing training. Appointments should be made with the Disability Coordinator to discuss any concerns related to the curriculum, learning, teaching and assessment.

6 DISCLOSURE OF DISABILITY

Applicants are encouraged to disclose any disabilities or specific needs they may have on their application forms, to enable the University and School to make reasonable adjustments to the applications/admissions process where necessary and to their studies once enrolled at the University. Such disclosures play no part in the decision as to whether or not to offer that applicant a place at Cardiff.

Once at Cardiff, students who have not made a disclosure on their application form are encouraged to do so either formally or informally to members of the academic or support staff. The University asks students to complete a disclosure form to ensure that the University is made aware of their needs, and so that the student can indicate the level of confidentiality they require. Staff to whom such disclosures are made may access the disclosure form electronically at <http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/dyslx/infoforstaff/disclose/index.html> or refer the student to the School Disability Contact who will complete the form with the student, hold a paper copy on file and return a copy to the Disability and Dyslexia Service. These forms do not form part of the student's academic file, and are disposed of securely in accordance with the University's Record Retention policies.

Confidentiality: any information about disability or specific needs will be held in confidence and will only be disclosed with the student's consent unless, in very rare circumstances, disclosure is necessary for reasons of health and safety.

7 PROCEDURES FOR STAFF

Staff should strongly advise students who make an initial disclosure of disability to make an appointment to see the School Disability Coordinator, and to contact the Disability and Dyslexia Service. Staff will only pass information on with the specific permission of the student. A student may also decide to withdraw their disclosure, which will be respected by the School, although the student must be made aware that the University/School cannot make any specific adjustments unless a disclosure is in place.

For the purposes of fulfilling the particular needs of a student, further staff may be informed on a “need-to-know” basis in order to fulfil the request made. For example, staff responsible for providing a special chair to laboratories will need to liaise directly with the student in order to ensure the correct equipment is provided to the right places at the right times. A list of examples of such actions is given in the School’s *Procedures to Support Students with Disabilities* document.

8 TRAINING FOR STAFF

Staff new to teaching are required to complete the Postgraduate Certificate in University Teaching and Learning (PCUTL), which includes training on creating and delivering an inclusive curriculum. In addition, the University’s staff induction programme covers issues of equality and diversity. The School runs its own induction programme for new members of staff to introduce them to its practices, policies and procedures, which include all aspects of equality and diversity.

The University’s extensive Staff Development Programme offers courses to current members of staff on many aspects of teaching, learning and assessment which offer opportunities to discuss and expand staff understanding of the inclusive curriculum.

9 COMMITTEE RESPONSIBILITIES

The terms of reference of all the major School committees include reference to equality, dignity and diversity issues. All committee agendas include a standing item to check that any such issues have been identified and dealt with, but more importantly, there is a responsibility upon committee members that all agenda items include a consideration of equality and diversity issues, as a key aspect of decision-making.

The Equality and Diversity Committee takes a lead role in highlighting and considering these issues generally and bringing them to the attention of the School Board and other committees, in particular the Teaching Executive Committee.

10 IMPORTANT CONTACTS

Disability and Dyslexia Service: 50 Park Place, Tel. 029 20874528.

School Disability Contact: Mrs Louise Winter, School Office (N1.04),
Tel. 029 20876468.

School Disability Coordinator (Academic): Dr Bernard Richardson, N1.24, Tel. 029 20876710.

Director of Learning and Teaching: Dr Carole Tucker, N1.15, Tel. 029 20874144.

Equality and Diversity Committee: Dr Annabel Cartwright, WX1.10, Tel. 029 20874857.