

Disability Services – *Quick Guide to:*

Evidence of a disability

Why do students need evidence?

To implement individual reasonable adjustments, the University requires the students to produce supporting evidence of a disability. Additionally, if a student wishes to apply for Disabled Students' Allowances (DSAs) to fund any study support they may require, they will need evidence to support their application.

Who can produce evidence?

Possible sources of evidence include:

- A letter or report from a GP/ consultant, psychiatrist, or other health professional
- A diagnostic report from an educational psychologist or specialist teacher
- A DSAs academic needs assessment

What might evidence tell me?

Supporting evidence can vary substantially depending on who wrote it, when it was written and why. Health professionals commonly only state a diagnosis and symptoms, whereas a DSAs academic needs assessment will make specific recommendations for reasonable adjustments to teaching and assessment

Does the evidence need to state or explicitly justify a reasonable adjustment?

Educational psychologists and DSAs needs assessments typically make specific recommendations and justifications for reasonable adjustments, however these may:

- Be written with different educational context (e.g., a different university or course of study) in mind
- Not refer to the University's own regulations or competency standards

Health professionals will not routinely suggest specific adjustments unless prompted. Or, they may suggest adjustments which are not possible or practical to implement.

Thus, it is often necessary to use good judgement (rather than relying on statements in the evidence alone) to decide what may be an appropriate reasonable adjustment in response to a particular student's disability in the context of their particular course of study at this university.

What if I am not sure about the sufficiency of the evidence a student has shown me? What if the student does not have any supporting evidence?

Please signpost the student to Disability Services, who will be able to look at any evidence they hold or discuss how to obtain new evidence.

What if you believe a student does have a disability but they do not have any evidence?

There may be occasions when a student has a long-standing disability but has not needed to provide evidence of this as an adult. For example, a student might have a diagnosis of Asperger syndrome – but the diagnosis may have been made when the student was very young. This may also be the case for students with sensory loss or some physical disabilities where ongoing contact with health services has not been needed. In these cases, the student may not have evidence to hand and may also not know how to provide evidence quickly (or be able to provide evidence quickly). This could result in delay in providing evidence where the student has clear support or access needs.

In such cases, Faculties/ Schools are advised not to delay offering support but to discuss interim support with the student. Disability Services can provide further advice and guidance – both to Faculties/ Schools and to students who may need support to provide appropriate evidence of a disability. This can take place before a DSS is produced for the student. *For fuller guidance on providing interim support in advance of a DSS, see section 2.3 of the full DSS guidance: <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/disability-services/staff-professionals/school-disability/supportsummaryguidance.pdf>*

Evidence for alternative examination arrangements (AEAs)

The University has specific requirements regarding evidence for alternative examination arrangements. *For further information, please see guidelines for staff: <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/exams/alternative>*

For further advice and guidance regarding evidence of a disability, or to discuss any aspect of study support for students with disabilities, please contact Disability Services and ask to speak to a Disability Adviser.

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bristol.ac.uk/disability-services/staff-professionals/guidance