

Accessible and Inclusive Learning Policy



THE UNIVERSITY
of EDINBURGH

Purpose of Policy

The purpose of this Policy is the provision of accessible and inclusive teaching and assessment to all students¹, through consideration of their different requirements in the design, approval, delivery and review of programmes, courses and assessment.

Overview

This Policy contains principles for improving accessibility and inclusivity of teaching and assessment at the University. It provides some detailed baseline requirements, including mainstreaming some adjustments recommended for disabled students whose universal adoption benefits all students.

Scope: Mandatory Policy

This Policy applies in respect of all students of the University and to all staff and external guest teachers who teach, assess or support students. Unless there is a justified pedagogic reason for not doing so, it applies to all teaching and assessment within all programmes and courses. A justified pedagogic reason must be made clear to students in advance in the [Degree Regulations and Programmes of Studies](#) or another School-specified standard location for publishing essential information about each programme or course.

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Document control

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Approving authority	Senate Learning and Teaching Committee
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Consultation undertaken	The original policy was developed from work of a Task Group of the Quality Assurance Committee, at the request of the Learning and Teaching Committee. The Student Disability Service, Edinburgh University Students' Association and the Assistant Principal Academic Standards and Quality Assurance led the consultation.
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Section responsible for policy maintenance & review	Disability and Learning Support Services
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Related policies, procedures, guidelines & regulations	Estates Accessibility Policy , Estates Accessibility Policy Guidance , IAD Guidance on mainstreaming , Lecture Recording Policy , Virtual Classroom Policy , Assessment and Feedback Principles and Priorities
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UK Quality Code	QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education Chapters B1 and B4
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Policies superseded by this policy	The Policy was reviewed in May 2016 (no changes were made). Additions and amendments were made in May 2023.
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Alternative format	If you require this document in an alternative format please email Academic.Services@ed.ac.uk or telephone 0131 651 4490.
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Introduction

Under legislation including the [Equality Act 2010](#) the University has a legal duty as an education provider to take positive steps to ensure that students with protected characteristics can fully and equitably participate in the education and enjoy the other benefits, facilities and services which it provides for students. The University meantime aims to foster a welcoming community, where its students feel proud to be part of the University. The University community has a responsibility to:

- (a) Recognise and anticipate the barriers to equitable participation in teaching, learning and assessment for each student,
- (b) Recognise that in many cases we can design, remove, reduce or overcome these barriers through or by making changes, and
- (c) Recognise and anticipate that it must address situations where a barrier may be insurmountable, whether in whole or in part or for the time being, and still maintain the student's opportunity to participate.

This policy addresses accessibility and inclusion for teaching, learning and assessment. It covers every context, including field trips, study abroad, digital classes and student research. It operates in tandem with the [Estates Accessibility Policy](#) and [Estates Accessibility Policy Guidance](#), the accessibility principles in the Digital Strategy, and the [Assessment and Feedback Principles and Priorities](#) that cover universal design and upgrade of the physical and digital estate to comply with relevant legislation and regulation and to promote accessibility and belonging.

Definitions

- **Universal design** is 'design that's usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design.'¹ Universal design for learning comes from the systematic consideration of the effects of teaching, learning and assessment practice and policy at the each of the planning, implementation and evaluation stages to ensure that teaching and learning is accessible to all students.
- **Reasonable adjustments** are specific types of additional academic support that are mandated for individual disabled students by the Disability and Learning Support Service.
- **Mainstreaming** means applying a specific adjustment universally to benefit students generally.
- An **Equality Impact Assessment** is a method for carrying out the statutory duty to assess the impact of applying the University's policies and practices to people with protected characteristics. The **protected characteristics** are age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; sexual orientation².

Principles for accessible and inclusive learning

The University shall in the first instance seek to anticipate barriers to student participation and address these by designing programmes, courses and facilities and designing or procuring services and resources that are accessible to all. It recognises that this will not always be possible and that

¹ Attributed to [Ron Mace](#).

² These are defined in [Chapter 1 of Part 2 of the Equality Act 2010](#).

specific adjustments may then have to be made to remove remaining barriers for individual students.

- A. **Those creating or delivering Programmes, Courses or teaching materials shall apply the principles of universal design for learning and adhere to recognised standards for accessibility and inclusion.** They shall design Courses and Programmes to be accessible to all students, avoiding any unnecessary barriers to students with protected characteristics.³
- B. **Course and Programme Organisers shall offer opportunities for students with protected characteristics to contribute** to Programme and Course design and review.
- C. Course and Programme Organisers shall assess the **equality impact** of new or updated Courses and Programmes, including postgraduate research programmes, and Schools shall critically review these assessments as part of the approval process.³
- D. **Reasonable adjustments** will be made where design cannot eliminate a barrier to student participation. Colleagues should bear in mind that an individual adjustment may lead to perceived or actual stigma. It is recognised that some barriers cannot be anticipated before students are accepted onto a course or programme.
- E. Where a reasonable adjustment is made for a disabled student, it will often be appropriate to consider whether this can be **mainstreamed** for the benefit of all students.
- F. The knowledge and skills required for making teaching and assessment accessible to all students and learners are considered a standard part of normal academic and professional practice. The University shall make **training and guidance** available for all staff, so that they can be confident that they understand and can engage with issues of accessibility.³
- G. Schools shall **monitor** accessibility and inclusion of their teaching, learning and assessment through appropriate methods including systematic audit.

Detailed baseline standards

The following seek to increase accessibility of learning and teaching for all students.

1. Course outlines and reading lists shall be made available at least **four weeks** before the start of the course.
 - 1.1. This means providing an outline of the course in terms of the indicative content, nature of assessments and indicative reading. This information is likely to be communicated in course handbooks and reading lists. The provision of this information will facilitate course choices, where available, and provide students with an early opportunity to engage with the course requirements and familiarise themselves with the subject and learning material. Reading lists at this stage may focus on the core texts only, where core texts are used.
 - 1.2. It should be stressed that the requirement is for an outline and that further course details can be provided nearer to or at the start of the course. Additional reading may also be provided nearer to the start date of the course.
 - 1.3. In some subjects, the compilation of a resources list may be central to the assessment task and it may therefore not be appropriate to provide a set resources list. Where this is the case, it shall be signalled clearly to students.

³ The University recognises that a transition may be required to implement these principles fully. It will seek to implement them over the lifetime of this revision of the Policy (2023-2026) with or as part of its Curriculum Transformation project.

2. Reading lists shall indicate priority and/or relevance.
 - 2.1. The key purpose is to help students prioritise their own reading.
 - 2.2. Where resources lists are provided to students, these should clearly indicate those readings that are key to the course or particularly relevant to a session or theme within the course. It is not necessary for the whole reading list to be ordered. Neither is it expected that students should read only from the reading list provided; they will be expected, through their own research, to identify further readings.
 - 2.3. Materials indicated on reading lists shall be accessible and available in alternative formats. Course teams shall seek advice from Library colleagues where necessary, for example where there are pedagogical reasons for using materials not available in multiple formats.

3. Lecture outlines or presentation slides for lectures and seminars shall be made available to students at least **24 hours** in advance of the class for all students to access as required.
 - 3.1. The key purpose is to inform students of what they will be taught so that they can prepare in advance in their own time.
 - 3.2. Teaching staff will not be expected to produce presentation slides if these are not normally used. In such cases, an outline of the lecture will be required that may take the form of a bullet-pointed list of the key themes and content of the class: it is not required that detailed notes are provided.
 - 3.3. Where lecture outlines or presentation slides cannot be provided through the VLE, students must be informed how to access the materials.
 - 3.4. Lecture outlines or presentation slides for lectures and seminars shall be designed with accessibility in mind using accessibility settings, appropriate sizes, fonts, ALT text, hyperlinks and adjustable sizing.
 - 3.5. Judgement will need to be exercised in such cases where confidential or 'spoiler' information is contained within materials so as not to compromise confidentiality or impinge on the pedagogical experience. In such cases students should be informed of the presence of such information and may be provided with only a partial set of slides in advance of the class; with the full materials to be made available following the class.

4. Key technical words, terms or formulae used in a class shall be provided to students at least **24 hours** in advance of the class that they are being used in.
 - 4.1. The key purpose is to facilitate students' participation by ensuring that they fully understand terms and formulae used in the class.
 - 4.2. Where technical words, terms or formulae cannot be provided through the VLE, students must be informed of how to access the materials.
 - 4.3. In many cases technical words and formulae are likely to be embedded in the presentation slides and are likely to be covered by the provision of lecture outlines or slides detailed in point 3 above⁴. In other cases it may be necessary to produce a supplementary hand-out for students.
 - 4.4. The use of technical words, terms or formulae may not be relevant to all subjects and judgement needs to be exercised.

⁴ Providing a glossary slide with technical terms at the start of a presentation is also likely to help students interpret imperfect automated captions on a recording of the class.

- 4.5. In the same way, where maps, complex graphs or detailed images are used in a class, it will normally be appropriate to provide these to students **24 hours** in advance of the class.
5. Students shall be notified by email announcement of changes to any teaching arrangements, for example changes to courses, room changes or class cancellations.
- 5.1. The key purpose is to ensure students do not miss essential information and have sufficient time to respond to changes.
- 5.2. Students should be notified of changes to courses or classes as soon as possible.
- 5.3. The official form of communication is the University email system and this should be the primary method of communication. This may be supplemented by other forms of communication as available and appropriate, bearing in mind the proportion of students that may be reached by these.
6. A student shall be permitted to make audio recording of their lectures, tutorials and supervision sessions using their own equipment for the sole purpose of their own personal learning.
- 6.1. The University records taught Course lectures and other teaching in accordance with the [Lecture Recording Policy](#) and the [Virtual Classroom Policy](#). Where the University intends to record a session, the student may still make an audio recording but shall delete this once the University has provided them with a recording that meets the purpose of the student's own personal learning.
- 6.2. The student recording may only be used by the individual student for the purpose of their personal study. It shall be a disciplinary offence to use the recording for any other purpose, including sharing or distributing it.
- 6.3. Video recording and photography shall not be permitted without the explicit permission of the member of staff involved.
- 6.4. The University, the lecturer and any student recorded making a contribution to the class will retain their intellectual property rights in the recording.
- 6.5. The recording must be done in an unobtrusive manner by the student using their own equipment.
- 6.6. The recording must be destroyed once its purpose has been met. This will always be before the student leaves the University and shall normally be by the end of the assessment diet to which the course relates.
- 6.7. Teaching staff have the right to insist that recording stops in certain circumstances. An example might be to protect confidentiality where sensitive or personal information is being discussed.
- 6.8. Students agree to these terms and conditions as part of the contract between the University and its students and assent to it on matriculation.
7. All teaching staff shall ensure that microphones are worn and used in all lectures **regardless of the perceived need to wear them**.
- 7.1. The key purposes are to reduce the effort involved in concentrating in the class for all students, not only students with a hearing impairment, and help improve their attention; and **to avoid making students identify publicly that they have a hearing impairment**.
- 7.2. Where radio microphones are made available in teaching rooms these must be worn and used by all teaching staff, including external guest presenters, regardless of the perceived need to wear them. Table-top microphones are not always sufficient on their own.

7.3. Maintenance of the microphones is everyone's responsibility and teaching staff should report promptly any faults that they encounter to the IS Helpline (for central rooms) or to the relevant School support team (for rooms operated by Schools; if in doubt, contact IS Helpline).

8. Teaching staff and examiners shall ensure their materials such as slides, lecture outlines, examinations and other electronic documents are accessible.

8.1. The key purpose is to ensure as many students as possible can utilise these materials in their learning or assessment without the need for further adaption or support.

8.2. Students use multiple methods to interact with their digital teaching materials, including through screen readers, through a range of devices and different screen sizes, and with variable bandwidth. Staff should familiarise themselves with the range of likely methods and variations.

8.3. It is a legal requirement that staff shall make their digital materials⁵ accessible. This will involve taking the following measures, although it is recognised that this list is in no way exhaustive.

- a. Ensure that filenames, folders and hyperlinked text provide an explanation of the linked material when read out of context by, for example, a digital screen reader.
- b. Provide titles and headings within documents, images, graphs and tables, using template heading styles where available.
- c. Use text and background colours that contrast well.
- d. Avoid overlaying text on textured backgrounds.
- e. Avoid fully-justified text, as this has uneven spaces between words or characters.
- f. Use a plain font of sufficient size, and avoid *italic* or CAPITALISED text.
- g. Avoid using colour alone to communicate information within text, images or diagrams.
- h. Provide alternative text explanations on non-decorative images and diagrams. If the image is a hyperlink then the alternative text shall also include the link information.
- i. Avoid flashing or moving text or images, and give the user complete control over any scrolling text.
- j. Make audio and video resources more accessible to blind, deaf and Deaf students, for instance using audio description, captions, or a transcript.
- k. Provide a statement indicating how to obtain the resource in an alternative format.

8.4. Standard applications for preparing digital materials often include an accessibility checker that can assist the authors by highlighting some of the common issues.

8.5. Training and guidance shall be available to support accessible use of standard and popular tools and formats in teaching and learning and to support provision of non-digital materials in accessible formats.

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⁵ [Further information on creating accessible digital resources](#) is available from Information Services.