

Overview - Visual impairment

Students with visual impairment experience varying degrees of sight loss due to a wide range of conditions. This link from RNIB explains them more fully: <http://www.nib.org.uk/eye-health/eye-conditions>. People may be either “sight impaired” (also referred to as partially sighted) or “severely sight impaired” (also referred to as blind). Many will have some useful vision.

The type of support required will vary according to the degree and nature of the students’ visual impairment. The best way to address this is to discuss directly with the student his/her individual requirements in a discreet manner.

Students with visual impairment may experience the following issues:

- Difficulty locating and accessing texts, resulting in taking longer to carry out reading and research.
- Finding skim reading difficult or impossible.
- Difficulty understanding diagrams and new vocabulary without additional clarification.
- Sensitivity to light or screen glare.
- Problems with independently editing and proof reading work as well as meeting formatting criteria and referencing.
- Taking accurate notes in lectures and accessing them afterwards.
- Difficulty navigating around campus and finding rooms and lecture theatres.
- Problems locating and recognising people, especially in crowds.
- Missing out on information on notice boards.
- Elevated levels of stress.
- Difficulties with face to face communication if they are unable to read facial expressions or body language.
- Identifying who is speaking in group discussions.
- Social isolation.



Top tips for academic staff:

- Have conversations with the student about their strategies, preferences and challenges so you know how best to support them.
- Provide core reading lists well in advance to enable the student to access texts according to their preferred means, e.g. electronic text reader, large print, audio recording or Braille.
- Be flexible with deadlines to allow extra reading time.
- Provide lecture notes or handouts in advance to allow these to be transcribed to the student's preferred medium.
- Design electronic documents so they are easily accessible to text readers; check that any PDF files consist of editable text rather than scanned images.
- Be aware that the Learning Space/ELE may not be suitable for screen reading technology.
- Allow the student to record lectures.
- Use a large font (24pt+) and avoid overcrowded slides.
- Allow extra time to absorb what is on the screen.
- Convey orally what is shown in charts and diagrams.
- If you plan to show videos, offer the option of seeing them beforehand, sitting very close to the screen or having someone explain them.
- Be sensitive about seating in crowded lecture theatres.
- Agree with the student how you will communicate last-minute room changes, messages and assignment feedback (e.g. by email, verbally or phone) as hand written comments and notices will not be accessible.
- Talk through the possible options and solutions for field trips and placements with the student well in advance to avoid problems.

Useful links

- <http://www2.le.ac.uk/offices/accessability/staff/supporting-students-with-disabilities/information-for-staff-teaching-blind-and-visually-impaired-students>
- <https://www.mib.org.uk/young-people/negotiating-support-university>
- <https://www.mib.org.uk/young-people-starting-university/life-at-university>

