

Good Practice Guide: Inclusive Teaching for Students and Staff with Diverse and Complex Needs



Why make teaching more inclusive, why make reasonable adjustments?

- Training the next generation of production professionals and performers is a shared enterprise within each school, collectively across the schools, and as part of the wider arts environment. To succeed in this aim, and to effectively teach the leaders of the future, we know that adopting and refining inclusive practice is key.
- Arts Council England note that “Leaders need to think differently about developing and retaining talent, particularly in order to enable organisations to become more inclusive and to adapt to changing demographics in an increasingly intergenerational workforce... These challenges require innovative, brave and resilient leaders, who work collaboratively and can begin to change organisational cultures to create a new paradigm of leadership”¹.
- The Higher Education Academy (HEA) definition of inclusion is a helpful one: “Inclusive learning and teaching recognises all student’s entitlement to a learning experience that respects diversity, enables participation, removes barriers and anticipates and considers a variety of learning needs and preferences.”
- Key to an inclusive approach is that a one size fits all mindset is unlikely to succeed with the diverse range of learners and teachers within our Schools. Taking an innovative and differentiated approach is likely to achieve inclusion and underpin student and staff success.

What are Diverse and Complex Needs

Students and staff many live with or experience certain conditions which affect their work or study. As a result of this, they may require additional support or reasonable adjustments to enable them to engage fully with study and work.

While there are many conditions, experiences and events that may be defined as a Diverse/Complex Need, this guide will focus on the following:

- The Autistic Spectrum;²
- Mental Health Difficulties including Eating Disorders;
- Physical and Mobility Difficulties;
- Specific Learning Differences/Difficulties (SpLDs).

Please see below for definitions of these and how they may affect a person’s study or work.

FOR EXAMPLES OF REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS AND INCLUSIVE TEACHING SEE THE END OF THIS DOCUMENT

¹ Changing Cultures: Transforming Leadership in the Arts, Museums and Libraries, Kings College London, Arts Council England, (August 2018)

² Research conducted by the National Autistic Society (NAS), the Royal College of GPs and the UCL Institute of Education found that UK autism community members, including autistic people, parents and their broader support network, found that the most highly endorsed terms for describing autism are ‘autistic’ and ‘on the autism spectrum’. Cf. Lorcan Kenny et al. ‘Which terms should be used to describe autism? Perspectives from the UK autism Community’ *Autism*, vol, 20, issue 4 (May 2016), Accessible at <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361315588200>

The Autistic Spectrum

Autism is a lifelong developmental condition that affects how a person communicates with and relates to other people and the world around them.

Autism is a spectrum condition which means that it affects different people in different ways. If you have met one autistic person, you have met one autistic person.

A substantial proportion of autistic people are of average or advanced intellectual abilities and academically competent, although some have an additional learning disability. Autism can lead to ways of thinking and behaving that appear unnecessarily rigid or repetitive, difficulties in understanding social interactions, and difficulties in concentrating and processing information in typical ways.

On the other hand, many autistic people have specific strengths such as an ability to maintain intense focus, adopt unconventional angles in problem solving, or spot errors that others may overlook. The strengths of autistic people as professionals in certain fields are increasingly recognised.

Impact on Study of Autistic Spectrum Conditions

- Autistic students and staff have often developed very good coping strategies but transition to study or work in our Schools is likely to pose particular challenges. These may include struggling to make friends, to relate to others, or express and regulate emotions;
- Autistic students and staff may occasionally find it hard to communicate ideas effectively or know when/how to assert their opinion or ask questions during workshops, classes and groups. This can lead to frequent interruptions, talking over others, or silence;
- Autistic students and staff may have difficulty with the use of metaphor, simile and sarcasm, and may interpret communication literally;
- Autistic people are likely to also have a co-occurring SpLD.

Who can I discuss student issues relating to the Autism Spectrum with and what resources are available to me?

A list of student related policies and procedures with school specific contacts can be found at :
<http://www.cdd.ac.uk/policies/student-related-policies/>

Further sources of information include:

- The National Autistic Society provides information and advice for autistic people, their friends and families: <https://www.autism.org.uk/>
- Autism&Uni project provides Best Practice Guides for academics and support staff. They contain background information and tips for adapting one's professional practice: <http://www.autism-uni.org/bestpractice/>

Mental Health Difficulties

'Mental health difficulty' is a broad term used to describe a continuum between 'relatively mild anxieties and frustration associated with everyday life, and severe problems affecting mood and the ability to think and communicate rationally'.³

It is increasingly common to experience 'mental health difficulties' which may be long-term (have lasted or likely to last for a year or more) and may fluctuate.

Many people get better without formal/medical intervention, but for some individuals the problems become longer lasting and pervasive. The diagnoses likely to be considered as a 'mental health difficulty' include anxiety, depression, bipolar affective disorder (formerly manic depression), schizophrenia, self-harming and eating disorders:

"A small number of people experience eating disorders, including those with Anorexia Nervosa. Such a condition is associated with high mortality rates These students often minimise their problems or deny having an eating disorder and instead focus solely on their studies. They may continue to perform academically but at huge expense to their physical and psychological wellbeing."⁴

Students with Bulimia and Eating Disorders Not Otherwise Specified (EDNOS) may also experience significant physical and psychological impacts.

The Conservatoire [Support Through Studies Policy](#) intends to encourage a holistic approach to student support that can be tailored to the individual student's needs. The policy is designed to provide a framework within which a school can hold a dialogue with a student and agree, as far as possible, on what the School might reasonably expect of the student and what the student might reasonably expect of the school. The policy is formed of informal frontline resolution procedures such as Learning Agreements and Reasonable Adjustments and three formal stages. When the Support Through Studies policy is being used, even informally, the student should always be made aware of this.

If other support and intervention is not effective the Support Through Studies policy also permits registration to be suspended in some circumstances. This may be because of a very low BMI, which is known to impair a student's cognitive functioning and ability to study effectively. If BMI is very low, a student's physical and psychological health can be permanently damaged hence the need to ensure focus on recovery and not study. The Schools must consider safety in different settings (e.g. in studios) and the impact on other students and staff (such as serious stress and anxiety).

Impact on Study of Mental Health Difficulties

- Difficulty with notetaking during classes and working under timed conditions due to difficulties with focus, concentration, and/or memory;
- Challenges with starting academic work or being able to stop and move on to the next task because of problems with avoidance, time management, procrastination, motivation, perfectionism;
- Making decisions or communicating ideas clearly (verbally or in writing) – particularly around stressful points in the academic year (performance and assessment deadlines);
- Group work/discussion due to strained interpersonal dynamics or appearing withdrawn;
- Sensitivity to perceived criticism might make it difficult to receive or utilise constructive feedback.

Who can I discuss student issues relating to Mental Health Difficulties with and what resources are available to me?

The following information is provided to assist staff with best supporting students:

- Confidentiality is important to young people;
- It is important for staff to talk about what you can and cannot keep confidential;
- Staff should not make promises of confidentiality that they can't keep;
- Staff should work on a need-to-know basis and refer students to dedicated student support staff as necessary;
- Staff should involve parents where appropriate. The Support Through Studies policy has guidance on managing confidentiality and information for students who are under 18 (see Appendix 2 to the policy).

A list of Conservatoire-wide student-related policies and procedures with school specific contacts can be found at : <http://www.cdd.ac.uk/policies/student-related-policies/>

Reasonable adjustments, along with any other agreed arrangements, should be managed under the Conservatoire's [Support Through Studies Policy and Procedures](#). You should ensure that you know who your Support Through Studies School Coordinator is, to ensure that support for the student is fully coordinated across all relevant areas of the School and the student's programme, and that academic and pastoral support are properly integrated.

Further sources of information include:

- BEAT resources <https://www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk/>
- Centre for Clinical Interventions Disordered Eating Resource: <https://www.cci.health.wa.gov.au/resources/looking-after-yourself/disordered-eating>
- Mind: Mental Health Resources: <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/>
- Mind: Student Life Mental Health Support: <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/student-life/#.XPUiMsBKjIU>
- National Eating Disorders Association (NEDA): <https://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/help-support>
- NHS Self Help Resources: <https://web.nth.nhs.uk/selfhelp/>
- Self-Harm and Suicide Prevention: Young People Who Self-Harm: A Guide For School Staff (developed by Oxford University Researchers): https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/docs/default-source/improving-care/nccmh/suicide-prevention/young-people-who-self-harm-a-guide-for-school-staff.pdf?sfvrsn=e6ebf7ca_2
- Student Minds (UK mental health charity for students): <https://www.studentminds.org.uk/>
- Universities UK Student Mental Wellbeing in Higher Education Good Practice Guide: <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Pages/student-mental-wellbeing-in-higher-education.aspx>
- Universities UK Step Change Agenda: <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/stepchange>
- Togetherall: All Conservatoire for Dance and Drama student have access to Togetherall, a 24/7 anonymous online community and professional support resource with trained counsellors: <https://togetherall.com/en-gb/>.

³ (IRISS Project, Students and Mental Health Resource Pack, Rethink/NUS, 1995).

⁴ The Higher Education Occupational Health Physicians/Practitioners (HEOPS)

But what about staff mental health and wellbeing?

It is vital that School staff look after their own emotional wellbeing, as this will ensure they have the capacity to support young people who are experiencing emotional and mental health difficulties.⁵

The following actions may help staff members to maintain their own wellbeing and mental health when you are supporting students with challenging circumstances:

1. Talk

Arrange for a debrief as soon as possible with another member of staff – ensure that you talk to your line manager, or to an appropriate designated person within your school (e.g. an HR manager), to ensure that confidentiality is maintained as appropriate. Student Support staff should not necessarily be your first port of call for this action, as this is about maintaining your own wellbeing, not that of the student. It is helpful if the debrief includes questions such as “How did you feel at the time?” and “How do you feel now?”

Acknowledging your emotional state after supporting a student can help you to process the information you have received.

2. Look after yourself

Make time for you. Have a bath, go for a walk, and make sure you engage in activities that you enjoy. This will help to put some balance back in your life.

3. Seek specialist support if you feel it will help

Ask to speak to a healthcare professional. This is not a sign of weakness but a sensible step towards coping with stress. It is more common than you think. All Conservatoire staff also have access to the Togetherall online community. This is completely anonymous, available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and staffed by professional counsellors. Togetherall provides a safe space online to get things off your chest, explore your feelings, get creative and learn how to self-manage your mental health and wellbeing.

To access, simply go to <https://togetherall.com/en-gb/> and sign-up under ‘organisation’ with your School email address.

⁵ <https://www.teachwire.net/news/how-to-spot-signs-of-self-harm-in-students>

Physical & Mobility Difficulties

Students or staff with physical impairments may have difficulties with mobility, manual dexterity and speech.

Some students or staff might use a wheelchair all or some of the time and might need support with personal care and assistance navigating between teaching, learning and other spaces.

Some physical impairments are fluctuating whilst others remain constant significantly impacting on people's ability to access study venues, materials and opportunities.

It is important to talk to the person about what is most optimal for them but the consistency of teaching and learning spaces, access to library and learning is key.

Students and staff with physical impairments are likely to need a Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan (PEEP)

Impact on Study of Physical & Mobility Difficulties

Students with physical & mobility impairments may experience difficulty with:

- Managing the distance between different learning activities;
- Carrying books, materials, laptops, a tray for food and drinks;
- Notetaking, typing and other areas of dexterity such as turning pages;
- Answering questions, joining in class discussions or (sometimes) presenting material orally;
- Completing multiple assessments in a limited time period and/or managing conflicting deadlines due to fatigue.

Who can I discuss student issues relating to Physical and Mobility issues with and what resources are available to me?

A list of student related policies and procedures with school specific contacts can be found at : <http://www.cdd.ac.uk/policies/student-related-policies/>

Reasonable adjustments, along with any other agreed arrangements, should be managed under the Conservatoire's [Support Through Studies Policy and Procedures](#).

Further sources of information include:

- [AdvanceHE Accessible Estates and Facilities](#): The quality of the physical environment can encourage forms of social interaction and enrich the whole staff and student experience. However, there can be barriers for people with impairments in studying and working in higher education caused by physically inaccessible and inappropriate environments such as lecture rooms, accommodation, libraries and social spaces.

Specific Learning Differences / Difficulties (SpLDs)

SpLD is an umbrella term which is increasingly being referred to as 'neurodiversity'. SpLDs include the following diagnostic labels which are often co-occurring:

- **Dyslexia:** Students or staff with dyslexia may experience problems with processing information; memory, organisation and sequencing; and may mix up letters within words and words within sentences when reading. Staff or students with dyslexia may also find spelling to be problematic when writing.
- **Dyspraxia:** Also known as Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD). Dyspraxia affects fine and/or gross motor coordination.
- **Dyscalculia:** Relates to difficulties understanding maths concepts and symbols.
- **Dysgraphia:** This can be defined as a 'disorder in written expression'. As such, dysgraphia is the condition of impaired writing by hand which can impact a student's ability to spell words in writing and speed of writing text.
- **Attention Deficit (Hyperactivity Disorder - A.D.D / A.D.H.D):** This is a disorder which is characterised by difficulties such as staying focused and paying attention. Students are very easily distracted, lose track of what they are doing and have poor listening skills.

An individual may have one of these conditions independently or they can co-exist as part of a wider profile. SpLDs can also co-exist with autistic spectrum conditions such as Asperger Syndrome.

Impact on Study of SpLD's

- Difficulties working under time constraints - especially in assessments, teaching or workshop sessions - when trying simultaneously to write, read, listen and extract full meaning;
- Students or staff with SpLD's may find it harder to recognise errors in their own work when editing and proofreading, thus needing more time to finalise written work;
- Issues with reading and writing - individuals with SpLD's might have very strong verbal abilities, but struggle with extracting information from written material.
- There may be a significant discrepancy between the person's ability to discuss topics in teaching, workshops or other sessions and the quality of their written work including planning, structuring and sequencing ideas.

Who can I discuss student issues relating to SpLDs with and what resources are available to me?

A list of student related policies and procedure with school specific contacts can be found at: <http://www.cdd.ac.uk/policies/student-related-policies/>. Reasonable adjustments, along with any other agreed arrangements, should be managed under the Conservatoire's [Support Through Studies Policy and Procedures](#).

Further sources of information include:

- **BRAINinHE** a comprehensive resource on dyslexia and other SpLDs: <http://www.brainhe.com/>
- **British Dyslexia Association** information and advice on dyslexia: <http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/>
- **Dyspraxia Foundation** supports individuals affected by dyspraxia: <http://www.dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk/>
- **Adders** information and support for people affected by AD(H)D: <http://www.adders.org/>

EXAMPLES OF INCLUSIVE TEACHING AND REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS

Inclusive Teaching examples

- Well-structured classes, workshops and other teaching so that if concentration is impacted by slow speed of processing or challenges with organisation or sequencing skills re-engagement can be achieved through clarity of session format.
- Deadlines e.g. for written work in advance and clearly described academic tasks which means assessment timetable is clear for all.
- Provide clear and legible written (or oral) summary feedback (including that arising from feedback meetings or sessions), highlighting both good contribution to classes, written work and aspects requiring further development. Student with SpLD's may have a negative self-view in relation to peers so positive feedback should be emphasised.
- Proactive management of group discussions should help reduce anxiety felt by students about making a contribution and also stem over contributions from individuals. This will also offset reticence that may stem from cultural norms as well as disability-related reasons.
- Where a short-term task is involved, it is helpful for all students, but particularly so for students with SpLDs, if sufficient time for completion is given, which should, where possible, include a weekend.
- Where a longer-term piece of assessment is set the student should be encouraged to use all of the services on offer so that advisors and tutors can help with organisational aspects.

Reasonable Adjustment examples

- Provision of reading lists that indicate to students those readings that are considered to be 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 or exhaustive, students should still explore all possible research avenues.
- Provision of assessment format alongside adjustments such as extra time, a separate or familiar room with opportunity to familiarise in advance.
- Consideration of adjustments to assessment scheduling.
- Permission to record lectures or take notes on a computer, and access to lecture capture.
- Library adjustments including extended loans.
- Provision of a specialist SpLD tutor or mentor via DSA funding (if needed) to help students develop strategies for managing stress, the impact of their condition, maintain realistic study patterns and develop a sustainable and effective routine.
- Additional preparation and support for placements, presentations, work experience and national or international visits/exchanges: to offset stress and to anticipate and identify further barriers in a timely way.