

Guidance regarding the disabled student experience on pre-registration SLT courses

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About this guidance

The speech and language therapy profession encourages people from all communities to study to become Speech and Language Therapists (SLTs) so that the profession is more reflective of the populations it serves. Disabled SLTs enrich the profession and often bring lived experience of healthcare services to the role. This can enable a unique perspective and empathy to the collaborative relationship of service user and SLT.

In 2021, 14.3% of full-time home Higher Education (HE) students and 19% of part-time students declared at least one disability in England (Office for Students, 2021). Estimates for Scotland are similar (around 11% - Scottish Funding Council, 2016/17), Wales (16% - StatsWales, 2023) and Northern Ireland. The number of students with a known disability in HE has increased by 47% since 2014/15. (House of Commons, 2021). 21% of speech and language therapy students have declared a disability.

However, many challenges and barriers remain for disabled students with recent studies highlighting that despite Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) adhering to the 'social model of disability' some institutions still perceive the disabled person as a 'problem' to be solved. On the whole, students across HE who report a disability have lower degree results and are less likely to be in employment after graduation than non-disabled students (House of Commons Library, 2021).

It is therefore important that disabled students and the professionals around them are able to be informed about the support available and the legal responsibilities HEIs and Placement Educators (PEs) have in these circumstances.

Context and scope of this guidance

Who is this for?

This guidance is to provide advice for disabled students on pre-registration speech and language therapy courses, as well as for HEIs and PEs who are supporting disabled students. These guidelines are therefore designed to be used by:

- Disabled pre-registration SLT students
- HEIs

- university staff (academic and administrative)
- PEs (clinical co-ordinators, practice educators, managers)
- employers
- commissioners of pre-registration SLT education in the 4 countries of the UK

The aim of the guidance is to reflect a disabled student's journey from being accepted onto the course through to course completion. It takes an anti-ableist stance towards supporting disabled people on pre-registration SLT courses and intends to support HEIs and PEs in understanding the needs of and promote the equality of access for disabled students to undertake a pre-registration SLT course which includes undergraduate, masters and apprenticeship routes.

These guidelines are designed to meet the needs of students, HEIs and employers who are PEs whilst also providing clear and robust advice that takes into account the current recommendations of the:

- Equality Act (2010)
- Disability Discrimination Act (1995)
- Special Education Needs and Disability (NI) Order (2005)
- Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) Standards of Proficiency (2023)

as well as recommendations from the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), Council of Deans and other relevant stakeholders.

These guidelines do not cover admissions processes onto pre-registration SLT courses or a disabled person's career post-graduation as an SLT. Qualified SLTs are directed to ['Supporting SLTs with disabilities in the workplace: a guide for all'](#) (RCSLT, 2021). The RCSLT is aware of inconsistencies in the admission process for pre-registration SLT applicants and is working with partner organisations to address this.

What counts as disability?

A full definition of disability as in the Equality Act (2010) and Disability Discrimination Act (2005) can be found in the **'Legal Responsibilities'** section. It should be noted that disability and health are separate issues, although they may co-occur and ill health may lead to disability. Both may be short or long term, and each may affect a student's ability to access the curriculum. This separation is stressed in the [RCSLT curriculum guidelines \(2021\)](#) and students can access their HEI's Extenuating Circumstances process in relation to some health-related situations.

It is important to recognise that disability is not a monolith and the disabled student experience differs student to student. Disabled students applying to HE are more likely

to be mature students, identifying as LGBTQIA+ and/or care-experienced (UCAS, 2022). These intersectionalities as well as for those from marginalised backgrounds must be acknowledged and considered when working with disabled students.

Throughout this guidance, reference is made to 'disabled students' and not 'students with disabilities' as it is often the terminology preferred by disabled people (Botha et al, 2023; Best et al 2022; Bickford, 2004). Although there is no definite consensus amongst disabled communities and it is recognised that this is not the case for all. If you are unsure of which language to use, ask the person involved themselves. A discussion of the history of person-first versus identity-first language can be found in Dunn and Andrews (2015).

RCSLT and disability

The RCSLT is a member led organisation and is committed to equality, diversity and inclusion. It encourages best practice for disabled pre-registration SLT students. The RCSLT monitors, understands and responds to the changing external environment regarding disabled students.

The RCSLT values include active accountability to ensure continual innovation, improvement and delivery to members and to the profession. It also promotes strong and empathetic leadership to actively pursue inclusiveness, diversity and fairness across the profession, within the membership body and within our organisation.

In the 5 year vision it includes the aspiration to be a more diverse, inclusive and representative profession, with equitable access to culturally appropriate provision for service users.

Being a disabled SLT student

The first decision a disabled SLT student often makes is whether to disclose or share their disability to a HEI. This could be upon application, admission or during the course. Further information on this can be found in the disclosure section [\[link to disclosure section\]](#).

If a student discloses/shares their disability, HEIs will have a system for students to access e.g. via student support/disability services and occupational health. A disabled SLT student may consent to an assessment to determine what needs they have and what support is required. This can be shared with the HEI, and may lead to receipt of [Disabled Student's Allowance \(DSA\)](#). DSA is independent from specific universities but can inform the support and reasonable adjustments available, however it is not essential or mandatory to have DSA to receive support.

In terms of documenting needs and support, a student may already have an [Education Health and Care Plan \(EHCP\)](#) that HEIs can access. HEIs also put together separate documents detailing needs and support often called a Learning Support Plan or Disability Support Summary that can be shared with teaching staff and placement educators.

Disabled students are strongly recommended to familiarise themselves with the available support within their HEI and also to take advantage of all the support on offer both by their course team and also the central HEI services. It is advised that disabled students become familiar with this support system from the beginning of their course.

Getting started as a disabled SLT student (including those diagnosed on the course)

- Decide whether to **disclose** your disability. You may wish to talk it through with your family, friends or other networks to help you decide as well as weigh up the pros and cons [\[link to disclosure list\]](#).
- Arrange a meeting with your personal tutor/disability lead tutor. Topics you may wish to cover (if you feel comfortable to) include:
 - a) a description of your access needs
 - b) your strengths and things you are good at
 - c) what you think will help (if you know)
 - d) the reasonable adjustments the HEI can offer
 - e) what services are available at the HEI
 - f) how you can check in with a member of staff if your needs change or aren't being met.

It is useful to get the content of this meeting confirmed in writing afterwards e.g. an email.

- Contact disability support services to receive an assessment. This may lead to you getting [Disabled Student's Allowance](#), a Learning Support Plan (or similar - a document detailing what you need to access the course), specific equipment (e.g. software for note-taking) and/or access arrangements for assessments. You may also wish to find out what further support they offer within their department e.g. diagnostic services and/or counselling services.
- Outside of the HEI, you may need to register with a new GP/local health providers if you have moved locations. This could include transferring to a new pharmacy to get your repeat prescriptions and/or specialist medical teams to a local provider.
- You may wish to explore if your HEI has a Disabled Students peer support network or society either within your department (i.e. specifically for SLT students) or generally in the University. Although not every University has access to this.

- The RCSLT also has support networks you can join e.g. the disabled SLT and SLT students working group that meets online.

Being diagnosed during the course

Some students who enter a programme do not have diagnoses of disabilities, but find out during the programme that they may be disabled.

For example, Jaspreet was halfway through her first year of SLT and attended lectures on autism spectrum condition. She identified with what was being said, and decided to pursue an autism diagnosis for herself.

On another course, Ashley found it difficult to write assignments and learn phonetic transcription. She was referred to disability support services where she received a diagnosis of dyslexia.

If a student starts to suspect they may have a disability during the course, they can seek support either via the disability support services which often offer diagnostic screening services and/or their local GP for referrals on to specialist agencies.

For some people, they may recognise that they are struggling but do not wish to pursue a specific diagnosis. These students can still arrange to have conversations with personal tutors to find out what support is available to them on the course, e.g. extra support on revision strategies or academic skills.

As with students who already have a declared disability on entry to a course, once a disability is declared, the HEI has a duty to the student (under the Equality Act 2010) to ensure that support and reasonable adjustments are put in place in order to enable the student to pursue their studies.

Some HEIs have a separate policy for students diagnosed in the duration of their course meaning marks can be re-analysed retrospectively in light of the new identification of needs. Students can speak to their tutor about this at their HEI.

A newly diagnosed disabled student is still required to meet the learning outcomes in order to progress through their course. See [Fitness to Practise section](#) for further details.

Disclosure

Disabled students in Higher Education have the right to choose whether or not to disclose or share information about their disability. 42% of students disclose during application and 37% at induction or during first year (Equality Challenge Unit, 2012). When making

the decision regarding disclosure, individuals weigh up the pros and cons of sharing and therefore a supportive environment is key.

Disabled SLT students are encouraged to disclose their disability at the earliest possible opportunity to HEIs and PEs to enable support to be put in place in a timely manner. However, it is important to bear in mind that not all disabled students feel comfortable disclosing their disability. Groups less likely to disclose are those with less-visible disabilities, international students and postgraduate students (Equality Challenge Unit, 2012).

Deciding to disclose/share

Some positive reasons to share information on disability may be to:

- ✓ enable timely reasonable adjustments to be put in place on the course and on placement
- ✓ not have to manage everything on their own
- ✓ gain support and advice from tutors
- ✓ understand more about their own disability.

However some students may not wish to disclose because of:

- fear of being discriminated against, stigmatised and/or prejudiced
- worried about being seen as unsuitable for the course or placement
- concerns regarding confidentiality of what they have said
- previous negative experiences of disclosure
- not regarding themselves as disabled or 'disabled enough' (Equality Challenge Unit, 2012).

[EXAMPLE STORY NEEDED HERE]

Creating a disability-inclusive culture helps increase people's confidence to disclose or share. Tips to develop this culture can be found here [\[link to 'Creative a disability-inclusive culture for disabled SLT students'\]](#).

It is not compulsory for an SLT student to declare their disability by its label and adjustments can be put in place without disclosure. However students are encouraged to discuss their condition as they feel comfortable to. It is particularly important for HEIs

and PEs to understand the impact of that disability (rather than just the label) in order to consider reasonable adjustments and understand potential variable performance during the course or placement.

It is particularly important when thinking about placement to share information with PEs for Health and Safety reasons. This is to enable them to maintain a safe working environment (e.g. if working in a setting with service users who may cause injury).

Communication and Confidentiality when disclosing

Confidentiality is a right, unless the safety of self and others is compromised (Data Protection Act 2018, Equality Act 2010 and Disability Discrimination Act 2005). Any discussions should be formalised and duly recorded in the appropriate way. See [placements](#) section for specifics around disclosing to a placement provider.

All forms of communication should be frequent, clear, ongoing and a two-way process, with the student involved at every stage. It can be helpful, especially during the initial stages of disclosure, for staff and students to jointly determine the frequency and format of ongoing communications to set expectations.

Clear and concise communication can also help build the confidence of a disabled student, by enabling them to easily talk about their specific requirements to potential employers. HEIs should encourage an open door policy for all students.

The disabled student should be aware of who the right person is to approach if there is any dispute or concerns regarding any aspect of the course.

Legal responsibilities

HEIs have a legal duty to disabled students with the legislation differing depending on the territory within the United Kingdom.

Equality Act (2010)

In England, Wales and Scotland, disability is listed as a protected characteristic and is defined in the [Equality Act \(2010\)](#) as:

‘a physical or mental impairment that has a ‘substantial’ and ‘long-term’ negative effect on your abilities to do normal daily activities’.

Substantial is defined as ‘more than minor or trivial’ and long-term as ‘12 months or more’.

This can mean anything from a physical or sensory disability to neurodivergences (including autism) to mental health disorders such as anxiety or depression. There is further detailed guidance on how that is interpreted on [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk).

The Equality Act (2010) states that disability is a protected characteristic making it against the law to discriminate against a person due to their disability. It is against the law for education providers to treat disabled students unfavourably/at a substantial disadvantage compared to non-disabled students. This includes:

Type of discrimination	Definition	Example for SLT students
Direct discrimination	Being treated badly due to something that happens because of a disability	Being refused access to a lecture because of a disability.
Indirect discrimination	A rule or arrangement that is in place that applies to everyone but puts the person with the protected characteristic at a disadvantage	Providing lecture content in a standardised format that is not accessible to a student with a specific disability requiring adjusted formats
Discrimination arising from a disability	Treating someone unfairly because of their disability.	Lectures taking place in rooms without lift access when a student in a wheelchair is required to be present
Harassment	Unwanted behaviour linked to a protected characteristic that violates someone's dignity or creates an offensive environment for them	A lecturer telling off a student who has ADHD in front of the class for not concentrating
Victimisation	Treating someone unfairly because they've complained about	Telling a student they can't go to class because they've complained about how

	discrimination harassment.	or	their adjustments are not accommodated.	reasonable are not
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Under the Equality Act (2010), HEIs have a duty to ensure equality of opportunity for disabled students by:

- Changing rules or practices e.g. extensions to written submissions
- Altering or removing physical barriers e.g. ramps into buildings where lectures are taught
- Providing support services or devices e.g. note-taking software

An [animated summary of the Equality Act](#) if that is more accessible for the reader.

HEIs are also listed as public authorities in the Act and therefore need to fulfil the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED, 2011). More information can be found in [Disabled students at university: discussion paper](#)

In Northern Ireland, disability is defined in the [Disability Discrimination Act \(1995\)](#) as a 'physical or mental impairment that has a large and long-term adverse effect on the person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities'. 'Long-term' is classified as likely to last for or have lasted for at least 12 months. 'Normal day-to-day activities' are defined as the things people generally do on a daily basis.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Disabled people are also protected under the United Nations International Agreement on the the Rights of Disabled People (2011). Article 24 Education states that disabled people have a right to education without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity. It states that disabled people have the right not to be excluded from education systems on the basis of disability.

Key Principles for pre-registration SLT programmes

Regarding disability, it is recommended that SLT pre-registration programmes:

- a) Maintain high professional standards for all students alike and not pre-judge the professional competencies of disabled students.

b) Acknowledge the intersectionalities that disabled SLT students from marginalised backgrounds and/or identifying as LGBTQIA+ may experience and act as an ally for them.

c) Ensure that disabled students are not expected to meet competence standards at application, or at the beginning of courses, that other students are only expected to meet during, or at the end of, their courses.

d) Carry out impact assessments of:

- admission procedures
- the provision of occupational health services
- processes for allocating and arranging work placements

e) Observe best practice in enabling students to achieve their academic and professional potential within a HEI.

HEI staff and supporting disabled students

The RCSLT wishes to encourage disabled individuals to join the profession, and to advise HEI staff to be inclusive and anti-ableist in their approach to disabled students.

Staff should ensure that they do not discriminate against particular students through their actions or omission. This requires staff to have opportunities to reflect on and develop their anti-ableist allyship toward disabled people and challenge the basis of ableist attitudes and practices.

Academic staff should undertake disability awareness and anti-ableist allyship training. This culture should be embedded and demonstrated within each department/faculty as in the section '[Creating a disability-inclusive culture](#)'.

Treating disabled students fairly may not equate to treating them the same as nondisabled students. Further information on the difference between [equity and equality](#).

Staff should also adhere to any Disability Support Summary (DSS - or similar) and work with disability support and occupational health services within the HEI to ensure the written documents accurately represent the specific demands of the SLT course. For example, a placement may require travelling from home to home during a community

placement so whilst a health centre may have adequate access, the writers of a DSS need to be made aware of how to put in access support for visits to homes too.

It is important that HEI staff are aware that some students may not be aware of the help available to them until situations deteriorate significantly. For example, not being diagnosed with a condition until mid-course or a change in their disability during the course of their studies. HEIs should ensure disabled students are familiar from day one of the course of the possible support and resources available to them.

Staff are governed by the legislation and also their HEI policies and procedures. Staff should be familiar with these with regard to disabled students.

Academic staff should be open and available to students regardless of any disabilities, and should observe the same approach to students as to clients in terms of accepting, respecting and advocating for them. This is also stated in the RCSLT's Curriculum Guidance, Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct, as well as HCPC disability guidance.

[CASE OF GOOD PRACTICE NEEDED HERE - VIDEO]

Creating a disability-inclusive culture

Tips for HEIs and PEs on creating a disability-inclusive environment for disabled SLT students:

- Create a culture where disability is spoken about as a part of the SLT workforce and not just as a service user experience. Celebrate the visibility of disabled SLT staff and students within HEIs and placement settings.
- Make it clear that disability and difference are welcomed in the SLT profession, right from the admissions processes including promotional materials.
- Acknowledge the intersectionality for students from marginalised backgrounds and/or LGBTQIA+ students who may experience further oppression or discrimination, and act as an ally for them.
- Take a whole department approach to inclusion, including a commitment from senior SLT management with the ethos that people are able to bring their whole selves to work/study.
- Use disability-inclusive language with staff and students.
- Ensure reasonable adjustments are not seen as additional 'effort' for teaching staff and placement educators but a natural variation in access needs. Reasonable adjustments can be beneficial for all students, not just those who are disabled.

- Have clearly disseminated and comprehensive policies on support for disabled SLT students.
- Share information on disability to all students not just those who are disabled, particularly around allyship.
- Gather the student voice on disability issues and centre this in policy and process decision-making.
- Include representation from disabled students on all projects affecting students not just those specific to disability.
- Create opportunities for peer-to-peer support for disabled students.

Reasonable Adjustments

What are they?

HEIs have a legal responsibility to try and remove barriers disabled students face in their education. The aim of making these 'reasonable adjustments' is to create an equitable level of access for all students, disabled and non-disabled alike.

The legal duty for education providers is an anticipatory one meaning there should be forward strategic planning to address systemic barriers faced by disabled students that can be activated as appropriate, as well as individual reasonable adjustments for specific needs.

Inclusive system-wide practice can look like:

- Using e-learning platforms to support teaching and learning and ensuring all staff are trained in digital accessibility.
- Having academic disability champions within departments for both staff and students and enabling opportunities for peer-to-peer support (where students feel comfortable to do this).
- Building inclusivity and accessibility considerations into curriculum design and programme review.
- Utilising flexible study methods, such as alternative formats of content as standard practice.
- Providing alternative assessment options for all students.

More information on this can be found in ['Managing reasonable adjustments in higher education'](#).

Examples of individual reasonable adjustments to access teaching can include:

- Specific alternative formats for information presented, for example in large font.

- Access to teaching content in advance of the session.
- Permission to audio record lectures.
- Accessible rooms and venues.
- Adaptations to assessments and examinations (see '[Access arrangements](#)' section).

[EXAMPLE OF GOOD PRACTICE NEEDED HERE]

This guidance deliberately does not provide an exhaustive list of what reasonable adjustments can be implemented. This should be tailored to each student's individual needs through collaboration with teaching staff, the disability support services within the HEIs, and PEs when considering access to placement. Information on the possibilities for reasonable adjustments in relation to specific conditions can be found at [Adjustments for disabled students and apprentices](#)

Who to ask?

Students can get in touch with the disability support or student support services at their HEI. They can also ask the disability lead tutor (or equivalent) or ask their personal tutor or course lead.

It is important that the student takes the lead on what they disclose and with whom it may be shared, but is able to be fully supported by staff who know the policies and procedures of their HEI and where to signpost the student to.

What is 'reasonable'?

The EHRC (2019) measures 'reasonable' as dependent on the setting's circumstances in relation to practicality, cost, organisation's resources and size, how effective the change will be in avoiding the disadvantage the person would otherwise experience and the availability of financial support.

It is important to remember that not all reasonable adjustments can be met. This can be due to a number of reasons including lack of resources or logistical reasons. An open and honest discussion needs to take place between the disabled student and the HEI, in order to determine what can be done in order for the disabled student to meet the course competencies, whilst not lowering the academic standard of the course. Further information on this can be found in [Health, disability and becoming a health and care professional](#)

If what is reasonable cannot be agreed between the HEI and the student, a further route can be for the student to take legal action to ask a court to decide what is 'reasonable' (see 'Raising Issues – For Students').

Pre-registration eating, drinking and swallowing (EDS) competencies

From 2026 onwards students will need to have achieved pre-registration EDS competencies to be able to graduate. For some disabled students this may present challenges. It is recommended that if a student chooses to disclose their disability and have reasonable adjustments put in place, they discuss how their disability may be impacted within this clinical area. For students with a disability where their disability specifically prevents them from achieving these competencies, the timeframe has been altered to 2028 onwards. After this point, the RCSLT advises that where a student or HEI is concerned a disabled student will not be able to achieve the competencies because of their disability, to contact them early in the course to establish what additional support can be put in place.

[CASE STUDIES NEEDED HERE – e.g. dyslexia or for less visible disabilities]

Access arrangements

A Disability Support Summary (or plan with another title e.g. Reasonable Adjustment Plan) often includes a section for reasonable adjustments required for assessment procedures.

It is advised that students ask for arrangements as soon as possible (e.g. at the start of the academic year) as these can take some time to be put in place. They are usually arranged via the disability support services within the university, as well as via the disability lead lecturer in the SLT department.

Students can also ask their personal tutor about the process for these arrangements.

Examples of access arrangements are:

- Extended deadlines for assignments
- Ability to use a word processor/laptop rather than hand write exam scripts
- Taking an exam in a smaller room with less students present
- Alternative forms of assessment so long as these are equitable for all students and meet the learning outcomes of the programme.

Most HEIs require access arrangements to be formalised in writing by disability support services within the HEI in order for them to implement them.

More detailed information on reasonable adjustments and access arrangements:

- [Reasonable adjustments in college and university education](#)
- [Adjustments for disabled students and apprentices](#)

[EXAMPLE VIDEO NEEDED HERE]

Practice-based learning/placements

Placements are a core part of an SLT degree to prepare a student to join the SLT workforce.

Whilst SLT students need to meet the professional standards as set out by the [RCSLT Practice based learning guidance \(2021\)](#) and [HCPC Standards of Proficiency \(2023\)](#), it also must be recognised by HEIs and Placement Educators (PEs) that being an SLT encompasses many different ways of working and being that must not disadvantage disabled students.

Just as for access to teaching and assessment in the HEI, PEs are also legally required under the guidance listed above and the Equality Act (2010) to implement reasonable adjustments in the workplace to ensure disabled SLT students are not disadvantaged compared to non-disabled students.

Examples of reasonable adjustments could be:

- Regular breaks
- A later start time
- Extended time to write up case notes
- Lifts available if required to move between floors of a building
- No expectation to socialise at lunch times
- Clear explanations of communication expectations in that particular workplace (e.g. if working remotely, how often to check in with an educator)

- Processing time given when having verbal discussions on theory to practice
- Feedback provided written and/or asynchronously

Sensitivity and anti-ableist advocacy are required as to the needs of disabled students on practice placement, and the possibilities for flexible adjustment within the practice placement setting.

The needs of disabled SLT students must be recognised and supported via effective pre-placement planning, monitoring, reviewing and debriefing to enable them to demonstrate the required professional standards as above. Effective communication and partnership working between the student, HEI and PE is also needed.

Where possible, practice experiences for disabled students should be organised as far in advance as possible. Practice experience should not be changed at the last minute as this does not leave students or PEs time to prepare. In reality this may not be avoidable, however, it is essential that the HEI has robust communication channels to ensure minimum disruption to the student.

Preparing and planning for placement

There are 3 separate meeting points that may be useful for disabled SLT students in regards to placement:

1) At the earliest possible point upon starting the course or receiving a diagnosis– It is useful to discuss with the HEI what access needs the student anticipates they may need on future placements. This allows for HEIs to incorporate this into their placement planning and allocation processes. A student may also need to be cleared by occupational health which can take time and submission of evidence regarding fitness for placement.

2) Once a disabled SLT student has a placement allocated – it is useful to arrange a pre-placement meeting with the PE (and HEI as appropriate) to discuss the student’s access needs on that specific placement.

3) Midway point: Halfway through placement, it is useful for the HEI and/or PE to check in with the student to ensure access needs are being met or whether any new adjustments need to be explored.

Discussion at these meetings enables exploration of what might be done to manage issues and by whom (HEI, student and PE).

Some HEIs require students to sign a summary of these pre-placement meetings with consent for what information shall be passed on to the PE and what information is left out.

Sharing information

Detailed and student-specific practice-based learning plans for disabled students (sometimes called 'Placement Action Plans') should be available to PEs prior to placement starting, with the permission of the student. If agreed with the student, this should be discussed with the PEs in advance of placement with sufficient time given to PEs to make the necessary adjustments.

The student has control over what information is passed on to the PE and has a copy themselves. This copy allows the student to feel confident with the information the PE has been given and can use this to draw on if difficulties arise during the placement.

It is important for PEs to bear in mind that students may not have the workplace knowledge to anticipate how their disability might impact them during this specific placement. It can be helpful in advance of this meeting for the PE to share with the student the types of:

- clinical areas/patient groups
- environments/physical spaces
- travel and method of travel
- timings
- pacing/amount of change expected
- systems
- multi-disciplinary staff
- expectations e.g. around communication in the office or via email

they will be working with so that the student and PE together can plan what reasonable adjustments are required. It is helpful to share what each day is likely to be like.

Discussions would also normally include consideration of the *impact* of a student's disability in general and specific areas. These might include access needs related to:

- mobility
- physical and/or mental fatigue
- effects of medication
- software/writing/dexterity
- organisation/planning

- health and safety
- environmental factors
- in some cases, whether or not the placement should be deferred.

[\[Link here for the bullet points to be downloadable pdf\]](#)

Keira's story

At my university, there was a lengthy process of being cleared by both occupational health (who required lots of evidence that I was fit for placement) as well as meeting with the disability team to create a separate "placement action plan" which outlines my disability and reasonable adjustments that placement educators could put in place. The idea of the plan is that the onus is on the student to share with placement educators if they wish, which usually requires meetings preplacement (if the placement educators have time!)

I have a range of experiences on placement in response to this action plan, including one placement signing me off as I was on crutches, and it was against health and safety policy to be allowed on crutches in that setting. Another placement didn't have lifts, so I was expected to climb three flights of stairs to the office, and on the first day my placement educator said, "you'll be ok with stairs as you said you're doing well at the moment, didn't you?" I felt like I couldn't explain that three flights of stairs were too much regardless of having a good day, so I endured the stairs and felt embarrassed when it took 10 minutes to compose myself once in the office.

I also had fantastic placement educators who met me pre-placement remotely and talked through my dynamic disability and understood that some days I may be "less able" than others. One placement educator pre checked with a custody suite that I could use my crutches on placement if required which made me feel at ease and took the shame away from needing to use them.

I found it alarming how many of the NHS clinics on placements were not wheelchair accessible, not only does this stop people with physical disabilities being able to become therapists, it also furthers the inequity of access to healthcare for disabled people.

Being an anti-ableist ally for disabled students on placement

It is not the place of PEs to judge whether disabled students should be training to be SLTs. Educators should be supported by HEIs, who are in turn scaffolded by student support

services, to make reasonable adjustments and need to adhere to the HCPC guidance on becoming a health and care professional.

It is important that discussions and preparation for placement are a joint endeavour between all parties and the student does not have to take full responsibility for gaining equal access to placement. Being disabled often means energy is already additionally expended on the maintenance and admin of having a disability.

It is also important that PEs and HEIs advocate for disabled students when navigating placement (e.g. in a school ensuring there is an accessible place to sit) as part of taking away this burden. PEs can also support disabled students to practice advocating for themselves on placement to support transition to work, if this is something the student wants to work on.

Students may require support from educators and HEIs where staff and/or service users display prejudicial and offensive behaviours as a result of conditions such as a brain injury, and additional preparation and support may be required for this. Its important that the PE acts as an ally in this circumstance and also gains consent from the student to report to their HEI under safeguarding processes as required. Students should be aware of the system of support within the HEI and feel comfortable to access this.

When marking a disabled student on placement, PEs should consider how to take an anti-ableist stance to providing grading and feedback on their progress. A student should not be discriminated against in regards to their marks or feedback in relation to their disability.

For example, if a student is neurodivergent and communicates in a way that is different from the neurotypical method(e.g. in terms of eye contact and body language), it is important for placement educators to respect this as an equally valid way of communicating and not deduct marks on any learning outcomes that relate to communication expectations as long as the student continues to meet the criteria provided relating to HCPC Standards of Proficiency.

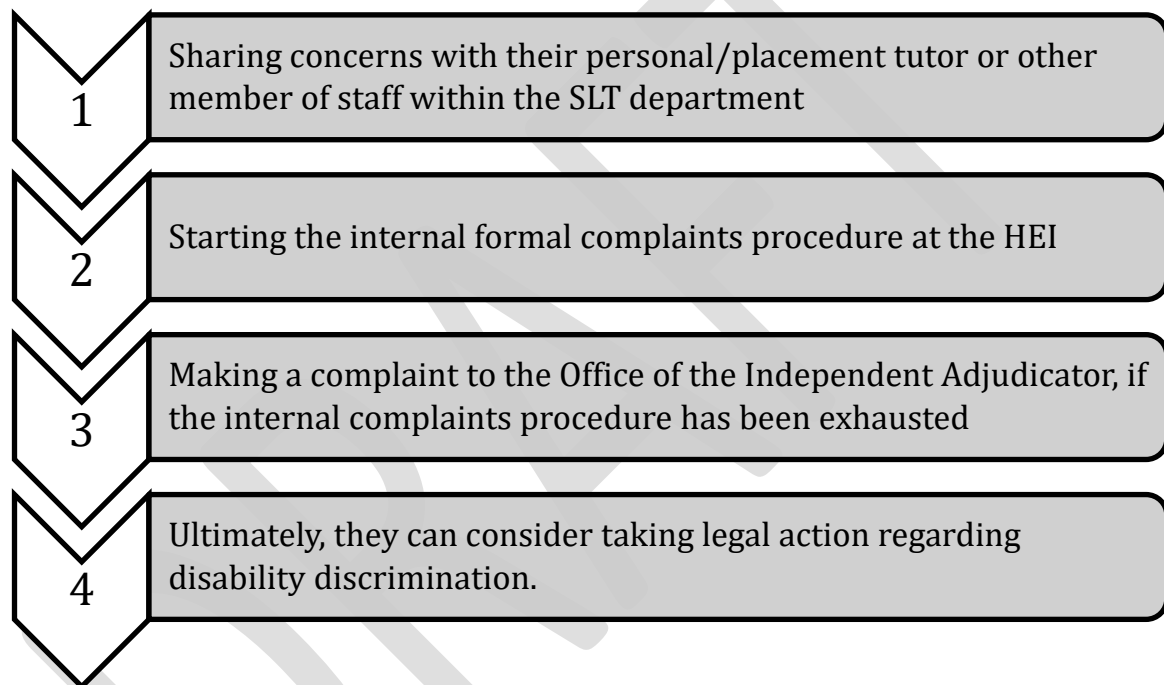
Similarly, PEs should not discriminate against a disabled student in relation to external forces outside of their control. For example, if a disabled student requires a taxi to get to placement and the taxi is late, or if a disabled student needs to spend lunch time alone or if they are fatigued in parts of the day.

Specific guidance on supporting neurodivergent students on practice-based learning has been developed by Health Education England and can be found [here](#).

Raising concerns – for students

As above, HEIs and PEs have a legal duty to consider all requests to reasonable adjustments and be able to explain why they are not able to be implemented.

If a student is experiencing discrimination or difficulty with the implementation of reasonable adjustments either at the HEI or on placement, they can raise these concerns via informal and formal channels such as:



[Advice on taking legal action](#)

(Office for Students, 2019)

Fitness to practise

Disabled SLT students are still required to meet the learning outcomes to progress through a course, as the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) requires all

graduates who apply for entry to the register to be able to adhere to its Standards of Proficiency (2023).

The reasonable adjustments outlined in any Disability Support Summary (DSS), or equivalent, shouldn't affect the standards required to meet the learning outcomes of any given programme of study but are there to provide alternative methods of meeting these fitness-to-practise standards.

The HCPC Standards of Proficiency (2023) cannot override the legal requirements under the Equality Act (2010) and if the threshold for reasonable has been met, the focus should be on whether the student can meet the HCPC Standards with the reasonable adjustments or not.

The HCPC Standards of Education and Training (2017) state that admissions for programmes leading to eligibility to apply for registration must apply selection and entry criteria that includes:

'b) health and disability: applicants should be in sufficiently good health to be able to comply with the programme requirements, with reasonable adjustments and support where necessary.'

Health and Safety

Health and safety legislation must not be used inappropriately to avoid making a reasonable adjustment. The Equality Act (2010) does not override health and safety legislation and therefore HEIs and placement settings are not required to make adjustments that would endanger the health and safety of the disabled person or of other people e.g. other staff and/or service users.

There is a duty to protect the public as well as the student. If occupational health screening and discussion with the student reveal they may be a danger to themselves or others either on the taught element or on practice placements then they may, exceptionally, be refused admittance or withdrawn from a setting.

Useful organisations

- [Advance HE](#)
- [Disability Rights UK](#)
- [HCPC](#)
- [Office for Students](#)
- [Scope](#)
- [UCAS](#)

Related RCSLT guidance

- [RCSLT Practice-based learning guidance](#)
- [Students](#)
- [Link on SLT as a career webpage](#)
- [Supporting SLTs with disabilities in the workplace > students on placement](#)
- [Meeting the HCPC standards](#)
- [Settings where SLTs work](#)

APPENDIX 1 Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Am I classed as disabled?

Disability is a very personal topic and self-identification as disabled can be complicated for many reasons. The definition that HEIs are legally bound to is in the Equality Act (2010). You can find this information here [[link to Legal Responsibilities section](#)].

What help can I ask for?

Disabled HEI students can ask for assessment and support in regards to accessing:

- Teaching and learning (e.g. recording lectures or accessible buildings)
- Assessments (e.g. extra time on exams)
- Practice-based learning/placement (such as getting to the setting)
- Funding (through [Disabled Student's Allowance](#))

Students may also be able to seek diagnostic screening for learning differences such as dyslexia and neurodivergence through their local disability support service at their HEI, as well as access to counselling services.

More information on this can be found here [[link to Reasonable Adjustments section](#)].

My teacher/placement provider won't implement the reasonable adjustments I've asked for. What do I do?

HEIs and PEs have a legal duty [[link to Legal Responsibilities section](#)] to try and remove barriers to learning for disabled students. If you are having difficulty with this you can find your options here [[link to Raising Concerns-For Students](#)].

My placement feedback is ableist. What do I do?

If you think that you have been discriminated against due to your disability when on placement, speak to your placement and/or personal tutor at the HEI in the first instance (if you feel comfortable to). You can also raise the issue with the disability support services at the HEI. If you still feel you need further assistance, you can find your options here [[link to Raising Concerns-For Students](#)]. Information on how placement educator can be anti-ableist allies can be found here [[link to Being an anti-ableist ally for disabled students on placement](#)].

You may also wish to seek peer support either from your local disabled students network, SLT society or the RCSLT disabled SLTs and student SLTs working group.

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APPENDIX 2 Glossary of terms

Term	Definition
Competence	Competence is the ongoing ability to meet the standards for professional knowledge, understanding and skills, so that a person can, practice safely and effectively.
Disabled Students Allowance (DSA)	The Disabled Students' Allowance cover any extra costs that you have to pay during your course that are directly associated with your disability, e.g. specialist equipment.
Disability Support Summary	A Disability Support Summary (can also be called a Reasonable Adjustment Plan or similar) forms part of a learning agreement. It identifies the learning outcomes / objectives you wish to achieve, a strategy to meet these objectives, and the means by which you will provide evidence of this achievement.
Disclosure	The term used within disability literature to refer to the process by which the disabled person lets others know about their disability and/or access needs.
Equality Act 2010	The main piece of legislation used in the UK to protect disabled people from discrimination.
Fitness to Practise	A person's fitness to practise is their ability to practise their profession in a way which meets the HCPC and professional body requirements. They must have the skills,

	knowledge, character and health to do their job safely and effectively.
Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC)	They regulate the SLT profession and we were set up to protect the public. To do this, they keep a register of health and care professionals who meet their standards for their training, professional skills, behaviour and health.
Higher Education Institution (HEI)	Usually, a University where undergraduate and postgraduate study takes place.
Practice-Based Learning/Practice Placement	Placement learning is the learning achieved during an agreed and negotiated period of learning that takes place outside the institution at which the full or part-time student is enrolled at. These are an opportunity to gain workplace experience in a SLT setting.
Standards of Proficiency (SOPs)	These are the professional standards that the HCPC set, which SLTs must meet before they can be registered with the HCPC.

APPENDIX 3 Examples of good practice

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