GUIDANCE FOR LINE MANAGERS ON COMMUNICATION NEEDS OF DISABLED STAFF

1. Introduction

In line with the University of Nottingham’s commitment to a comprehensive equal opportunities policy, the Human Resources Department has produced this guidance to support line managers of staff who have particular communication needs.

This document is a general guide to ensure we have clear and accessible information, whether this is printed or in an electronic format. Following this guidance is important because:

- It is effective – employees need to receive information that is accessible to them. Good communication practices support all employees in carrying out their roles.

- It is the law – the Equality Act 2010 means there is a legal duty to meet the information needs of disabled people as a reasonable adjustment. This includes a full range of information that non-disabled employees can access and that may relate to matters beyond the immediate work place or tasks, such as access to information on social activities related to work.

  Health and Safety legislation states every employer shall provide their employees with comprehensible and relevant information on the risks to their health and safety identified by the risk assessment and the appropriate preventive and protective measures.

To foster good communications we must ensure that we do not use any language or take actions that will discriminate, either directly or indirectly, against members of staff who are disabled. This includes effectively including individuals who cannot take part fully in spoken conversations.

Some basic points of etiquette for working with people who may experience barriers to communication (this might be a visual, hearing, speech or learning impairment):

- Avoid asking personal questions about someone’s disability. If you must ask, be sensitive and show respect. Do not probe, if the person declines to discuss it.

- Be considerate of the extra time it might take for a disabled respond to certain forms of communication.

- Be polite and patient when offering assistance and wait until your offer is accepted. Listen or ask for specific instructions.

- When planning a meeting, team building event or any other event, anticipate specific accommodations a person with a disability might need. If a barrier cannot be avoided, let the person know ahead of the time.

- Meetings should be managed in a way which is inclusive (e.g. not allowing people to talk over each other).

- Avoid combining meals with meetings; where necessary ensure that food is consumed separately to the business of the meeting.

2. Written Information

A document that is not well-designed¹ or is overly complex or full of jargon can be off-putting and difficult for anyone to understand. However, there are some groups of people who may find it particularly difficult to access various kinds of written or printed information. For example:
Some people with a visual impairment may have difficulty accessing information that is poorly-designed or produced in a small typeface or only available in black and white. People may also find it difficult to access electronic files which are incompatible with assistive software (such as ZoomText – a piece of software that enables users to enlarge the information presented on a computer screen).

Some people with a visual impairment will require printed information in an alternative format (e.g. Braille, audio or electronic formats) or in an electronic format which is compatible with assistive hardware or software.

People with sight problems use a variety of methods for accessing information and communicating. There is no one solution that everyone uses; therefore, it is vital that you ask the person what they need.

You may need to consider translating materials into different formats, e.g. Braille, large and giant print, computer disks and supplying or supporting assistive technology. You can get advice on how to do this from Information Services (IS) by sending an email to alternativeformats@nottingham.ac.uk. Please note that the Transcription Service can get busy around peak term times, such as exams. If IS are not able to assist with the request, there are external contacts provided in section 8 Contacts of this document.

People whose first language is not English may find written documents difficult to understand. This may include, for example, some deaf people whose first language is a Sign Language.

People with specific learning difficulties (e.g. dyslexia) or autism spectrum conditions (e.g. Asperger Syndrome) may find complex written documents difficult to access.

Dyslexia/dyscalculia/dyspraxia: it is important to note that people with dyslexia may have a variety of different requirements; this document is only for general purposes. Each individual employee’s situation needs to be taken into consideration.

The following are some general principles to bear in mind:

- Avoid putting people on the spot by, for example, asking them to read aloud or watching them while writing.
- People with specific and common learning difficulties will need longer than average to read and produce documents. They may also find verbal instruction difficult to remember and experience short-term memory and concentration span problems.
- Where it is required to read more than a page of text, this should be provided in advance and preferably in an electronic format.
- Directions, instructions, requirements and procedures should be provided in both spoken and clear written format or audio recorded. This way they can be referred back to. For example, spoken instructions should be followed by a confirming email.
- Avoid talking to someone while they are writing. People who have jobs that require much reading/writing may need a quiet place to work without distractions.
- People who lip read cannot read paper and lips at the same time.
- Written information should be in minimum 12 pt plain font but the clear print guide gives more details.

1 For guidance on accessibility of printed documents please contact the Disability Support service.

- Natural light is invariably better than artificial. Inappropriate lighting may be uncomfortable over time, or may cause great discomfort quite quickly.
- 1.5 line spacing in documents is helpful.
- Avoid justifying text.

Please note the next two points may be supportive for people with dyslexia, they are contrary to the requirements of visually impaired people:

- Reduce the contrast between text and print e.g. use off-white or pastel coloured paper and/or blue print.
- Use images or diagrams wherever possible.

3. Offering Alternative Formats

The University is committed to equality in information provision and therefore the following statement should be included in relevant publications that are aimed at staff or the wider community:
It is recommended that this statement should be in a prominent position, at the front of the publication, preferably in 14 point type size.

4. Dealing with Alternative Format Requests

Any documents that are produced in an alternative format such as Braille are charged to the Department. Managers should not turn down a request for information in an alternative format on the basis of cost alone. All departments have a legal responsibility to make adjustments for disabled people.

The University of Nottingham has a transcription service offered by Information Services (IS). At present, this service is set up for students as IS work closely with Academic Support. However, IS will endeavour to provide advice and support for staff where they can. In the first instance please contact Information Services via the following email:

alternativeformats@nottingham.ac.uk

If IS are not able to deal with a request, please use one of the External Contacts provided in section 8 Contacts.

IT support can offer advice on assistive technologies for disabled staff. In the first instance, contact IT Helpline on ext 16677. Please note that IT Support Teams are not able to provide specialist advice on individual requirements but are able to assist with the sourcing of computer equipment (e.g. hardware such as large monitors and software). For individual assessments, Access to Work should be contacted. (Please see section 8 Contacts).

5. Spoken Information

Spoken or verbal communication can take a variety of forms, for example, department meetings, informal communications, social events and team building events.

The following sections offer a summary of advice to consider when working with people with specific impairments. For more detailed practical advice on communicating with disabled people please contact the Disability Support service.

5.1 Hearing Impairments

- Let the disabled person take the lead in establishing the communication mode, such as lip-reading, sign language, or writing notes.
- Talk directly to the person, even when a sign language interpreter is present.
- If the person lip-reads, face him or her directly, speak clearly and with a moderate pace, and avoid standing against the light.

5.2 Speech Impairments

- Pay attention, be patient and wait for the person to complete a word or thought. Don’t finish it for the person.
- If you don’t understand ask the person to repeat what they said.
- Summarise with the person what you understand that conversation to have been about and what actions have been agreed by you both.
- It may help to simplify your sentences and use more facial expressions and body language.

5.3 Visual Impairments

- Introduce yourself and others who may be present when approaching someone who is visually impaired.
- Don’t leave the person without excusing yourself first.
- Never push or pull the person when asked to guide them. Allow him or her to take your arm and then walk slightly ahead.
• Be descriptive when describing the location of objects.

5.4 Physical and Mobility Impairments

• Speak to the person at eye level if possible, do this naturally by sitting down if necessary, do not push, lean on or hold onto a person’s wheelchair as this is part of his or her personal space.
• Talk directly to the person and not to the person’s assistant.

6. General Advice

We all have a responsibility to avoid creating barriers for disabled people whatever our role, either as managers or colleagues.

Create good communication – we must ensure that we do not use any language, or take any actions that will discriminate, either directly or indirectly, against members of staff.

Identify and remove barriers – these are not just physical. Lack of awareness, frustration and other people’s attitudes can all create barriers. Misunderstandings and thoughtlessness can lead to a breakdown in communication that could easily cause feelings of isolation and exclusion.

Consult – disabled people, like other people, need to be fully involved in what is happening in their department. They need to play a full part in any meetings and be kept up to date with developments. Do not make assumptions. Not knowing what the issues are may lead to mistakes, so take the time to ask and find out.

7. Additional Information

Any further information or advice should be obtained from your Human Resources Advisor.

8. Contacts

Transcription Services provided by:

A2i Transcription Services Ltd
139a Whiteladies Road
Clifton
Bristol
BS8 2NR
Tel: 01179 70 70 90
Web: http://www.a2i.co.uk/index.html

Nottinghamshire Royal Society for the Blind
Ortzen Street
Radford
Nottingham
NG7 4BN
Tel: 0115 9706 807
Website: http://www.nrsb.org.uk

Advice on Adaptive Computer Technology provided by:

Abilitynet
PO Box 94
Warwick
CV34 5WS
Tel/text: 01926 312 847
Freephone: 0800 269 545
Fax: 01926 407 425
Email: enquiries@abilitynet.co.uk
Website: www.abilitynet.co.uk

Access to Work

Information on the Access to Work Scheme can be found on the .gov website:
https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work

Access to Work
Operational Support Unit
Harrow Jobcentre Plus
Mail Handling Site A
Wolverhampton
WV98 1JE

Telephone: 0800 121 7479
Textphone: 0800 121 7579
Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm

Further Information

3. RNIB Accessible Information, http://www.rnib.org.uk

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