# 'SUBSTANTIAL DISADVANTAGE': REVIEWING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF DISABLED STUDENTS' ACADEMIC ADJUSTMENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

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## FOREWORD: EMRYS TRAVIS AND MATT KITE

## CUSU DISABLED STUDENTS OFFICER & CUSU EDUCATION OFFICER 2018/19

Parity in access to education for disabled students has been one of our main focuses this year as the Education Officer and Disabled Students' Officer at Cambridge University Students' Union. Disabled students' issues are often assumed to fall primarily or exclusively within the realm of 'welfare,' and this affects how they are dealt with in public conversation and in university governance. We know from the students we represent that this assumption neglects an area that is often the most pivotal in defining disabled students' experience of university. With disabled students making up at least 15% of the student body, educational policy and practice at all levels cannot afford to omit equality of education provision for disabled students from its core focus.

Existing work at Cambridge, led by the DRC, has begun the difficult but necessary culture change away from an individualised 'case-by-case' model towards a structurally inclusive ethos of teaching and learning. We are excited about the benefits this will bring in the longer term, not only for disabled students, but for the University as a whole. We are also keen that current and incoming disabled students do not fall through the cracks. Innovation and excellence in inclusive teaching and learning will be best built upon a strong foundation of understanding and supporting disabled students in their education within the constraints of the current system.

Under the existing model, disabled students - a diverse and wide-ranging group, with experiences of physical and mobility impairment, mental health conditions, neurodiversity, long-term illness, and many more - are legally and institutionally entitled to 'reasonable adjustments' in their education. These are changes made to the way these students are taught or assessed to ensure that they are not placed at a 'substantial disadvantage' to other students as a result of being disabled. The goal of reasonable adjustments is to ensure that the burden is not placed upon disabled individuals to overcome barriers placed in their way by

inaccessible societal systems, but instead is upon society and the institutions within it to proactively ensure that they are as accessible as possible to everyone, regardless of disability.

We began our data collection for this report with the hope of discovering weak and strong areas of practice in the current Cambridge system, aiming to find out what works and what doesn't, enabling us to share best practice. Although experiences vary significantly, we have in fact had to draw far more general conclusions. The 'substantial disadvantage' referenced in the title of this report is not only a reference to regulations, but also an accurate description of the current situation in which disabled students at the University of Cambridge are studying. Where defined and managed processes and systems exist, such as with examination adjustments, the changes to be made are more incremental. Where there is no such system and responsibility for the implementation of adjustments is individualised and diffuse, however, we found that a great deal more work is needed to ensure parity of educational provision for all.

*Emrys Travis and Matt Kite*
CUSU *Disabled Students Officer & CUSU Education Officer 2018/19*

## KEY FINDINGS AND SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

- The current Student Support Document system is failing disabled students. **71% of students had average-to-negative experiences** with the distribution of their SSD. There is a lack of clarity about responsibility within the current system. Moreover, teaching staff are not being adequately trained on SSDs: **44% of teaching staff respondents** (of 64 postgraduate students who teach undergraduates) **had never heard of an SSD.**

- By contrast, **73% of students had positive experiences with the exam adjustments application system.** The negative experiences reported point to improvements that should be made within the existing system, but not to the need for a complete system overhaul.

- **Reasonable adjustments are not being made.** When asked about the implementation of the reasonable adjustments to teaching on their SSD (as opposed to exam adjustments), the average student experience across the board is not only inadequate, but **actively negative.**

- By contrast, students have a **net positive** experience when it comes to the **implementation of their exam adjustments.**

- **Inclusive teaching and learning principles** being embedded at the top levels of educational policy in the University are **not yet being felt by students.** Existing inclusive practices appear to **vary unpredictably** not only among different faculties/departments, but also within the same faculty/department.

- **Teaching staff are not being equipped to support disabled students.** Only **12%** of respondents felt comprehensively informed regarding the needs of disabled students from a teachers' perspective, while **60% felt mostly or entirely uninformed.**

These findings, and the more detailed breakdowns in the next section, point to some clear necessary next steps. Overall, the University's ongoing commitment to inclusivity in teaching and learning, as reflected in e.g. the Education Strategy, must be matched by a commitment to immediate material process creation and changes in practice. The University must recognise the overwhelming disparity in full and equal access to education currently being experienced by disabled

students, and act accordingly with a view to short-term as well as longer-term solutions. More specific recommendations are detailed as part of each of the 'themes' in the next section of this report, and a timeline can be found in the final section, but an overall summary of our recommendations is as follows:

1. Support for the bid for resource to systematise SSD production and distribution via inclusion in existing central digital systems.

2. Commitment from the collegiate University at all levels to clearer, more frequent, and more transparent communication across the board to ensure that adjustment application and implementation processes are advertised and demystified.

3. The Examinations and Assessment Committee to undertake a review, with student and DRC representation, of the back end of the exam adjustments applications process – specifically, of the medical evidence students are being asked to provide, and whether there is parity in how this is understood across support staff on a college level.

4. An immediate focus on overhauling the existing devolved/individualised model of implementation of academic reasonable adjustments and investigating ways in which this can be systematised across the collegiate University in the immediate short term; this will begin with the first CUSU/GU-organised Reasonable Adjustments Forum on March 21st.

5. The creation of a Reasonable Adjustments Working Group at University level, reporting to the General Board's Education Committee, to take forward and implement recommendations arising from the Reasonable Adjustments Forum. This Working Group will bridge the institutional gap in responsibility between the immediate short term future and the longer term goals of inclusive teaching and learning practices.

6. Investigation into possible systems of accountability, on both departmental/collegiate levels and a University-wide level, to ensure that students whose reasonable adjustments are not being met have clear routes to raise concerns and ensure that they do not fall through the cracks (this may link with reporting systems work being done within the Sub-Committee on Accessibility).

7.  The inclusion of comprehensive training on reasonable adjustments and SSDs in all existing supervisor/teacher training, ideally as part of a wholesale review of training provision across faculties/departments.

8.  Commitment of greater central resource towards the project of identifying and implementing practical and specific changes, reflecting on the current Lecture Capture project model and on existing DRC recommendations, within existing teaching and learning processes which would reflect the central University's commitment to inclusive teaching and learning.

# REPORT CONTEXT: EXISTING DATA

The number of disabled students coming to Cambridge, and accessing HE more widely, is increasing; the Institute for Employment Studies reported a rise from just over 16,700 new entrants in 2003/4 to over 51,000 in 2012/13 across the UK, and the Disability Resource Centre Annual Report 2017-18 reported a 25% increase in disabled students between July 2017 and July 2018 (from 2,410 students to 3,017). However, the limited amount of Cambridge-specific data available suggests that this increase in numbers of disabled students is not matched by an effective concurrent commitment of resource to establishing, reviewing, and improving provisions for disabled students so as to ensure parity regarding opportunity to achieve and student satisfaction. The Big Cambridge Survey 2016-17 found that less than half of disabled student respondents (47%) agreed that academics had made reasonable adjustments for them when requested. Only 28% of disabled undergraduate students reported that their workload was manageable and healthy, in comparison to 44% overall. Almost double the number of disabled students said that Cambridge had had a negative impact on their physical health compared to the average (51% vs 26%), and the difference is similarly striking for mental health (71% of disabled students said Cambridge had a negative impact, vs 44% of all students).

While individual areas of, and services within, the collegiate University may collect datasets with some relevance to monitoring the academic (dis)parity experienced by disabled students and the level of success of current systems and processes intended to provide parity, there is very little existing University-wide data focusing on these issues. The DRC Annual Student Survey reports of the last two years make up the majority of existing data, and provide a wealth of qualitative feedback from disabled students on their experiences. This surveys conducted for this report aim to supplement this data but also, crucially, to contextualise it by filling the existing quantitative data gap; it also makes recommendations for some of the necessary next steps to be taken in ensuring that the University's commitments to diversity and inclusivity can be embedded on a practical level into the academic experience of its disabled students.

The most focused existing report on disabled students' academic issues at Cambridge in recent years is the 2017 DRC report 'Inclusive teaching and learning: report and recommendations for Cambridge.' This report will touch on some of the same issues, considering the progress made in the eighteen months since that report and assessing whether inclusive teaching and learning principles are at present being felt at the student level. However, the focus will be more strongly on the immediate here and now, underlining that disabled students who are currently part of the University are simply not being adequately provided for. Our conclusions and recommendations are based around the clear need identified, not only for the building of a foundation of inclusive teaching and learning practices which will embed themselves over time as part of a holistic culture change, but also for immediate and material action to improve – and, in some cases, overhaul – existing systems and practices. We are concerned, in particular, with ensuring that current and incoming students are not allowed to continue to fall through the cracks during the ongoing process of developing inclusive teaching and learning practices throughout the University, as well as with the demonstrable necessity for decisive shorter-term action which also serves to pave the path for these longer-term developments in teaching and learning.

# BREAKDOWN

## INITIAL PROCESSES: APPLYING FOR SSDS AND EXAM ADJUSTMENTS

The current system of SSD distribution relies on devolved individual responsibility. Where a student's DoS and/or tutor changes, is not adequately informed, does not hold a central record of all supervisors/lecturers a student will be in contact with, or for any other reason fails to take the initiative to ensure SSDs are sent round and inform students regularly as to their progress, the current system quickly falls down and students are forced to self-advocate.

| How well was your SSD distributed among your supervisors/lecturers/others whom it should have been made available to? | | |
|---|---|---|
| Easily and promptly distributed | 8% | = 30% positive experience |
| Pretty well distributed | 22% | |
| Average | 17% | = 54% negative experience |
| Not very well distributed | 30% | |
| Not at all distributed/lost track of | 12% | = 71% average-to-negative experience |
| Don't know | 12% | |

Of the qualitative comments given, 3 were positive, 14 were neutral or mixed, and 33 were negative. Many respondents indicated not only a lack of control and agency over the sending of their SSD, but also a lack of knowledge or certainty as to who had received it; 18 comments specifically noted being unsure of/losing track of where their SSD had gone and having "no way of knowing," while 12 comments described having to chase up individuals, "nag," and take the initiative to ask for adjustments directly (multiple respondents specifically highlighted the anxiety that doing this caused them).

*"When my DoS changed no-one made sure it had been handed over so my supervisors and new DoS didn't receive it until week 7 when I found out my supervisor hadn't seen it and followed up myself"*

*"Was given to my DoS and tutor but my DoS didn't send it to any of my supervisors despite me saying I wanted her to"*

*"I heard nothing about it from anyone until I brought it up with my DoS, and still then I don't think it was sent on"*

*"I have no idea who my SSD has gone to, or what version of my SSD has gone to who."*

*"I know my dos received it and ensured all my supervisors had seen it. No idea if it ever got to any of my departments and no idea how I'd check"*

*"I had many different supervisors so it was easier to distribute it myself. However this took time and anxiety around how to disclose it."*

*"I was never entirely sure who my DoS had actually sent my support document to, especially if I changed supervisors during the year, and I had to send emails including it myself as a result."*

In contrast to SSDs, the current exam adjustment applications system is devolved to colleges at the student-facing end and central at the administrative and decision-making end. The difference in student experience appears clear; although the system is not without its hitches, and improvements are still to be made (see recommendations below), the current exam adjustments application process relies significantly less on the responsibility of individuals at all levels than the corresponding model for obtaining academic reasonable adjustments not relating to exams.

| How straightforward did you find the process of applying for your exam adjustments? | | |
|---|---|---|
| Very straightforward | 32% | = 73% positive experience |
| Pretty straightforward | 41% | |
| Average | 14% | = 13% negative experience |
| Not very straightforward | 4% | |
| Not at all straightforward | 9% | = 27% average-to-negative experience |

Of the qualitative comments received, 26 were positive, 10 were neutral or mixed, and 7 were negative. The issues highlighted among the negatives were: issues on the medical side of the process, such as trouble getting quick GP appointments; issues with the central process, such as the time taken to approve adjustments or the specificities of medical evidence being asked for; initial intimidation that the process would be difficult; and a lack of clear communications as to the process and actions required.

*"College were great, they took on feedback from previous exams to give me my preferred room the following year. I didn't need additional medical*

*evidence when applying for longer rest breaks or to bring food into the exam. The only downside was the several months it took for the university to approve these changes."*

*"The only adjustment that worked for me were exam adjustments"*

*"The JCR disabilities officer posted on the Facebook the details about how to apply for exam adjustments months ahead of the deadline, specifying who to contact, by when, and what to expect. I followed her instructions and it went smoothly."*

*"Terrible. Incredibly stressful, needlessly difficult. The university was incredibly demanding about the specific wording of my medical note; it felt as if I was not believed/was being accused of trying to cheat. I had to spend hours going back and forth to the hospital and on the phone just to get a correct note, and it wasn't finalised until the week before my finals."*

*"Wasn't sure whether this was dealt with by DRC or college tutorial office; lack of clear communication meant that I was (pleasantly) surprised when I was notified that I would be sitting exams at the uni. centre with rest breaks."*

## RECOMMENDATION 1: SUPPORT FOR THE BID FOR RESOURCE TO SYSTEMATISE SSDS VIA INCLUSION IN EXISTING CENTRAL DIGITAL SYSTEMS.

Migrating SSDs from relying on complex and extensive email trails into a streamlined digital system would solve a huge number of the issues reported by survey respondents. John Harding (Head of the Disability Resource Centre) has submitted a bid to the Our Cambridge initiative with a view to integrating SSDs into existing digital University systems.

*Action: EQP and other stakeholders to formally recognise this recommendation in support of the bid; John Harding to give progress updates to relevant bodies, including a future Working Group (see Recommendation 5).*

## RECOMMENDATION 2: COMMITMENT FROM THE COLLEGIATE UNIVERSITY AT ALL LEVELS TO CLEARER, MORE FREQUENT, AND MORE TRANSPARENT COMMUNICATION ACROSS THE BOARD TO ENSURE THAT ADJUSTMENT APPLICATION PROCESSES ARE ADVERTISED AND DEMYSTIFIED.

Many of the negative experiences detailed in qualitative comments from those who had struggled with the examination adjustments application system stemmed from inadequate communications. An attitude of 'case-by-case' individualism tends to pervade throughout the collegiate University regarding adjustments made for disabled students; this approach has merit in many ways, but also results in students falling through the cracks. An appropriate response to the rising proportion of students disclosing disability (currently ~15%) is for colleges to proactively contact their entire student body – not only those disabled students whom they are already aware of – with a brief and simplified explanation of what adjustments are available, what next steps students who would benefit from these should be taking, and what the application process entails as a whole.

*Action: CUSU Education Officer to bring this recommendation to Senior Tutors' Education Committee. STEC to discuss best practice and report back on changes made in their colleges in the following meeting.*

RECOMMENDATION 3: THE EXAMINATIONS AND ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE TO UNDERTAKE A REVIEW, WITH STUDENT AND DRC REPRESENTATION, OF THE BACK END OF THE EXAM ADJUSTMENTS APPLICATIONS PROCESS – SPECIFICALLY, OF THE MEDICAL EVIDENCE STUDENTS ARE BEING ASKED TO PROVIDE, AND WHETHER THERE IS PARITY IN HOW THIS IS UNDERSTOOD ACROSS SUPPORT STAFF ON A COLLEGE LEVEL.

While a majority of students report positive experiences, 13% of respondents reported negative experiences with the examination adjustments application process. Qualitative comments highlight that, for a minority of students, gathering medical evidence has been particularly troublesome. Data on the question of whether paid medical evidence was required (to be detailed in a forthcoming CUSU report) underlined the apparent discrepancies in the evidence being asked for; it is unclear whether these discrepancies occur at a central level, or whether colleges are giving students mixed messages. For this reason, it is important that EAC review its processes and communications with external input from students, CUSU, and the DRC.

*Action: CUSU representative to attend Examinations and Assessment Committee in order to propose such a review.*

## IMPLEMENTATION: REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS VS EXAM ADJUSTMENTS

Students were asked which reasonable adjustments (RAs) were on their SSDs, and the answers inputted were fed into questions asking how well each RA was implemented a. by the student's college, b. by the student's faculty or department, and c. by any other relevant colleges in which the student had been taught.

Averages were taken of the 'net well' (sum of percentage positive and percentage negative responses) of the implementation of a. each RA separately across all colleges, b. each RA separately across all faculties/departments, c. all RAs on average across each college, and d. all RAs on average across each faculty/department. College and faculty results are not labelled in this report due to a small number of responses from certain colleges/faculties meaning responses might be identifiable; in any case, what is shown is consistent inconsistency across colleges/faculties, rather than any strong positive or negative practice in any one college or faculty. Results below (NB: 'net well' = a percentage between 100% and -100%, making 0% equal a net neutral/average experience across students, positive %s a net positive experience, and negative %s a net negative experience, although the university should of course be aiming for strong or total net positives across the board in order to be providing equal access to disabled students as to their non-disabled peers):

| REASONABLE ADJUSTMENT | NET WELL WHEN RESPONSIBILITY OF COLLEGE | NET WELL WHEN RESPONSIBILITY OF FAC/DEPT |
|---|---|---|
| Note-taker | 0% | -50% |
| Ability to record lectures etc. | 10% | 25% |
| Directed (prioritised) reading lists | -33% | -33% |
| Physically accessible rooms | -11% | -33% |
| Ability to hand in plans instead of essays | 13% | 20% |
| Ability to hand work in digitally | 41% | 47% |
| Provision of materials in advance | -8% | -34% |
| Extended library loans | 32% | 14% |
| Provision of additional task guidance | -31% | -38% |
| Provision of additional writing guidance | -17% | -50% |
| Reserved seating | -13% | -25% |

| Timetabling changes | 20% | 60% |
|---|---|---|
| Changes made to structure/format of supervisions | 11% | -22% |
| OVERALL NET | 1% | -9% |
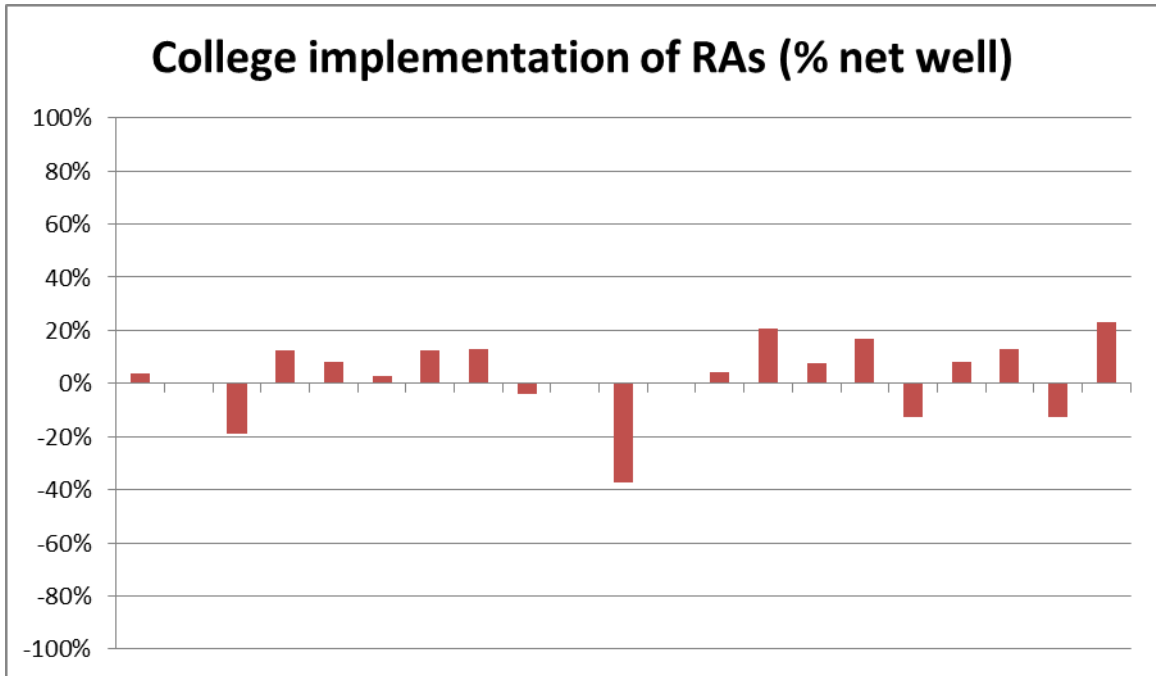


*Each bar here represents a different college*
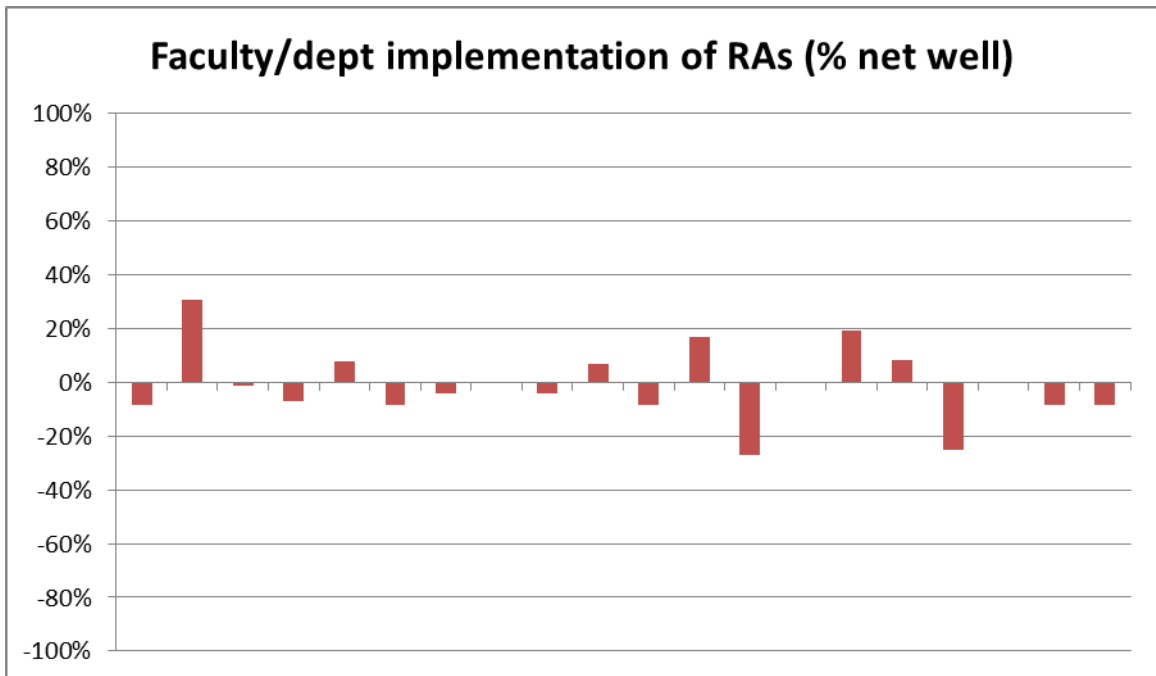


*Each bar here represents a different faculty*

*"Supervisors really ranged in their understanding of me and some of them were not very supportive or accommodating (others were angels though)"*

*"My DoS just about accepted that I be allowed to hand in essay plans instead of essays but she also supported the right of my supervisors (including herself) to deny me a supervision if I had not written an essay, as she said that was where all the learning happened not in the supervision. This was despite the fact that I had always done all the reading and I had anxiety attacks that specifically manifested around writing. I always found supervisions very helpful even where I had not written an essay because I could always discuss the topic and then often gain confidence in my ability to write about it. But my DoS's lack of support caused me much stress during my degree."*

*"Mostly positive down to individuals being understanding rather than any standardised training or guidance as far as I can tell. If I weren't as cognisant of my rights and as able to stand up for myself and request the adjustments I need as I am, this would have been much more difficult."*

*"Lecturers had been asked to provide me with lecture notes in advance of every lecture. Instead they decided they'd only give me notes after any lectures I'd missed at my request. This would frequently take them several days to do meaning I was unable to get the notes before the next lecture and so could not be caught up."*

*"Very dependent upon the individuals involved - clearly no standardised training (or at least no effective standardised training) as I had issues with certain teachers/supervisors in particular more than once."*

*"Generally, the adjustments that weren't implemented as well were ones I had to repeatedly ask for to the point where I gave up writing emails. I felt like a nuisance, that I was asking for special treatment. The faculty never puts lecture slides on Moodle until a few days/weeks after the lecture - I couldn't change that process to have them in advance. It was hard enough to get a copy of them after the lecture."*

Students were also asked which examination adjustments (EAs) they had applied for, and the answers inputted were fed into questions asking how well each EA was implemented a. where it was the responsibility of the student's college, or b. where it was the responsibility of the student's faculty/department.

Averages were taken of the 'net well' (sum of percentage positive and percentage negative responses) of the implementation of a. each EA separately across all

colleges, b. each EA separately across all faculties/departments, c. all EAs on average across each college, and d. all EAs on average across each faculty/department. College and faculty results are not labelled in this report due to a small number of responses from certain colleges/faculties meaning responses might be identifiable. Results below (NB: 'net well' = a percentage between 100% and -100%, making 0% equal a net neutral/average experience across students, positive %s a net positive experience, and negative %s a net negative experience, although the university should of course be aiming for strong or total net positives across the board in order to be providing equal access to disabled students as to their non-disabled peers):

| EXAM ADJUSTMENT | NET WELL WHEN RESPONSIBILITY OF COLLEGE | NET WELL WHEN RESPONSIBILITY OF FAC/DEPT |
|---|---|---|
| Taking exams in college or in faculty | 90% | 65% |
| 1:1 invigilation | 95% | 0% |
| Use of a PC/word processor | 81% | 87% |
| Room accessibility requirements | 57% | 100% |
| Other physical accessibility requirements | 77% | 20% |
| 25% extra time | 81% | 85% |
| More than 25% extra time | 100% | 0% |
| Rest breaks | 76% | 44% |
| Alternative formats (Braille, large print, etc) | 100% | 100% |
| Allowance to take food/drink/meds in | 100% | 50% |
| Alternative modes of assessment instead of an examination | 0% | 100% |
| OVERALL NET | 71% | 54% |
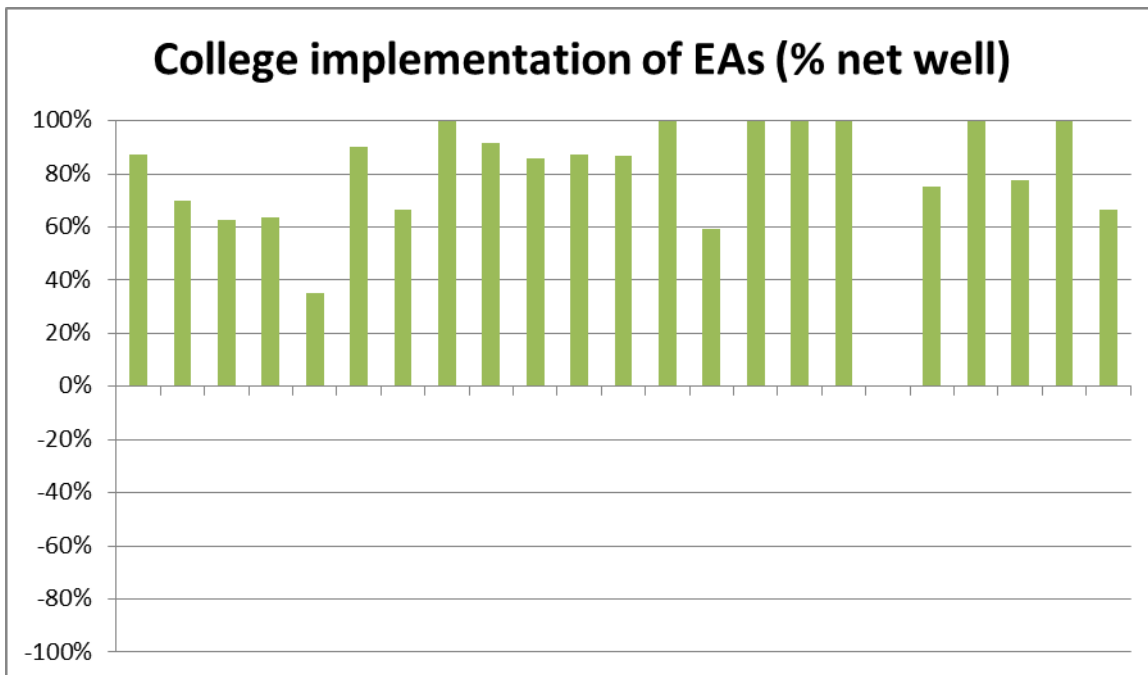
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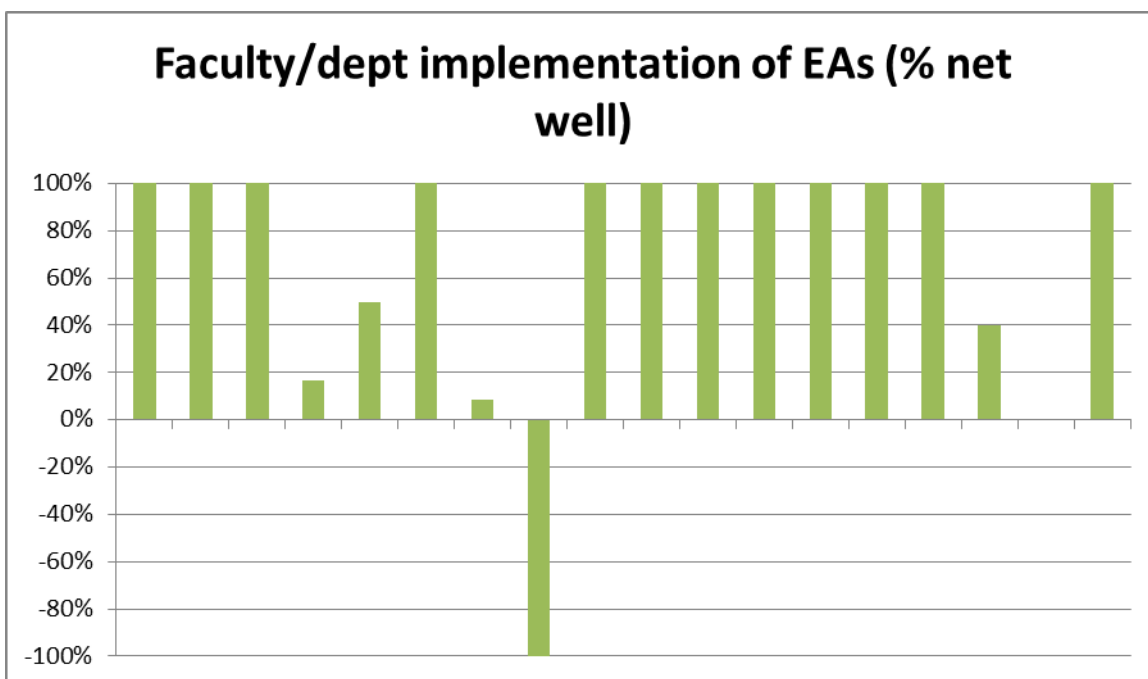


*Each bar here represents a different faculty*

*"College arranged for me once I had received my SSD, very straightforward!"*

*"I got the adjustments I needed but invigilators were a bit baffled by the amount of extra time I have and how to call rest breaks etc"*

*"Well organised for me, the only slight issue was that some invigilators didn't know my exact arrangements so I had to tell them about my rest breaks, but once I had done this it was fine."*

*"For written exams, the faculty wasn't aware I was sitting them in college and invigilators were searching for me (according to friends) which delayed the exam for others. My seat was apparently inaccessible for these exams anyway had I been there. For oral exams which I sit in the faculty, the reading section was fine and the room is accessible, but the examiners of the actual speaking section weren't aware I was in a wheelchair and the room was difficult for me to access, and time had to be spent moving furniture around before my exam could actually start, so it meant I was delayed and stressed"*

The comparison of the results from the RAs and EAs implementation sections of the survey mirrors that of the corresponding application processes (see above). The results for RAs show a categorical failure of the current system of implementing RAs to provide consistently and adequately for disabled students; while some colleges and faculties perform on average better and worse comparatively, not one college or faculty represented in the responses collected is implementing RAs at an average of better than 31% positive, or worse than -38% negative. This consistent inconsistency is believed to be a consequence of the devolved, individual nature of the implementation of most forms of RA for disabled students, which tends to rest on individual teaching staff.

By contrast, the results for EAs show a much more positive average experience across the board than for RAs. This would appear to be due to the more centralised means of implementing EAs, with one person or office ultimately responsible, rather than the experience being devolved to each individual member of teaching staff with whom a student interacts. With the exception of one college from which data was received, and a small number of faculties from which data was received, all student experience was net positive.

RECOMMENDATION 4: AN IMMEDIATE FOCUS ON OVERHAULING THE EXISTING DEVOLVED/INDIVIDUALISED MODEL OF IMPLEMENTATION OF ACADEMIC REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS AND INVESTIGATING WAYS IN WHICH THIS CAN BE SYSTEMATISED ACROSS THE COLLEGIATE UNIVERSITY IN THE IMMEDIATE SHORT TERM; THIS WILL BEGIN WITH THE FIRST REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS FORUM ON MARCH 21ST.

Comparing data of student experience of reasonable adjustments in teaching throughout the year with that of examination adjustments, both at application/initiation and at implementation level, leads to the clear conclusion that a more systematised model of RAs in teaching is urgently necessary. The general move away from an individualised model of adjustments for disabled students towards a more holistic inclusive teaching and learning model will alleviate pressure in the long term, but short term solutions are needed to ensure that current and incoming disabled students are being provided for in line with legal duty.

*Action: CUSU Disabled Students' Officer to set the agenda for the first Reasonable Adjustments Forum with this goal as a guiding framework. All stakeholders to proactively consider this goal alongside longer-term ITL goals when shaping educational policy and practice.*

## RECOMMENDATION 5: THE CREATION OF A REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS WORKING COMMITTEE AT UNIVERSITY LEVEL, REPORTING TO THE GENERAL BOARD EDUCATION COMMITTEE, TO TAKE FORWARD AND IMPLEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS ARISING FROM THE REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS FORUM, AND BRIDGE THE INSTITUTIONAL GAP IN RESPONSIBILITY BETWEEN THE IMMEDIATE SHORT TERM FUTURE AND THE LONGER TERM GOALS OF INCLUSIVE TEACHING AND LEARNING PRACTICES.

As already demonstrated, an immediate investigation into the short-term systematisation of reasonable adjustments – with a view to paving the way for the gradual introduction of inclusive teaching and learning practices and principles across the University – is essential. Compliance with the equality duty for disabled students is an institutional issue, and not something for which responsibility should be delegated in full to already overworked and under resourced services. A centrally situated Working Group, with an expected lifespan of no more than three years, should be created to fulfil this need. This group should include representation from the DRC, CUSU and GU, EQP, CCTL, and representation of management in both colleges and faculties/schools.

*Action: CUSU Disabled Students' Officer, John Harding, and the EQP team to draft terms of reference for a Working Group, to be approved by GBEC.*

## RECOMMENDATION 6: INVESTIGATION INTO POSSIBLE SYSTEMS OF ACCOUNTABILITY, ON BOTH DEPARTMENTAL/COLLEGIATE LEVELS AND A UNIVERSITY-WIDE LEVEL, TO ENSURE THAT STUDENTS WHOSE REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS ARE NOT BEING MET DO NOT FALL THROUGH THE CRACKS (THIS MAY LINK WITH REPORTING SYSTEMS WORK BEING DONE WITHIN THE SUB-COMMITTEE ON ACCESSIBILITY).

Under the current model, the onus is generally on students to self-advocate and to push for the adjustments they need to be put into place. Students are encouraged to contact their DoS or tutor to advocate on their behalf; however, for many students, it is their DoS and/or tutor themselves who is partly or fully responsible for exacerbating the barriers they are facing, and even when a DoS or tutor is understanding and helpful, they often have no real ability to ensure that supervisors, lecturers, etc. are actually putting adjustments in place. Across the board, students are forced to expend unjust amounts of time and energy in order to jump the administrative hurdles to chase up the implementation of their adjustments, often unsuccessfully. This represents an institutional failure to adhere to the equality duty in proactively ensuring parity for disabled students. It is imperative that the University investigate how it can mitigate this situation by putting systems of accountability into place.

*Action: CUSU Disabled Students' Officer, John Harding, and Martin Vinnell and/or the Sub Committee on Accessibility to investigate further the possibility of integrating a University-wide accountability system with the newly in development online reporting system; updates on this to be reported to the new Working Group. CUSU DSO to include a consideration of faculty-level accountability systems in the remit of the first Reasonable Adjustments Forum; GBEC to follow this up in future meetings.*

## SUPPORTING AND TRAINING TEACHING STAFF

New teaching staff across the university are currently trained across online modules, blended learning modules, and in some cases via department-specific training. We asked postgraduate students who teach undergraduates a number of questions on their experience of teaching disabled students, and how well informed and supported they felt in implementing reasonable adjustments for those students. The quantitative data here therefore represents experience in the teaching of undergraduate rather than postgraduate students; however we feel the patterns arising may be equally applied to postgraduate teaching, although further research with disabled graduate students specifically may well be useful in developing next steps.

| Are you aware of what a Student Support Document is? | |
| --- | --- |
| Yes, I am aware of and understand SSDs | 25% |
| I have heard about SSDs, but am not entirely sure how they work or what they're for | 29% |
| I've never heard of SSDs | 44% |
| Other | 2% |

| If you're aware of or have heard about SSDs, how did you find out about them? | |
| --- | --- |
| Personal experience - I or a friend have had or been offered the option of having an SSD as part of our studies | 29% |
| Personal research - I came across SSDs when doing my own research on teaching/supporting students | 16% |
| Informal instruction - someone in my department or college told me about SSDs in reference to my teaching responsibilities | 18% |
| A student sent me an SSD, which was the first time I'd come across one | 5% |
| Someone (e.g. a student's DoS or tutor) sent me an SSD on behalf of a student, which was the first time I'd come across one | 8% |
| Training - I received supervisor training which explained SSDs to me | 8% |
| Other | 16% |

| Have you received supervisor (or other teacher) training which informed you about SSDs? | |
| --- | --- |
| I received training in which SSDs were explained to me | 4% |
| I received training in which SSDs were mentioned, but not fully explained to me | 15% |
| I received training, but SSDs were not mentioned | 56% |
| I did not receive any training | 19% |
| Other | 7% |

| How informed overall do you feel regarding the needs of disabled students you may teach? | | |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Comprehensively informed | 12% | |
| Pretty well informed | 12% | = 24% positive |
| Fairly informed | 17% | = 59% uninformed |
| Not particularly informed | 42% | = 76% average to |
| Entirely uninformed | 17% | uninformed |

*"I think there's a very strong need for training in this to be mandatory, not only for new supervisors but also for current supervisors. It was not discussed at the supervisor training session I attended, and attending this training session is mandatory only once. The training session told me nothing about what an SSD was, what reasonable adjustments might entail, nor how I could implement them. After discovering that two of my students had SSDs I emailed the departmental administrator to check that others did not; I found that in total 4 of my 12 students had SSDs. I emailed the person who had taught the effective undergraduate supervision course to suggest that SSDs should be included in the training; he replied asking me to clarify what SSDs were. When I explained, he said he would not advise asking for these, that he had only had 4 cases of students with special requirements in 15yrs, and that there are some training courses available on specific learning difficulties. I didn't feel that this was a very supportive or helpful response, but also didn't feel that there was anything more I could do/say other than, on a case-by-case basis, to make sure that I do everything I can to find out about and understand the needs of the students I supervise."*

*"The general willingness amongst grad students and desire (particularly speaking from sociology) is absolutely there to provide inclusive teaching. The university needs to provide more training however that ought to be properly paid. Many graduate students work tirelessly for our students and the current pay structures don't reflect this labour. We're lucky in the end if we earn £5 an hour including organising, prep time, reading, marking and*

*delivering the supervision. Yet, we still do it out of a mix of love for the work (and financial necessity). Given the dedication of graduate supervisors, it would be great if the university as a teaching institution would meet us even a small fraction of the way and provide more rigorous and paid training, given their "unique selling point" is research-led teaching in the supervision system renowned for its ability to tailor itself to individual student needs. At the moment that isn't coming from the institution, that's coming from the exploitation of underpaid graduate students."*

*"I would very much like more support from colleges and departments (although that support should be genuinely helpful, rather than placing greater work burdens on teaching staff who are, in many cases, already over-worked and under-paid)."*

*"There needs to be more training on this at a department level -- I didn't receive any and only implemented strategies to proactively learn about adjustments my students needed because I believe this is an important issue."*

*"EDUCATE YOUR STAFF. And provide more obvious guidelines. I have found myself on more than one occasion explaining the Equal Opportunities Act to academic members of staff."*

*"Stop putting obstacles in our way by not training staff at all levels"*
*"mandatory training for all tutors and supervisors so they are aware of their legal requirements to disabled students"*

*"Increase awareness of student with disability accommodations. For example, one lecturer insisted on discussing my disability accommodations before class, in front of a packed lecture hall. Another threatened disciplinary action for audio recording lectures"*

*DRC Annual Student Survey Report, 2016-17*

*"More (preferably compulsory) training for supervisors on the purpose of the SSD, why it's important and why they should actually read it and follow the recommendations, because so many seem to just ignore it even though it's a really useful document."*

*"supervisors don't understand learning difficulties, and don't give the necessary leniencies and extra support."*

*DRC annual student survey report 2018*

## RECOMMENDATION 7: THE INCLUSION OF COMPREHENSIVE TRAINING ON REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS AND SSDS IN ALL EXISTING SUPERVISOR/TEACHER TRAINING.

The existing online modules on the CCTL Moodle (Effective Undergraduate Supervision and Supervising Grads) are under imminent review, and it should therefore be simple to include a section on SSDs and reasonable adjustments/supporting disabled students within the updated versions of these online modules, as well as in the blended learning workshops. A number of departments provide their own teacher training; central guidance on reasonable adjustments and SSDs should therefore be developed and sent out to Directors of Teaching, who can modify it accordingly and ensure it is included in all training, briefings, and departmental handbooks for supervisors (as appropriate). The training for incoming Directors of Studies and Tutors is overseen by Senior Tutors' Committee, and the corresponding online handbooks are maintained by the Education Quality and Policy Office; these bodies should therefore formally acknowledge this recommendation, and commit to a review of their materials in collaboration with CUSU, the DRC, and CCTL, as well as with the forthcoming Working Group (see Recommendation 5).

*Action: CUSU DSO and Education Officer, Graduate Union President, and CCTL to work on a relevant section for the updated online-only and blended learning modules, and on developing a collaborative resource to be sent to Directors of Teaching. STC and EQP to formally recognise this recommendation; CUSU DSO, Mark Wormald, and Alice Benton/EQP to table a review of the inclusion of relevant materials in existing training and handbooks.*

# INCLUSIVE TEACHING AND LEARNING: WHERE ARE WE NOW?

Inclusive teaching and learning principles have started to be embedded in educational strategy at committee level; as well as the 2017 DRC report devoted to ITL, the University Equality & Diversity Strategy 2016-2021 point 3.3 stated a recommendation to "identify and promote best practice for inclusive teaching in the context of the collegiate University to ensure that teaching and learning are accessible to all students," and the currently in development Education Strategy pinpoints diversity and inclusivity among its core values. In line with the DRC report's finding that the buy-in of key senior figures is crucial to successful ITL initiatives, we welcome the inclusion of ITL in these documents; however, we are concerned that an overall lack of specific and measurable objectives is hindering progress. The E&D strategy's recommendation breakdowns, "work with faculties and departments to further embed expectations set out in the Code of Practice for Disabled Students" and "initiate discussions with academics through Education Committee and Senior Tutors' Committee on good practice," are positive overarching targets but lack more specific, measureable outcomes. Other than the Lecture Capture Project, no real discrete and clearly outlined project currently exists to push implementation of any given ITL practice in particular at faculty/departmental level. We feel, given the findings of this report, that such specific projects are necessary to ensure that ITL principles move beyond senior-level culture change into actual practice across the board.

Students were asked whether any existing practices within their faculty/department rendered the need to ask for certain RAs to be put in place unnecessary. Results were inconsistent; in general, where some students noted a certain practice in their department, not all students on the same course did so. Qualitative comments underlined this inconsistency and the fact that many practices vary wildly depending on paper, supervisor, etc.

The existing practices most often cited were a. provision of directed (prioritised) reading lists, and b. ability to hand work in digitally. The former was commonplace (reported by a majority of respondents) in two faculties, present (reported by some but not by a significant majority of respondents) in nine further faculties, and

absent in nine; the latter was commonplace in four faculties, present in thirteen further faculties, and absent in three.

Some students reported that the following practices had aided them by rendering the need to ask for certain RAs unnecessary: lecture capture; physically accessible rooms; ability to hand in plans instead of essays; provision of additional task and/or writing guidance; and actively inclusive format or structure of supervisions. The discrepancy between students in the same faculties regarding these adjustments, as well as the discrepancy between faculties, underscores the inconsistency of inclusive teaching and learning practices dependent on individual supervisors/lecturers/courses/papers/etc. 'Advance provision of materials' was also a selectable option in the survey; no respondent from any faculty reported that this was in place.

The specifics of our survey results do not map exactly onto the results found by the DRC. However, a pattern of inconsistency across the board holds across both sets of results:

| *"Responses to the question 'Are Cambridge's teaching and learning methods inclusive?' showed that there is still room for improvement."* | |
| --- | --- |
| *My course materials are available a sufficient amount of time before my lectures /supervisions* | *20%* |
| *My course materials are presented in an accessible format* | *25%* |
| *My reading list is prioritised in terms of 'core reading' and 'further reading'* | *23%* |
| *My teachers are available to help me with questions / concerns I have about the course material* | *32%* |

It is, moreover, worth highlighting the mixed – and often overall negative – experiences of students who had certain core ITL practices as reasonable adjustments on their SSDs, as further evidence of the inconsistency of ITL provision across the University.

| REASONABLE ADJUSTMENT | NET WELL WHEN RESPONSIBILITY OF COLLEGE | NET WELL WHEN RESPONSIBILITY OF FAC/DEPT |
|---|---|---|
| Directed (prioritised) reading lists | -33% | -33% |
| Physically accessible rooms | -11% | -33% |
| Ability to hand in plans instead of essays | 13% | 20% |
| Ability to hand work in digitally | 41% | 47% |
| Provision of materials in advance | -8% | -34% |

Qualitative comments from existing data, especially the DRC student survey annual reports, can serve as useful starting points to identify specific elements of best practice.

*"My statistics course (SOC5) had all lecture recordings, lecture slides, workshop slides and workshop handouts on moodle, plus reading lists. This has been very helpful for revision and for catching up if i had to miss a lecture."*

*"I would like digital PPTs or Notes to be made available on the day of lectures I can make notes on them using iPad/laptop."*

*"Including resources other than text on reading lists helped me to engage more with the materials, especially one class that included videos alongside books for seminar reading. It takes me a long time to process written text and the video meant I could absorb the information in a varied way, helping to make points in the reading clearer."*

*- DRC student survey report 2018*

RECOMMENDATION 8: COMMITMENT OF GREATER CENTRAL RESOURCE AND COORDINATION TOWARDS THE PROJECT OF IDENTIFYING AND IMPLEMENTING PRACTICAL AND SPECIFIC CHANGES, REFLECTING ON THE CURRENT LECTURE CAPTURE PROJECT MODEL AND ON EXISTING DRC RECOMMENDATIONS, WITHIN EXISTING TEACHING AND LEARNING PROCESSES WHICH WOULD REFLECT THE CENTRAL UNIVERSITY'S COMMITMENT TO INCLUSIVE TEACHING AND LEARNING.

While some of the institutional-level changes, such as embedding a values commitment to ITL within core documents and strategies, are already in progress, the experience at the student end is still patchy and inconsistent, with little established so far in the way of next steps to be taken (other than the rollout of Lecture Capture). Focused resource towards the goal of spreading and systematising best practice is necessary if we are to ensure that students' concerns

are not simply being collected and repeated with little to no central institutional commitment to – and material/financial support put towards – holistic change. This will link in significantly with CCTL's ongoing work.

*Action: CCTL to maintain regular consultation links with CUSU and GU while developing their upcoming inclusive teaching, learning, and curriculum project. Relevant education committees/offices to formally recognise this recommendation and prioritise accordingly in coordination and allocation of resource as well as commitment of value priorities.*

# SUMMARY OF ACTIONS ARISING FROM THIS REPORT

RECOMMENDATION 1

- *EQP and other stakeholders to formally recognise Recommendation 1and the findings of this report in support of John Harding's bid to the Our Cambridge initiative.*
- *John Harding to give progress updates to relevant bodies, including a future Working Group.*

RECOMMENDATION 2

- *CUSU Education Officer to bring Recommendation 2 to Senior Tutors' Education Committee.*
- *STEC to discuss best practice and report back on changes made in their colleges in the following meeting.*

RECOMMENDATION 3

- *CUSU representative to attend Examinations and Assessment Committee in order to propose a review as detailed in Recommendation 3.*

RECOMMENDATION 4

- *CUSU Disabled Students' Officer to set the agenda for the first Reasonable Adjustments Forum with the goal set out in Recommendation 4 as a guiding framework.*
- *All stakeholders to proactively consider the goal set out in Recommendation 4 alongside longer-term ITL goals when shaping educational policy and practice.*

RECOMMENDATION 5

- *CUSU Disabled Students' Officer, John Harding, and the EQP team to draft terms of reference for a Reasonable Adjustments Working Group, to be approved by GBEC.*

RECOMMENDATION 6

- *CUSU Disabled Students' Officer, John Harding, and Martin Vinnell and/or the Sub Committee on Accessibility to investigate further the possibility of integrating a University-wide accountability system with the newly in development online reporting system; updates on this to be reported to the new Working Group.*
- *CUSU DSO to include a consideration of faculty-level accountability systems in the remit of the first Reasonable Adjustments Forum.*
- *GBEC to follow this up in future meetings.*

RECOMMENDATION 7

- *CUSU DSO and Education Officer, Graduate Union President, and CCTL to work on a relevant section for the updated online-only and blended learning modules.*
- *CUSU DSO and Education Officer, Graduate Union President, and CCTL to work on developing a collaborative resource to be sent to Directors of Teaching.*
- *STC and EQP to formally recognise Recommendation 7.*
- *CUSU DSO, Mark Wormald, and Alice Benton/EQP to table a review of the inclusion of relevant materials in existing training and handbooks.*

RECOMMENDATION 8

- *CCTL to maintain regular consultation links with CUSU and GU while developing their upcoming inclusive teaching, learning, and curriculum project.*
- *Relevant education committees/offices to formally recognise Recommendation 8 and the findings of this report, and prioritise accordingly in coordination and allocation of resource as well as commitment of value priorities.*

# METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS DEMOGRAPHICS

Two surveys were created and circulated concurrently through CUSU, GU, and the DSC's communication channels (social media, email bulletin), and once through the DRC mailing list, over the 2018 summer holiday and Michaelmas 2018. The first was for all students who have ever had or requested reasonable adjustments of any kind (via SSD, exam adjustment application, or any other means); the second was for all postgraduate students who have ever taught undergraduate students in any capacity (note that this implies some overlap between respondents of the two surveys, since some postgraduate students who teach will also need or have needed reasonable adjustments themselves).

The 'students' survey received 109 fully completed responses (42 partially completed responses were omitted for ease of data analysis), of which 103 were students who study or studied as undergraduates at Cambridge, 14 as master's students, 7 as PhD students, and 1 as a PGCE student (note that this breakdown adds up to greater than the total as some PG students answered on both their UG and PG experiences). Responses were received from across 27 of the 31 colleges, and across more than 20 faculties/departments. The 103:22 ratio of UG to PG respondents shows a strong bias towards UG respondents (compared to the base DRC proportion of 55% UG 45% PG as of 1/11/18), which was expected due to disproportionate engagement with CUSU by UG students versus PG students. The survey asked respondents to identify via 'select all that apply' tickboxes a) which disability/ies they identified as having, and b) which disability/ies they had disclosed to the University. The categories used were more specific and differently categorised from the HESA Codes used by the DRC; nonetheless, answers seem to map fairly representatively between survey respondent breakdowns and DRC breakdowns, with the main notable difference being that many more survey respondents indicated two or more disabilities than DRC breakdowns would suggest. We believe that this, along with the discrepancy between self-identification and disclosure to the University among students with mental health-related conditions (47% identified vs 35% disclosed for anxiety disorders, 42% identified vs 37% disclosed for mood disorders, 6% identified vs 2% disclosed for eating disorders) accounts for what initially might seem like a significant

overrepresentation of students with mental health problems among survey respondents, in comparison to the DRC base population.

The 'teachers' survey received 64 responses from students who teach for or had taught for all 31 colleges, and at least 19 different faculties/departments. Only postgraduate students who taught undergraduates were surveyed, as opposed to seeking responses from all teaching staff across the University; this was firstly because we had more confidence in our ability as an SU to reach teaching staff who are also students, but also because in surveying PG students who teach we reasoned that we would be most likely to sample the cohorts who have benefited most clearly from any recent developments in the provision of e.g. supervisor training, which would have primarily targeted newly trained supervisors.

All percentage points in this report are rounded to the nearest whole number.

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