

To a degree: a guide for students with specific learning difficulties, long-term medical conditions or impairments



**Geography Discipline Network (GDN)**  
Higher Education Funding Council for England  
*Improving Provision for Disabled Students*

**INCLUSIVE • CURRICULUM • PROJECT**

<[www2.glos.ac.uk/gdn/icp/](http://www2.glos.ac.uk/gdn/icp/)>

The Inclusive Curriculum Project (ICP) aims to develop, disseminate and embed resources for supporting disabled students studying geography, earth and environmental sciences in higher education and to transfer the generic lessons widely to subject-based academics, educational developers, learning support staff and disability advisers. Its primary outputs include:

- the ICP Guide series - Nine complementary guides, aimed primarily at staff in geography, earth and environmental sciences, and one guide aimed at students:
  1. Issues in developing an inclusive curriculum
  2. Developing an inclusive curriculum for students with mobility impairments
  3. Developing an inclusive curriculum for visually disabled students
  4. Developing an inclusive curriculum for students with hearing impairments
  5. Developing an inclusive curriculum for a) students with mental health issues; b) students with Asperger Syndrome
  6. Developing an inclusive curriculum for students with dyslexia or hidden disabilities
  7. Developing an inclusive curriculum: a guide for heads of departments and course leaders
  8. Developing an inclusive curriculum: a guide for lecturers
  9. Developing an inclusive curriculum: a guide for departmental support staff (i.e. administrators and technicians)
  10. To a Degree: a guide for students with specific learning difficulties, long-term medical conditions or impairments
- a student survey report: 'The experience of disabled students in geography, earth and environmental sciences of teaching, learning and assessment in HE';
- a set of case studies on the experience of disabled students of teaching, learning and assessment in HE, and the experience of departments and disability advisory units of supporting the learning of disabled students.

All of these outputs are available via the GDN website at <[www2.glos.ac.uk/gdn/icp/](http://www2.glos.ac.uk/gdn/icp/)>. Both the Guide series and the survey report are also available in hard copy format via the GDN Publications Office. A complete set of the ICP Guides will be distributed in hard copy to all Higher Education institutions in England and Northern Ireland at the end of the project.

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<[www2.glos.ac.uk/gdn](http://www2.glos.ac.uk/gdn)>

To a degree: a guide for students with specific learning difficulties, long-term medical conditions or impairments

Gordon Clark, Terry Wareham and Rosemary Turner  
Lancaster University

Series edited by Michele Hills and Mick Healey  
University of Gloucestershire

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## Acknowledgements

We gratefully acknowledge the inputs to this guide from our Inclusive Curriculum Project colleagues in Cheltenham and across the UK, and from its referees, including the students who gave of their time to comment.



## Editors' Preface

This guide is one of a series of ten published by the Geography Discipline Network (GDN) as part of the **GDN Inclusive Curriculum Project** (ICP), a three-year initiative running from January 2003 to December 2005, funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England's *Improving Provision for Disabled Students* programme.

The ICP Guide series is written primarily for academics, educational developers, learning support staff and disability advisers supporting disabled students studying geography, earth and environmental sciences in higher education. In addition, one guide is aimed at helping disabled students to optimise their experience of higher education. The project builds on the success of an earlier HEFCE-funded GDN disability project, *Providing Learning Support for Disabled Students Undertaking Fieldwork and Related Activities*. This project, unbeknown to us at the time, broke new ground. Adams (2002), the Director of the National Disability Team (NDT), subsequently stated that:

*'The Geography Discipline Network project was, for a variety of reasons, an extremely important project:*

- a. It was one of the first disability-funded projects that exclusively addressed issues concerned with teaching, learning and assessment.*
- b. It was led by academic staff in partnership with disability practitioners – this kind of partnership has signalled a real shift in thinking regarding disability issues.'*

The project, as is the current one, was undertaken by the Geography Discipline Network, a consortium of old and new universities based at the University of Gloucestershire, whose aim is to research, develop and disseminate good learning and teaching practices in geography and related disciplines.

At the beginning of the Inclusive Curriculum Project, we wanted to capture the student voice. Accordingly, we undertook a survey of disabled students studying geography, earth and environmental sciences in the consortium institutions (Hall & Healey, 2004). The survey was supplemented by case studies of the learning experiences of disabled students and the different ways in which departments and tutors have supported them, which are also available on the GDN website <[www2.glos.ac.uk/gdn/icp/](http://www2.glos.ac.uk/gdn/icp/)>.

Awareness of the need to develop inclusive practices, which provide equal opportunities for disabled students in various elements of their courses, is spreading throughout Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the UK. This has been stimulated by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) *Code of Practice - Students with Disabilities*, published in 2000, and the extension of the Disability

Discrimination Act (1995) to education through the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (2001), later incorporated into Part IV of the DDA and the Disability Discrimination Act (2005).

The ICP project focuses on the fundamental principle of inclusivity, whilst addressing the day-to-day practical realities of supporting students with a wide range of specific physical and mental difficulties. Although the series is written from a disciplinary perspective and some guide titles address particular areas of disability, the project provides guidance which offers transferable lessons for what is good practice throughout teaching and learning in higher education.

Despite using medical categories for describing impairments, we are committed to emphasising a social model to exploring disability, which examines the barriers to disabled students which society creates. The distinction between the medical and social model is important because it shifts the responsibility for improving the provision for disabled students from the individuals themselves to society, and the strategies and policies that higher education institutions and their constituent departments develop and enact. However, we support recent modifications to the social model which emphasise the reality of the lived experience of disabled people, and we are sympathetic to calls to construct a more adequate social theory of disability which recognises that everyone is impaired (Shakespeare & Watson, 2002). The focus of this series of guides is on identifying the barriers that disabled students face to participating fully in the curriculum and the ways in which institutions, departments and tutors can help to reduce or overcome them.

The GDN ICP team comprises a well established group of discipline-based academics, educational developers and disability advisers. Each guide has been written by a specialist author or team of authors, based on outline content and structure discussed by the team as a whole, and has been reviewed in detail by nominated representatives from the team. Each draft was also circulated to the whole team and a panel of external advisers for comment before final editing.

Rather than adopt an imposed standardised format across the series, each authoring team was given freedom to develop their guide in the way they felt most appropriate. This also applied to the much-exercised question of appropriate language. Editing, therefore, has been intentionally a 'light touch' process, so individual guides in the series may vary from time to time in relation to language protocols adopted. In terms of layout and presentation for both printed and web-based versions of the guides, however, the editing team has attempted to follow nationally-established accessibility guidelines as set out, for example, by the National Disability Team <[www.natdisteam.ac.uk/Accessible%20printed%20documents.doc](http://www.natdisteam.ac.uk/Accessible%20printed%20documents.doc)> and TechDis <[www.techdis.ac.uk/index.php?p=9\\_4](http://www.techdis.ac.uk/index.php?p=9_4)>.

The project was undertaken in consultation with the Higher Education Academy Subject Centre for Geography Earth and Environmental Sciences (GEES). It has the strong support of the main professional associations and representatives of Heads of Department in the geography, earth and environmental sciences sector:

- the Royal Geographical Society with the Institute of British Geographers (RGS-IBG)
- the Geological Society (GeoSoc)
- the Conference of Heads of Department in Geography in Higher Education Institutions (CHDGHE)
- the Committee of Heads of Environmental Sciences (CHES)
- the Institution of Environmental Sciences (IES)
- the Committee of Heads of University Geoscience Departments (CHUGD).

We would like to thank the many individuals who have contributed to the ICP project and to making this series of guides possible. In particular, we recommend to our readers the stalwarts of the Geography Discipline Network project team, many of whom have over many years uncomplainingly devoted more of their time than we could reasonably expect to producing high quality materials and sound advice. We would also like to acknowledge the project Advisory Panel, the National Disability Team and the numerous colleagues who helped to keep the project on track and provided additional resources when necessary.

The net outcome of recent quality assurance and legislative changes is that HEIs need to treat disability issues in a more structured and transparent way. In particular, we may expect to see a relative shift of emphasis from issues of recruitment and physical access to issues of parity of the learning experience that disabled students receive. The implication of this shift is that disability issues 'cannot remain closed within a student services arena but must become part of the mainstream learning and teaching debate' (Adams & Brown, 2000, p.8). But there is an opportunity here as well as a challenge. As we become more sensitive to the diversity of student needs, we can adjust how we teach and facilitate learning in ways which will benefit all our students.

Michele Hills and Mick Healey

University of Gloucestershire  
October 2005

## References

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Available at: <[www2.glos.ac.uk/gdn/icp/survey.htm](http://www2.glos.ac.uk/gdn/icp/survey.htm)>.

Shakespeare, T. & Watson, N. (2002) The social model of disability: an outdated ideology? *Research in Social Science and Disability*, 2, pp.9-28.

## Words and language

In this guide we have tried to use language sensitively. We accept that the opportunities open to you could be enhanced if better provision were made. We are aware, however, of clear divisions among and beyond those immediately concerned as to the most appropriate words to use when discussing these topics. We have tried to follow current generally accepted practice; if you feel that we have failed in some respects, we can only apologise.

## Choosing what to read

You can read this guide from start to finish, or you might find it more useful to dip into the areas that are of particular interest. There will be some sections which will be less relevant to you than others, so feel free to ignore these and go straight to the sections that interest you the most. The index will help you locate the general advice on types of teaching, learning and assessment, and the sections specifically written for those with particular learning difficulties, medical conditions or impairments.



# 1 Jo's story

Jo has come through her schooling successfully and done quite well in her A level examinations. She has a couple of impairments that mean she has had to work a little harder than most to make it through. But she has supportive parents, brothers and friends who help her out with her studies and with day-to-day life. She also belongs to a local club for people with her disability where she feels at home and accepted without the need to be constantly explaining what the 'matter' with her is.

When she chose her degree course she wanted to do something that would build on her A levels and also offer her a possible route to a good job, so she looked at courses that offered both physical and human geography. At the interview she made it clear what she would need in terms of both study and personal support, and asked about the arrangements for students. She was offered a place, and as soon as she heard that her grades were good enough to be accepted she got straight back in touch with the university to set up a plan of action. She had already asked around her friends at the club about what being at university might be like and discovered that it was going to be quite different from living at home and going to a school with staff who had known her for years. At university she would be on her own!

Jo drew up a list of things she would need to know about and facilities she would require. But she also made a list of things about herself that would give her a head-start over other students. For a start, she knew exactly which tasks gave her difficulties and which did not. She had also developed a range of skills for dealing with people who were not used to disabilities, particularly ones like hers that were not obvious and thus tended to baffle people, who might think she was being deliberately 'difficult'.

In her first week at university Jo met up with her university's Disability Adviser, who had already set about informing her tutors about her needs, helped by Jo's list. She also discovered that there were Disabled Students' Allowances which would help her buy some specialist equipment she would need. At her interview she had already established how the teaching was done, and so she had a good idea what she might need from her tutors. The fieldwork elements of the course had particularly worried her, but she had been assured that there was a range of possibilities available and so she would be able to select those fieldwork activities in which she could participate fully and safely.

The first few weeks of the first semester were not entirely plain sailing, though. She found that she had to keep explaining about herself to fellow students, and some of the tutors had not yet appreciated fully the information they had

been sent by the Disability Adviser. She also discovered just how exhausting it is adapting to a completely new environment, making friends, and coping with looking after herself. She missed her family and `phoned and texted home regularly. It took a while to find her way round, and the signposting on the campus was not always helpful. But then she noticed that other students were also struggling with their new lives, so she decided not to beat herself up about it.

When the first pieces of coursework were required she panicked a bit, but a conversation with her tutor and some other students on her corridor helped a lot, and the specialist software on her computer was very helpful – much more up-to-date than what she had been able to use at school.

Jo's transition from school to university was not without difficulties, but she **managed it!** The difficulties were minimised with a little foresight and planning, good communication with the university, and getting support, information and advice from wherever it could be found. Jo established herself at the start of her new degree quite successfully.

*'Jo' is not a single student. All the elements of Jo's story have been taken from the experiences of several students we have known.*

## 2 Rationale

There are many sources of information and support for students beginning degree courses, even specialist ones for those doing geography, environmental and earth sciences – for example, Clark & Wareham (2003) and Kneale (2003). And there is plenty of advice for students with disabilities from such bodies as Skill <[www.skill.org.uk](http://www.skill.org.uk)> and TechDis <[www.techdis.ac.uk](http://www.techdis.ac.uk)>. What we are trying to do here, though, is to bring together information and advice which takes account of both your impairment and your choice of subject at degree level. In this way we hope to provide you with a one-stop-shop where you can get to grips with the opportunities university life can give you, the best ways of dealing with the new challenges and excitements, and how to cope with some of the difficulties many students face.

Of course, university life has many similarities for most students. This guide is for the aspects where changes to how things are done will help you. In practice many of these changes will help every student give of their best at university.

Our assumption throughout is that you are the expert on your own abilities and disabilities. What will probably help you most is to know as much as you can about what study and life at university hold in store for you, what the implications of different teaching methods might be for your personal and academic needs and where you can go for help and information. We will take you through the process of studying for a degree, from the changes you will encounter on entering university through the learning, teaching and assessment methods and on to the point where you will be planning your future as a graduate.

In the United Kingdom in 2001/02, 4.6 per cent of students said they had some sort of disability, and of these 38 per cent noted their dyslexia, 19 per cent had an unseen disability and 9 per cent had more than one disability (Gravestock (2004) personal communication). A survey was conducted in 2003 of 75 students with impairments at five UK departments of geography, earth and environmental sciences and related disciplines (Hall & Healey (2004)). Around 55 per cent were students with dyslexia, 19 per cent had an unseen disability, 13 per cent had multiple disabilities and small numbers had other impairments. These figures are similar to those nationally. Among the various forms of teaching they commented on, only lectures caused more than half these students difficulties. One in five students reported difficulties with fieldwork, and for two in five their dissertation and other forms of independent fieldwork raised concerns. By and large, assessment (your work that is marked) was a

more difficult area – between a third and two thirds of these students identified issues with various forms of assessment. Clearly, students with different forms and degrees of impairment will react differently to the university experience.

# 3 Moving on into higher education

## Introduction

You probably know that study at university is a much more independent experience than being at school or college and that you will need to get used to working with less guidance than before. Sorting out the right kind of study equipment or learning support for your studies will also probably involve a different way of working from what you have experienced before.

If you are moving away from home to go to university, there may be other things you need to consider, for example, the accessibility of your room, transport arrangements, finding your way around the campus, personal care, shopping, cooking or getting your laundry done. Whatever is important for you needs sorting out well in advance.

Some students find the transition into higher education daunting, particularly if they are mature students. Sometimes the element of fieldwork in geography, earth and environmental sciences can be a source of anxiety. It need not be so: the experiences can be planned so that everyone is included and can learn their subject.

The key to all this is **good planning done in advance**. This chapter looks at some of the ways you can do this.

## Disclosing information about your impairment

What is helpful for universities to know is what kind of support you are likely to need, both for study and for daily living, as well as the name of your impairment, medical condition or learning difficulty. You may not be able to predict all the relevant issues, as these may depend on the particular course or campus you are studying on, but some guidance for the university is always useful.

You may not be sure whether to disclose an impairment on the application form. The decision is up to you; but in many cases universities cannot provide the support you may need right away unless they know about your impairment. Remember too that the law is on your side – see the next section below. Acknowledging your impairment may also make you eligible for extra grants (in the UK the Disabled Students' Allowances – DSA) which can pay for equipment or personal support for study. Details about DSA are available at [www.dfes.gov.uk/studentsupport/students](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/studentsupport/students). Disabled Students' Allowances are also available for many postgraduates though funding arrangements vary.

For details in the UK see SKILL's information sheet on *Postgraduate Education for Disabled Students* at <[www.skill.org.uk/info/infosheets.asp](http://www.skill.org.uk/info/infosheets.asp)>.

*'As a dyslexic student, I'd strongly advise you to make sure staff know about your dyslexia. Let them know how it impacts on your studying, then you can get proper support.'*

*'When I came for interview, I also met up with the Disability Adviser. This was really encouraging because she was able to identify all the support I required. Then she highlighted all the support the university could offer.'*

## It's OK to ask for help

Getting to be an independent learner in a new environment can be a complex business. You do not necessarily have to do it completely on your own. Sometimes the most mature response to a new situation is to work out carefully what support you need and then to ask for it as clearly as possible.

Universities and colleges of higher education have been improving their services for students, particularly in the last five years, with special projects, quality assurance procedures and responses to new legislation. The Disability Discrimination Act in the UK specifically makes it unlawful to discriminate against students on grounds of disability; and places a duty on educational institutions to provide reasonable adjustments to ensure no student is substantially disadvantaged.

So you can expect to be listened to and have reasonable adaptations made to make sure you can study as far as possible on equal terms with all other students.

*'On gaining a university place, I was contacted by the Disability Adviser. She quickly arranged for letters to be sent to my department letting them know I was disabled and what extra help I needed.'*

## Tips for good planning when you are applying for higher education

1. Get in touch early with the university's Disability Adviser and admissions tutor in the academic department you have applied to. Why not visit the university for an open day or attend any 'taster sessions' that are offered?

In many cases it will be important to have a three-way conversation to discuss what support you may need. The academic tutor knows about the course (including off-campus activities); the Disability Adviser knows about obtaining equipment and other support; and you know about you, your impairment, and what arrangements have been helpful in the past. All three sets of information are crucial to work out the best support arrangements for

you. The Disability Adviser will only disclose information about you with your permission.

*'The Disability Adviser has helped me sort out a new statement of needs and supported my application for DSA to buy a laptop.'*

2. Alert your local education authority that you may apply for Disabled Students' Allowances to cover the cost of equipment or services. You will need their authorisation before you can get a DSA assessment. The local education authority will tell you where your nearest assessment centre is and how you can go about booking an assessment.
3. Try and get advice about having a DSA assessment of your support needs at a recognised Assessment Centre as early as possible, so you can get off to a good start with any equipment or services you need right at the beginning of your course. Make sure training on any new equipment or software is included in your support package. Try to get the training organised before your course starts.

*'I've used Disabled Students' Allowances to buy a mini-disc recorder for lectures and a laptop with specialist software. They've made all the difference.'*

4. If you are likely to need personal support for day-to-day needs (personal care, shopping, laundry), contact your local Social Services Department for an assessment. It is particularly important to think carefully about what you may need if you are moving away from home for the first time, and your family has been giving you informal support up till now – any medication or access to a doctor or counsellor, for example.
5. Think about your own range of strengths and weaknesses.
6. Get to know your fellow students on the course, and help them to get to know you. Helping each other, discussing your assignments and sharing notes and readings are all good ways of getting more out of your time at university.

**ACTIVITY**

What would you say is your greatest strength as a student about to embark on a university course?

How might you make best use of this strength?

If you think you may have a weakness as a student which might hold you back at university, what is it and how might you reduce its effects, or work around it?

You might like to consider these questions in general, first of all. Then think whether there are strengths or weaknesses closely linked to your impairment. For example, some disabled students have particular expertise in lateral thinking, time management, general planning, or particular kinds of concentration or memory, which are directly connected to their experience of impairment.

**In summary**

- Get in touch with the university's Disability Adviser. Visit the university.
- Get advice on assessment for Disabled Students' Allowances (UK).
- Apply for Disabled Students' Allowances (UK).
- Plan the key points for your daily living arrangements.
- Think about your strengths and weaknesses.
- Get to know your tutor and fellow students.

# 4 Getting off to a good start

## Introduction

What is important to get you off to a good start will depend on your personality, your approach to learning, the details of your course, your impairment and many other factors. You may find it useful to consider some of the points raised here and work out which ones are relevant for you.

## Plan, plan, plan

Many students find that there are extra jobs to do when they arrive at university. That is why it is important to be ultra-organised, getting as much done as possible before you arrive, and building in time to do these additional tasks around the Freshers' programme organised by your university.

For example, you may want to spend time on:

- finding your way around the campus;
- getting proficient at using new equipment;
- getting to know new helpers, and how to work with them.

*'A week or so into my first term, I finally got the cheque for my DSA, so I could go out and buy a computer that I can properly access. I was so relieved.'*

*'I had to get much more independent and organise my own care after having had it done for me for years. It was quite stressful, but I suppose it got easier after a while, and it got clearer what systems worked and which didn't.'*

## Key contacts

You may also want to make contact with key university staff – your tutor or the Disability Adviser can arrange this. You and your tutor will probably need to make the first move in arranging appointments with these people; that may be different from how things were at school or college.

*'At college, they organised a pre-booked weekly session with a learning support tutor. When I got to Uni., I had to sort all that out for myself.'*

These key people may include the following.

- The university's Disability Adviser

S/he is likely to be your best contact point for information and problem solving in the early stages of your course. S/he will be particularly useful in making sure your Disabled Students' Allowances come through, that your equipment arrives or support workers are recruited. It is also worth checking with her/him early on what the system is for having alternative examination arrangements, especially if you have mid-module tests soon after your course starts.

- The learning support or dyslexia tutor

S/he may be able to organise one-to-one sessions to help with approaches to long reading lists, strategies for essay or report writing, or extra information about the technicalities of writing at higher education level, such as referencing and plagiarism (using someone else's writing without proper acknowledgement). Make sure you are clear about the kind of help the tutor can offer and what s/he will expect you to do for yourself. This may be different from your previous school or college.

- Specialist library staff

S/he will probably be able to offer additional help with learning to use the library system, or with finding books from your reading list.

- Specialist computer or information services staff

S/he may be able to help with computer glitches, or help you sort out training for any specialist software.

- Personal assistants or helpers

If you have secured a personal assistant or helper for your daily living arrangements or to help with study (e.g. a note taker) do discuss with them the fine detail of what you need and what they can offer. An agreed way of working will make your life easier and theirs.

- Buddy

If your university operates a buddy system – where a current student helps a newcomer learn the ropes of university life – you might like to consider whether you should ask the university to assign you a student who shares your learning difficulty or impairment.

And finally, do make friends with your **departmental secretary** who is likely to have a vast body of helpful knowledge about how things actually work in your department.

### ACTIVITY

Make a list of the key jobs you'll need to do in your first week at university.

Use the university's prospectus or website to find contact details for any staff with whom you'll need to make an appointment soon after you arrive.

## Rights and responsibilities

If you have been active in explaining your situation to your department and Disability Adviser, you can expect:

- a written, agreed description of your support needs;
- that teaching and other staff will have been told about your requirements;
- that they will respond to and meet your needs.

*'Because of my mental health problem, they set up a system so I could study part-time.'*

*'My tutor was so reassuring - he just said to let him know if I needed help in any way.'*

*'They printed off large-print copies of all the overhead projector slides from the lecture – and gave me the next week's slides in advance. Some practical demonstrators gradually got better at describing what they were doing when I couldn't see it so well.'*

If this is not happening, do have a word directly with the member of staff concerned. If there are no improvements, contact the senior person in your department responsible for first-year students, or the university's Disability Adviser. You have a right to reasonable adjustments, and should not feel that you are being a nuisance by asking for them.

You may find that you are doing laboratory or fieldwork early in your course. Just ask for a familiarisation tour or chat before these start. If there are health or safety issues for you because of your impairment or medical condition, it is important you are active in letting staff know about these.

*'The lab. technician who organised the detail of fieldwork trips made sure I had lowland projects to do and didn't have to walk far or high up on hillsides.'*

Unfortunately, a course sometimes does not work out as you hope. If things

are going badly because your department has not made the requested arrangements for you and gentle persuasion has not improved things, do use your institution's complaints procedures to alert your department about any shortcomings. Don't suffer in silence. Of course, if things are going well, it helps to make positive comments too!

*'There's no point in just putting up with things when the arrangements were supposed to be in place. If things don't improve, I know who to see to get things sorted.'*

As you move on to new stages of your course, see how you can use your experience to suggest to your tutors ways that will work for you to meet the requirements of your course. Your experience about your impairment is a key factor.

*'The person with the problem will very often be the person who will know best how to solve it. You should be offered all the options and have a say in which one is best for you.'*

Do take an active part in telling people what works well for you.

# 5 Learning, teaching and assessment in geography, earth and environmental sciences

In this chapter we give some advice on how to get the most from the various forms of teaching and learning you will meet while at university, and how to perform as well as you can in the different types of assessment.

Most of this advice applies equally to undergraduate and postgraduate students whenever they encounter these forms of teaching, learning and assessment. We shall point out areas where the postgraduate experience might differ from the undergraduate one.

Four key points are worth making here.

1. Tutors can help and make alternative arrangements only if you have told them about yourself.
2. Alternative arrangements may take some time to set up, so planning and discussing things **early** is always helpful.
3. Reasonable alternative arrangements will be granted on the basis of what you need, not on what you want.
4. The ideas in this guide are based on the experience of previous students. This advice may or may not suit you. You have to consider and select what best meets **your** needs.

We have organised the advice in two ways.

First, we give some **general advice** on each type of teaching and assessment, and this should be relevant for all students (undergraduate and postgraduate, full time and part time) whether they have any specific learning difficulty or impairment or none. So, if you are interested in:

- **lectures**, turn to page 14;
- **tutorials and seminars**, page 15;
- **fieldwork**, page 15;
- **laboratory and practical classes and online learning**, page 16;
- **dissertations, projects and work placements**, page 17;
- **examinations**, page 18;
- **essays**, page 19;

- **field and laboratory notebooks**, page 20;
- **dissertations and projects – their assessment**, page 20;
- **oral presentations**, page 21.

Secondly, we give **specific advice** on each type of teaching and assessment for undergraduates and postgraduates with each type of learning difficulty or impairment. So if you are:

- **a student with dyslexia or other hidden impairment**, turn to page 22;
- **visually impaired**, page 30;
- **hearing impaired**, page 39;
- **a student with mobility impairment**, page 47;
- **a student with a mental health condition**, page 54.

## LECTURES

You will be expected to attend a lot of lectures – perhaps 200-250 in your first year alone. It helps to appreciate what the lecturers are trying to do when they give a lecture. A lecture is designed to:

- give you an overview of the structure of a part of your subject;
- give you key facts (dates, places, people, formulae, statistics);
- show you how to develop an argument in that topic;
- perhaps challenge the status quo of the current orthodoxy;
- get you enthusiastic about the topic.

There is a lot to do in a 50-minute lecture. You have to listen carefully, pick out the key points and note them down accurately. And do so even if some of your lecturers are not as inherently interesting to listen to as others. Some lectures may include more active periods when you will be answering questions, or discussing a topic with your neighbour.

Further details about lectures in general can be found in *Geography@University* (G. Clark & T. Wareham, Sage, 2003, chapter 4).

**Students with dyslexia and other hidden impairments**, turn to page 22;

**Visually impaired students**, turn to page 30;

**Hearing impaired students**, turn to page 39;

**Students with mobility impairments**, turn to page 47;

**Students with mental health conditions**, turn to page 54.

## TUTORIALS AND SEMINARS

Whereas lectures are large gatherings of students, tutorials may comprise only 6-12, and seminars around 25. Some universities have a separate strand of small-group teaching called tutorials. In others, small groups for student discussion or practical tasks may be formed within a 2-3 hour block of teaching, a practical class or during fieldwork.

The aim is for you to participate. You might be asked to take part in a debate, make a presentation, report on a small study you have carried out, or comment on some published work in your subject. The more you contribute to the tutorial, the more you will get out of it. You may (deliberately) be required to work in groups, as preparation for your career in which your employer might value a proven ability to be a good team member. You will be more obviously active in tutorials and seminars than in lectures. You will pick up new skills in public speaking, self-confidence and managing your time, as you learn from yourself, your fellow students and the tutor. The latter is perhaps the member of staff whom you will get to know best, and s/he will be happy to help you with any personal difficulties over your studies. So, get to know your tutor!

A lot of tutorial work is often done in groups, so tutorials tend to have a kind of buddy system built in for all students.

In some seminars or tutorials you may have to give an oral presentation, and students often find this a source of considerable anxiety. Check the section on oral presentations if this affects you.

Further details about tutorials and seminars can be found in *Geography@University* (G. Clark & T. Wareham, Sage, 2003, chapter 4).

**Students with dyslexia and other hidden impairments**, turn to page 23;

**Visually impaired students**, turn to page 31;

**Hearing impaired students**, turn to page 39;

**Students with mobility impairments**, turn to page 47;

**Students with mental health conditions**, turn to page 54.

## FIELDWORK

Fieldwork is an important part of geography, earth and environmental sciences. This is because all three subjects are about how the real world works, in theory and practice, and such understanding requires both scientific principles and their practical verification or critique – the latter comes from field studies.

Fieldwork also trains you in how to carry out research, on however small a scale, and that helps you develop into an inquisitive, competent researcher, when, for example, you have to complete your own dissertation (see the section 'Dissertations, projects and work placements' on page 17). So during fieldwork, you learn about places, specific skills, how to structure a field project, and how to cope with practical difficulties in the field. The key questions during any fieldwork are these:

- What is this and where is it?
- What is this like?
- What makes this place different?
- How has this place changed?
- Why is this place changing?

Always follow the safety rules laid down for the fieldwork; they are there to protect you.

Further details about fieldwork in general can be found in *Geography@University* (G. Clark & T. Wareham, Sage, 2003, chapter 4).

**Students with dyslexia and other hidden impairments**, turn to page 23;

**Visually impaired students**, turn to page 31;

**Hearing impaired students**, turn to page 40;

**Students with mobility impairments**, turn to page 48;

**Students with mental health conditions**, turn to page 54.

## LABORATORY AND PRACTICAL CLASSES AND ONLINE LEARNING

Practical classes held in laboratories are mostly concerned with teaching analytical techniques and applying these techniques to samples of materials collected in the field. Practicals can also be based around computers, and these are usually about analysing data and displaying it, as in a Geographical Information System. The focus in practical classes is about learning to carry out procedures carefully, precisely and successfully. These skills may turn out to be useful for your own dissertation towards the end of your degree course. Learning a new skill is important; learning how to learn any new skill is even more important. So the key first step is for you to be absolutely clear that you know what you are being asked to do; if not, ask for clarification. And always follow the safety rules laid down for the task.

Online learning, like practicals, is very practical and is based around the internet. It is a self-managed activity, and that is helpful for many students.

It might involve researching a topic using the web. You might participate in a web-based discussion group. You could be asked to produce a web poster or submit your coursework over the internet. Lecture notes might be found on a website. Even fieldwork can be simulated to some extent using the web. You may be able to access journal articles on the web and of course email keeps you in touch with your tutors and fellow students. But remember that the internet contains reliable and unreliable material; the onus is on you to tell them apart.

Further details about laboratory and practical classes and online learning in general can be found in *Geography@University* (G. Clark & T. Wareham, Sage, 2003, chapter 4).

**Students with dyslexia and other hidden impairments**, turn to page 24;

**Visually impaired students**, turn to page 33;

**Hearing impaired students**, turn to page 42;

**Students with mobility impairments**, turn to page 49;

**Students with mental health conditions**, turn to page 55.

## DISSERTATIONS, PROJECTS AND WORK PLACEMENTS

In geography, earth and environmental sciences, a dissertation (a large research project carried out entirely by you) is often the crowning point of your studies. You think up the project, design and plan it, read the background literature on the topic, carry out the fieldwork, analyse the material and write it up. The resulting report may be 7,000-15,000 words long. In geology, a major field mapping exercise is often undertaken. Tasks like these are a test of you as an all-round student. Projects tend to be shorter and less all-embracing, but the idea of a comprehensive test of you as a student is still there.

From your point of view, the dissertation topic needs to be interesting, have the potential to be creative and clever, and be feasible and safe to carry out. Bold and imaginative approaches to novel topics are better than standard approaches to hackneyed ones.

The key point in most dissertations is time management. Be organised. Plan backwards from the date the dissertation has to be submitted to get the key dates by when each stage of the research programme needs to have been completed.

But remember also to enjoy your dissertation; it is the part of your studies where you are most in control of what you do.

All dissertation plans need to be scrutinised by you and your supervisor to

ensure that all reasonable precautions have been taken to ensure your safety in the field and laboratory.

Work placements are available at some universities. These involve students spending time with an employer outside the university, working on a project agreed between you, the employer and your department. There can be considerable benefit to students from this insight into and experience of 'the world of work'. But careful planning is needed with all placements if they are to be a success. DSA should be available to help support you during placements which are an official part of your degree scheme; your university may also be able to provide additional help.

Further details about dissertations in general can be found in *Geography@University* (G. Clark & T. Wareham, Sage, 2003, chapter 4).

**Students with dyslexia and other hidden impairments**, turn to page 25;

**Visually impaired students**, turn to page 34;

**Hearing impaired students**, turn to page 43;

**Students with mobility impairments**, turn to page 50;

**Students with mental health conditions**, turn to page 56.

## EXAMINATIONS

There are many types of examination but most involve a timetabled period when students individually have to answer questions they probably have not seen before. These seek to test their understanding of a module they have just completed. Staff often like examinations because each student has the same amount of time to complete their answer (though some students with impairments may get more time); staff can verify who wrote the answer; and students have to revise the whole course to prepare for the examination. The key skill for examination success is quickness of mind in assembling and writing your answer.

The most common reasons for doing badly in examinations are these:

- inadequate revision, left to the last minute;
- not answering the exact question set;
- a poor structure to the answer;
- limited knowledge of the subject;
- excessive factual knowledge;
- too short an answer;

- waffle / irrelevant material for the question.

The key period in any examination is the first five minutes spent on each answer. During this time you should plan the answer and make notes on it. You can practise that first five minutes of planning during your revision period before the examination, by trying to answer previous years' questions.

Further general advice on examinations can be found in *Geography@University* (G. Clark & T. Wareham, Sage, 2003, Chapter 5).

**Students with dyslexia and other hidden impairments**, turn to page 26;

**Visually impaired students**, turn to page 36;

**Hearing impaired students**, turn to page 44;

**Students with mobility impairments**, turn to page 51;

**Students with mental health conditions**, turn to page 57.

## ESSAYS

If an examination tests your broad understanding of the whole module, an essay lets you go into more depth on a section of the syllabus. Essays are usually 1,500-5,000 words long. The task is to synthesise the material in books and journal articles into a clear account of some topic or area of debate. The key word in the essay title is usually 'discuss' or 'evaluate' or 'assess'. The tutor wants you not just to give the 'facts' but also to make sense of the material and give your judgment of the state of play on the given topic.

So, reading the references and pulling out just the key points is a vital skill for good essay writing. Similarly, the essay-planning stage is critical; set out the steps in your argument. Get your writing up to standard – correct grammar, spelling and paragraphing. Finally, remember to give your references correctly and to cite all your sources, which will avoid the charge of plagiarism.

Start work on each essay early; last-minute essays are rarely good. A first and second draft of an essay will often give you the time to refine your ideas and polish your text. When you get the essay back, learn from the mark and comments so your next essay will be better.

Further general advice on essays can be found in *Geography@University* (G. Clark & T. Wareham, Sage, 2003, Chapter 5).

**Students with dyslexia and other hidden impairments**, turn to page 27;

**Visually impaired students**, turn to page 36;

**Hearing impaired students**, turn to page 45;

**Students with mobility impairments,** turn to page 52;

**Students with mental health conditions,** turn to page 58.

## FIELD AND LABORATORY NOTEBOOKS

A good notebook from a field course or laboratory class will be concise, thorough, neat, clear and accurate. Diagrams, graphs and photographs may help. A notebook is your record of precisely what you did and observed. Your notes will also include your comments and conclusions on what you did and observed. You may have to complete the field notebook in the field or laboratory, or you may have some time afterwards to finish your report.

Further general advice on field and laboratory notebooks can be found in *Geography@University* (G. Clark & T. Wareham, Sage, 2003, Chapter 5).

**Students with dyslexia and other hidden impairments,** turn to page 28;

**Visually impaired students,** turn to page 37;

**Hearing impaired students,** turn to page 45;

**Students with mobility impairments,** turn to page 52;

**Students with mental health conditions,** turn to page 59.

## DISSERTATIONS AND PROJECTS – THEIR ASSESSMENT

When staff are marking dissertations they are usually looking for:

- a feasible topic that is interesting and even novel;
- a clear structure to the work and the dissertation itself;
- clear aims and research questions;
- a thorough literature review setting out the state of our current understanding of the topic;
- appropriate research methods carried out correctly – perhaps a sequence of methods, not just one method;
- correct and effective analysis of the material collected;
- a conclusion based on and supported fully by the research results which discusses the findings and their implications;
- good writing and graphical presentation.

That range of assessment criteria means you have to work steadily over a long period on your dissertation.

Further general advice on dissertations and projects can be found in *Geography@University* (G. Clark & T. Wareham, Sage, 2003, Chapter 5).

**Students with dyslexia and other hidden impairments**, turn to page 29;

**Visually impaired students**, turn to page 38;

**Hearing impaired students**, turn to page 45;

**Students with mobility impairments**, turn to page 53;

**Students with mental health conditions**, turn to page 59.

## ORAL PRESENTATIONS

Most departments will expect their students to be able to communicate well orally. Employers will want good debaters as well as good writers. Giving a talk needs careful preparation. The words you will speak should be written down, and a handout, OHTs or PowerPoint display needs to be constructed. The actual presentation will benefit from practice, running through the words and displays.

Remember your audience; speak clearly and not too quickly; talk to them and not to your notes or the PowerPoint screen. Make the topic sound interesting. A spoken presentation needs shorter sentences than an essay meant to be read.

In short, try to be like your ideal lecturer and not your worst one.

Further general advice on oral presentations can be found in *Geography@University* (G. Clark & T. Wareham, Sage, 2003, Chapter 5).

**Students with dyslexia and other hidden impairments**, turn to page 29;

**Visually impaired students**, turn to page 38;

**Hearing impaired students**, turn to page 45;

**Students with mobility impairments**, turn to page 53;

**Students with mental health conditions**, turn to page 60.

## STUDENTS WITH DYSLEXIA AND OTHER HIDDEN IMPAIRMENTS

### Lectures

For general information on lectures, turn to page 14.

Lectures are complex – you have to listen to the lecturer, read displays from overhead transparencies or PowerPoint and take your own notes as a record of the event. You have the right to expect the university to make reasonable adaptations to its teaching methods to allow you to participate fully. If reading and note taking are rather slower for you than for some others, useful solutions include the following:

- photocopy the lecture notes of a fellow student and use these to fill out your own notes;
- tape record the lecture – you should be allowed to, but ask the lecturer first – and try to use batteries (rather than a mains lead) to avoid trailing leads and finding power points. Afterwards you can play the recording back and add to your notes (and keep a good index of all your tapes);
- use whatever is available in terms of handouts, lecture synopses or website notes to expand on what you remember of what the lecturer said;
- remind the lecturer gently if there is a certain typeface (say, Arial, Helvetica or Comic Sans) and point size (e.g. 12 point text) which you find easier to read on handouts or PowerPoint;
- ask for additional lecture notes from the lecturer;
- ask for lecture notes on coloured paper if that helps you;
- get the list of lecture readings beforehand and start it early;
- if it is a very long list of reading, you can ask the lecturer to pick out the key items to read first;
- try out a notetaker machine such as AlphaSmart or any laptop if that helps give you clearer notes;
- ask your Disability Adviser to organise a helper to take notes for you during lectures (your DSA could pay for this);
- try always to reduce lectures to their key points – bullet points in fact – fewer words, more understanding.

If you have a medical condition that might cause an unexpected crisis (epilepsy, asthma or diabetes, for example) it might be in your interest if someone else in

the lecture theatre (either the tutor or a fellow student) knows about it. Then, if necessary, appropriate action can be taken.

## Tutorials and seminars

For general information on tutorials and seminars, turn to page 15.

It is less easy to specify beforehand what will happen in tutorials; the range of activities is much bigger. However the essence of tutorials is more oral – debate and discussion. The prospect of joining in the discussion may be daunting to you (as it is to many students) and if this is so, let your tutor know so that you are given time to settle in before being expected to participate in the discussion. If you are asked to read a journal article for next week's tutorial, see if you can get advanced warning and an early copy of it (on coloured paper or enlarged or in a different typeface) if that will help you. Let your tutor know if reading something out loud might be problematic for you. Often in tutorials students are asked to work in teams so you will have a buddy whose notes you can look over afterwards if you need time to reinforce what happened in the tutorial.

Tutorials are also a good opportunity for the whole group to discuss the materials presented in the lectures. This could be very useful if your lecture notes are not as clear as you would wish. Again, bullet points of key issues are the ideal summary from any tutorial.

As ever, do ensure that you get clear what the task is for each meeting. If the tutor could let everyone know on paper exactly what they are required to do, that would help the whole group as well as you.

If the tutorial involves some fieldwork, do read that section of this guide for further details.

If you have a medical condition that might cause an unexpected crisis (epilepsy, asthma or diabetes, for example) it might be in your interest if someone else in the tutorial room (either the tutor or a fellow student) knows about it. Then, if necessary, appropriate action can be taken.

## Fieldwork

For general information on fieldwork, turn to page 15.

Like all students, you need to get information about the field visit or course early, so you can plan ahead. Knowing early what should happen will often reduce anxieties. If there is preparatory reading to be done, try to get the items early and start on them in good time.

During a field course there may be briefings (which will seem very like a

lecture) and debriefings (which will seem like tutorials). Try to ensure that you use the methods of coping we suggested for lectures and tutorials, so you get the full benefit from the fieldwork. If the field course is overseas, you and the other students may have to cope with a foreign language.

Do keep checking the arrangements during the field course (e.g. where and when to meet, what to do) so you and your group of students do not get lost literally or metaphorically. A detailed handout is invaluable.

Planning ahead is particularly important with fieldwork. If you have a medical condition that is episodic or might be aggravated by the fieldwork, it is essential that you discuss this with the tutor well before you go, especially if the field trip lasts several days, if it is overseas or in a remote area. The tutor needs to be informed of your condition, what could happen, and be assured that you have all the appropriate medication to control the situation. If there are things you cannot or really should not do (e.g. walking long distances, going up mountains or being in a dusty atmosphere), the tutor needs to know, so s/he can make alternative arrangements. If the worst happens and you need to be taken to hospital, the tutor has to build this into the planning so you are not left far from help and certainly are never alone. This need not alter the fieldwork and training you receive; it just modifies it in case your condition worsens and ensures you can be kept safe. If you have particular dietary requirements or need a single room, this too needs to be communicated to the tutor and the accommodation provider. Remember to pace yourself if stamina is a factor for you.

### Laboratory and practical classes and online learning

For general information on laboratory and practical classes and online learning, turn to page 16.

In laboratory classes you are often required to carry out precisely defined tasks (for safety reasons or because there is a single correct procedure). In such cases it is very useful if you can get detailed instructions on paper ahead of time so you can familiarise yourself with what to do. And keep checking with the tutor or fellow students (you will often be working in a group) that you are on track.

It may be that minor adaptations will help you – perhaps a coloured filter on a microscope to make viewing easier or extra supports if equipment might get knocked.

If you are carrying out a lot of work for a computer practical class, it may be useful to learn how to alter the appearance of the computer screen so you can read the text more easily – a different typeface or point size or colours of text or background. If you do not know how to do this on the local machines, ask for advice from either your Disability Adviser or the computer service. If you

have a timed computer exercise and this poses problems, you could ask for a self-paced version.

If you have a medical condition that might cause an unexpected crisis (epilepsy, asthma or diabetes, for example) it might be in your interest if someone else in the laboratory (either the tutor or a fellow student) knows about it. Then, if necessary, appropriate action can be taken.

## Dissertations, projects and work placements

For general information on dissertations, projects and work placements, turn to page 17.

It is perhaps best to think of your dissertation as a series of phases, each with a distinctive type of work.

- At the start is the phase of attending briefing lectures to tell you how to produce a dissertation. The notes on 'Lectures' will help you here.
- The next phase is for you to devise a topic. As well as other issues you need to think how you can exploit your strengths through your choice of topic, and also how to avoid inappropriate or risky topics.
- Then there will be a period of background reading during which you will synthesise what others have written about your topic. For advice on this see the section on 'Essays'.
- Fieldwork will follow as you collect your own original data. The advice in the section on 'Fieldwork' will help here.
- Then a period of analysis will let you understand the information you have collected. The notes on 'Laboratory and practical classes and online learning' will be a guide to safe activity in this phase.
- Finally, you will have to write up the dissertation, and the ideas on 'Essays' should help you avoid the obvious pitfalls.

Every student will have to complete a risk assessment of their dissertation proposal, and for this you and your supervisor ought to reflect on whether anything about your medical condition makes your topic particularly risky for you. The ready availability of your medication may be an important issue, as might the physical demands of the work. A helper in the field with you could be both an added protection in the event of difficulty and a way of speeding the fieldwork with an extra pair of hands.

In some universities, you may be able to carry out a work placement with a 'real world' employer. If this attracts you, you need to prepare carefully with your department and potential employer. Both universities and employers now

have legal duties to provide reasonable adjustments in work placements. It would be reasonable for the placement provider to ask you about this (once they have been made aware of your impairment) and perhaps to arrange a visit in advance to work out what adjustments need to be made.

So, for both practical and legal reasons, you should give your work placement host or employer any information about your impairment which affects the way you work (for example, additional equipment or use of a helper); or which has implications for your health and safety or that of any of the people working around you.

You will need to get clear information from your employer or tutor about the tasks you will be expected to carry out, so you can work out what equipment or support you will need. Bear in mind that there is a different culture about what is acceptable. Whereas on campus you may be able to tape record a lecture, at a place of work taping a client meeting may not be allowed because of confidentiality issues. You should agree on adjustments to the work environment and any necessary safety precautions there (e.g. emergency evacuation).

## Examinations

For general information on examinations, turn to page 18.

Examinations are stressful occasions for any student and they are time-limited events. However, there is now much more flexibility over examinations. Here are some alterations to the standard examination procedures, which you could ask for:

- more time to complete the examination;
- a separate room to accommodate any special equipment you might use (e.g. an adapted computer);
- the examination printed on coloured paper or in larger or different type which is more readable;
- a reader or scribe to help;
- an oral examination instead of a written one, as a way of testing your understanding of the topic.

Do discuss your requirements with the department early in the session, so that they can liaise with your university's central administration.

Should you have to miss an examination because of an immovable medical appointment or a bout of illness, do let your department have the details and back-up confirmation as soon as possible.

If you have a medical condition that might cause an unexpected crisis (epilepsy, asthma or diabetes, for example) it might be in your interest if someone else in the examination room (perhaps an invigilator or tutor) knows about it. Then, if necessary, appropriate action can be taken.

Try and get some verbal feedback on your examination performance, so you will be clearer about how to do even better next time.

## Essays

For general information on essays, turn to page 19.

Essays necessarily involve a great deal of reading and writing whose quality will be assessed. How can you cope? Here are some ideas that other students have found beneficial; check them out and use whichever suit you. Or ask your Disability Adviser if s/he thinks they might be useful.

- There may be a support group in the university which can help students improve their reading and writing skills; why not join it and see if this helps you?
- Help may be available within your university library to retrieve texts and possibly convert them to other formats.
- If you suspect you may be dyslexic but are unsure, your Disability Adviser could arrange for a diagnostic assessment though this may take some weeks to complete. This might guide you towards some of the new technologies which might help you.
- Ask the tutor to pick out the key items to minimise reading time.
- A coloured transparency placed over the pages of books and journals could help you read more easily.
- Your Disability Adviser may be able to organise someone to talk you through the references you need to read, or tape record the items. Your DSA might help pay for this.
- A CCTV system might alter the text so that you can read it more easily than from the original printed page. A DSA assessment would show whether this might suit you.
- A scanner linked to a computer with speech software could 'read' the item for you and speak it out. Again, a DSA assessment would show whether this would suit you.
- When you make notes on the readings, focus your notes down to a few key bullet points. Sometimes visual tools like mind-mapping or spider diagrams might help sort out your ideas.

- The use of spelling and grammar checkers on your computer can help improve your writing but a real person to proof-read it would be better still. Make sure the software is set to UK spelling.
- The thesaurus facility on your computer may help suggest alternative words if you are stuck for the right one.
- When composing the essay, you might find that speech recognition software (though still not 100 per cent accurate) allows you to get your words onto paper more quickly than typing them all in at a keyboard. However, this software is not easy or quick to master.
- You may find that 'writing' your essay on a computer is made easier if you alter the default appearance of text on the screen by, for example, using a different typeface, enlarging the text or changing the colours of the text and/or the background. If you are unsure how to make these changes, do ask a friend or your local computer service for advice.
- If reading and writing take you longer, a request for an extension to the essay deadline will be useful. Essay writing should not become unreasonably stressful.
- Your Disability Adviser may be able to supply stickers to alert markers to your dyslexia.
- If writing essays is slow for you, it might be useful to enquire if some of your written assignments could be replaced by oral tests of your knowledge and abilities.
- When you get your essay back, ask for some verbal feedback on it, so you have a clear idea of how to improve next time...
- ...and finally, start essays early to allow time for thinking and revision and avoid the end-of term bunching of essay deadlines.

### Field and laboratory notebooks

For general information on field and laboratory notebooks, turn to page 20.

Providing a field or laboratory notebook should be less demanding than an essay because these forms of assessment typically require less writing and are more geared to brevity, using notes and bullet points to express just the key issues, results or conclusions. The work leading up to both sorts of notebook is usually done in conjunction with at least one other student so you can compare ideas before you write up your joint work. Check with your tutor that your notebook is developing along the right lines. The advice on 'Essays' may be useful in this context. If however you should experience difficulties, discuss the

problem with your tutor.

## Dissertations and projects – their assessment

For general information on the assessment of dissertations and projects, turn to page 20.

The advice for producing a 7,000-15,000-word dissertation is similar to that for essays – check that section for tips. In brief, make use of whatever computer technologies (altering screen appearance, scanners, speech-recognition software, spellcheckers) and proof-readers have worked well for you during the year in terms of essays. Your Disability Adviser and professional assessors should be able to advise on what might suit you. If you have a strong visual sense or creative side, do give that free rein when preparing your dissertation. Add diagrams or photographs where these make your point more effectively than words. Choosing a topic with a visual element might be better than one strongly based on text.

Do make use of spell-checkers, fellow students or your supervisor or tutor to ensure that the dissertation or project you submit does you justice.

An extension to the deadline might be a valid request if your dyslexia has necessarily slowed your work or if a sudden medical deterioration has knocked back your timetabling beyond your control. Do tell your department about what happened; they can take the circumstances into account during the assessment of your work.

Finally, if preparing a long dissertation is simply not possible even with an extension, then the possibility of the department examining your dissertation or project by an oral examination would be an idea worth exploring.

## Oral presentations

For general information on oral presentations, turn to page 21.

Giving an oral presentation is stressful; if this impairs your ability to speak clearly, you could tape record your talk in your own time and play the recording to the class. Alternatively, you could have your script read out by someone else. You might also consider using PowerPoint throughout. If your spelling is wobbly, then do get someone to proof-read your handout, overhead transparencies or PowerPoint display.

More generally, if written assessments are highly problematic for you, then you might ask the department to use oral tests of your ability in preference to written ones.

## VISUALLY IMPAIRED STUDENTS

### Lectures

For general information on lectures, turn to page 14.

To gain most benefit from a lecture you need to take notes on what the lecturer has said. This task can be minimised by asking for lecture notes to be made available as paper handouts or on a website. Better still, they might be supplied in the format you can use most easily (e.g. larger print, non-white paper, or as a digital file). Also helpful is to be allowed to tape-record lectures (you should be, but ask the lecturer first) – a battery-operated tape recorder will avoid trailing leads and finding power points. Recording lectures may be problematic if personal details are being discussed, but this is likely to be a rare occurrence. Remember to index the tapes clearly as you will accumulate a lot of them. Also helpful is the ability to sit in the middle of a row at the front of the lecture theatre (or wherever is best for you). Alternatively, a helper might take notes for you while you listen. Your university's Disability Adviser will be able to arrange such assistance. If there is a guest lecturer, you might like to remind your tutor of your requirements.

Of course, if a lecture is more than just spoken words – perhaps it includes slides, a PowerPoint display, overhead transparencies or a video – then the tutor needs to be reminded to explain in words (in the lecture, on a handout or as a tape recording) describing what is on display.

If taking notes (by you or a helper) needs some specialist note-taking equipment, then your Disabled Students' Allowances can be used to purchase this. Additional advice on equipment and software compatible with the university's facilities will be available from your Disability Adviser, computer services, the Skill website <[www.skill.org.uk](http://www.skill.org.uk)> or the TechDis website <[www.techdis.ac.uk](http://www.techdis.ac.uk)>.

It may be useful to get the list of lecture readings in advance and start on it early. You might also ask the lecturer to identify key items and read these first. You may need to liaise with your Disability Adviser or the Library to ensure the readings are in the right format for you when you need the material (e.g. in Braille or as an audio recording).

If the venue of the lecture is altered, you need to remind staff to give you some advance warning, especially if the route to the new venue is unfamiliar to you or your guide dog – a notice on a noticeboard will not be enough.

It will help all parties if you can discuss your particular needs as early as possible with your Disability Adviser and your tutors, so appropriate arrangements can be put in place in good time.

## Tutorials and seminars

For general information on tutorials and seminars, turn to page 15.

As tutorials are held in a variety of smaller rooms it is important to check where these are and that, if you have a guide dog, it too can be accommodated in the room.

You may find that tutorials are easier in many ways, as the essence of the tutorial is more oral – debate and discussion, rather than reading or note taking. But you might find it helpful to have advance notice of the topic for discussion and you must ensure that if a task is set for the next tutorial (reading an article, for example) that you can get a copy in a form you can use (e.g. large print or Braille), perhaps ahead of the rest of the class.

In discussions, body language is important. It gives visual clues as to when someone has stopped talking or is keen to make a contribution. When you want to intervene in a discussion, perhaps raise a hand or lean forward so the others know to 'let you in'. The whole group needs some time at the start to learn the etiquette of tutorials and seminars – when to talk and when to listen.

## Fieldwork

For general information on fieldwork, turn to page 15.

Fieldwork can be daunting for all students, but you will be able to cope. It takes you away from the familiar and safe environment of the campus.

The key point for all students and tutors, and also for you, is to plan early and in detail. Get as much information as possible in advance, including any readings, maps and handouts, and plan ahead. This particularly applies if you are going abroad or to a physically demanding place like mountains or coasts. Here is a checklist of things to plan for:

- the travel arrangements to and within the field area for you and your dog (if you have one);
- the welfare of your dog (if you have one) including food and wet-weather clothing;
- accommodation arrangements including the bedroom (and the space for any equipment you need), toilets and eating areas, and your privacy;
- personal insurance cover for any equipment;
- your Personal Egress Plans from unfamiliar buildings and the field (it may help if your helper or one or two fellow students know about this);

- what you can do safely in the field;
- who will help you;
- remember to keep checking the arrangements during the course (e.g. when and where to meet);

...and if going overseas...

- the compatibility of electrical supplies overseas with any assistive technologies you use;
- you will have the additional challenge of a foreign language, as will all your colleagues;
- inoculations for you and your dog (with its pet passport).

So, the support mechanisms you have refined for life at university have to be replicated and transferred to a field area.

Fortunately, all fieldwork for any student is now subject to rigorous risk assessments. Field courses tend to have several staff in attendance and any student could be your fieldwork buddy as you will all be working in groups anyway.

You need to plan for lectures (see that section) in which you will be briefed and need to take notes. When actually in the field, the aim is for you to do the same tasks as the other students and in the same places as them. A discussion beforehand with your tutor will be helpful to check the arrangements. If that really is not possible logistically, the task might be adapted or the work location moved so you can do something similar to the rest of the class. If none of these is possible, staff may devise a special university-based field course to be created for you, perhaps involving the web or library resources or work to be carried out on campus. A really useful device for fieldwork is the tactile map or diagram.

Although you will be working away from your normal support mechanisms, a combination of the following should allow you to do much the same work as the rest of the class:

- working in teams;
- additional briefings;
- pre-printed recording sheets to minimise writing while in the field;
- a buddy to take notes and describe the scene;
- extra time for activities;
- a mobile `phone or pager (for alerts);

- a tape recorder;
- perhaps some changes of venue;
- the presentation of your field results in an alternative format.

The advice at the start – plan early – is obviously critical, and it is the staff's job to do most of that planning in conjunction with you.

### Laboratory and practical classes and online learning

For general information on laboratory and practical classes and online learning, turn to page 16.

Practical classes, whether in scientific or computer laboratories, present a new set of challenges for visually impaired students. The emphasis is on watching demonstrations, seeing equipment and carrying out procedures in a standard and precise fashion. The fact that much laboratory work is carried out in teams is helpful, as is the risk assessment of each procedure for all the students.

To start, check you know how to get to, into and around the laboratory and where your guide dog (if you have one) will go. You should be offered an individual orientation tour to check the laboratory and discuss any special safety issues. Also, ask about your Personal Egress Plan from the laboratory in the event of an emergency.

Secondly, ask if simple adaptations could be made to equipment (for example, guides, a talking tape measure, armrests and equipment with audible rather than visual output, a coloured filter on a microscope or a switch to dim the light and reduce glare). Increasingly, digital equipment is becoming available and some new equipment is less visually taxing, with speech-synthesised read-outs. If a lot of microscope work is involved, perhaps a video camera could be used to display the microscope images on a television screen or your computer. If you might inadvertently spill liquids, arrange to wear gloves and protective clothing. These could allow you to do practicals much as the other students do.

Much laboratory work is done by teams of students, so having a buddy to take notes, operate equipment and ensure safety will not stand out as unusual. If your Disability Adviser has arranged helpers for you, they need to know where and when your laboratory classes will be held. They could observe and describe events and procedures for you, as could a fellow student. Also, check whether they can stay for the whole of the practical, which is usually longer than lectures and tutorials.

Advance information from your tutor about the task set for the practical class could allow you to prepare in advance. You could also check beforehand on procedures and any safety issues related to the experiment.

Computer laboratory classes, working generally with PCs, the web and virtual learning environments can all present particular problems for visually impaired students. You may gain from having special software or a screen reader. Computer classes are normally overwhelmingly visual mediums as they use printed and on-screen output and a keyboard for input. Again, forward planning is always useful. If you need extra time to complete an exercise, ask your tutor. Similarly, if timed computer exercises are set, you can always request a self-paced version. There may be separate computer facilities you can use, taking the time you need. Your tutor can advise you.

The saving grace is that once material is in a digital format it becomes very flexible and can be manipulated for other output mediums. So, lecture notes could be given to you as an electronic file. Text (for example, a handout, journal article or book) could be digitised via a scanner. Voice recognition software on a PC can digitise spoken input. Material on a web page can be captured digitally, and digital tape recorders and personal organisers are very useful. Braille keyboards and key caps are available. Special readers can enlarge text and show it in a variety of colours of text and background, and a polarised filter can reduce screen glare. You may also find different background colours and typefaces on PCs or handouts helpful; let the staff know what is best for you.

Technical advice on the wide range of assistive equipment (and it is a rapidly changing scene) should be available from your local Disability Adviser and computer service. Your Disabled Students' Allowances can be used to buy new equipment or upgrade what you already have. One has to bear in mind, however, that none of this equipment or software is foolproof despite huge technical strides in recent years. The web is still a difficult medium for blind and visually impaired students, though progress is being made with accessible web designs. You need also to check early on, through your local Disability Adviser, that the university's software and equipment is compatible with any you already use.

### Dissertations, projects and work placements

For general information on dissertations, projects and work placements, turn to page 17.

It is perhaps best to think of a dissertation or project as a sequence of learning situations.

- There will be lectures during which the purpose of a dissertation is explained (see the section on 'Lectures').
- There will also be discussion sessions, perhaps with groups of students and one-to-one supervision with your tutor (see the section on 'Tutorials').

- There will be some background research for you to do on your chosen topic, using the library and the web (see the section on 'Essays').
- Then you will carry out your own original field research to collect information (see the section on 'Fieldwork').
- These data will have to be analysed in some way, so a period of laboratory work will be needed (see the 'Laboratory and practical classes and online learning').
- Finally you will have to write it all up (see 'Essays').
- You may at some point in the process have to give an oral presentation about your topic or results, so consult the section on 'Oral presentations'.

If you need any equipment for your dissertation, your Disabled Students' Allowances can be used to help acquire it. If you are carrying out your dissertation during a summer vacation, do check with your supervisor that all the term-time facilities and support you have used will also be available over the summer. You might, for example, need a helper with your fieldwork. For all students, a mobile 'phone is a particularly useful device for support and for safety reasons when on fieldwork, though geographical coverage in rural areas may be patchy. The advantage of doing a dissertation is that you are in charge of what you study. So you can follow your own interests and consider feasibility right from the start of your planning stage. If you want to, you can steer clear of visually intensive topics or visually challenging locations. You will have to complete a risk assessment form to evaluate how safe your research proposal is – as will all the other students, of course. This is your chance to explore issues of resources and assistance with your supervisor and the Disability Adviser. Timetabling the work is important to ensure you can meet the deadline, but if you do run into difficulties, ask your tutor about the possibility of an extension.

In some universities, you may be able to carry out a work placement with a 'real world' employer. If this attracts you, you need to prepare carefully with your department and potential employer. Both universities and employers now have legal duties to provide reasonable adjustments in work placements. It would be reasonable for the placement provider to ask you about this (once they have been made aware of your impairment) and perhaps to arrange a visit in advance to work out what adjustments need to be made and to orientate yourself to the unfamiliar environment.

So, for both practical and legal reasons, you should give your work placement host or employer any information about your impairment which affects the way you work (for example, additional equipment or use of a helper); or which has implications for your health and safety or that of any of the people working around you.

You will need to get clear information from your employer about the tasks you will be expected to carry out, so you can work out what equipment or support you will need. Bear in mind that there is a different culture about what is acceptable. Whereas on campus you may be able to tape record a lecture, at a place of work taping a client meeting may not be allowed because of confidentiality issues. You should agree on adjustments to the work environment and any necessary safety precautions there (e.g. emergency evacuation).

Finally, if you are a research student doing a higher degree, all this advice applies, and on a bigger scale. However, you will have your own supervisor(s) who can talk plans through with you.

## Examinations

For general information on examinations, turn to page 18.

What does a blind or visually impaired student need to complete an examination on an even playing field with fully sighted students? Probably more time will be needed whatever management strategy you use. A separate room may be useful if you use special equipment or have a helper who writes for you or if you have a guide dog. Check out any unfamiliar venue in advance. Some discussions in good time with your department will help them liaise with the central administration of your university to set up such fair arrangements.

You may use a scribe, as perhaps you have already done when preparing essays during the session. You may prefer to tape record your answers, the examination paper being in Braille. Or a computer with software already trained to recognise your voice could be used. Alternatively, you may just need the examination paper enlarged, or printed on a different typeface or onto coloured paper. You may wish to investigate the possibility of substituting an oral examination for a written one.

The examination may take the form of a multiple-choice test on a printed sheet where you mark a very small box in pencil to indicate which you think is the right answer to the question. An online version of this may be easier for you to give accurate answers. Your tutor can help arrange this.

## Essays

For general information on essays, turn to page 19.

The essay (or any other form of extended writing) falls into two phases.

The first phase is reading what others have written about the topic – many essays require a synthesis of 'the literature'. There is usually the possibility of help within your university library to retrieve appropriate texts. These texts could be read to you by helpers; your Disability Adviser can organise them

for you. PDFAloud and Powertalk are software which read computer text out loud. You then take notes on a braille or as tape recordings. Alternatively the text might be converted into Braille, but this can take some time; the Disability Adviser can arrange this. You might use a scanner to digitise the text. However, a flatbed scanner can be a slow machine to use for a lot of pages in a bound volume. You may save time if you have a little help to find the start and finish places for your reading (a given chapter, for example). Equally slow are enlarging photocopiers. Your university may have a CCTV system which will enlarge and reverse the colours of text and background. If you are working from material on the screen of a computer (text from your tutor or material on the web), then screen-to-speech software may be very useful, though it can struggle to cope with complex screen layouts and pictures/graphics.

Your university should be able to give you access to such equipment. If you want to buy such equipment, your Disabled Students' Allowances may help you.

Clearly 'reading the literature' is going to take you longer than it does sighted students, so it would be sensible to ask your tutor, firstly, to pick out the key texts and passages, and secondly, to give you the reading list as soon as possible (even before the course has started) so you can get ahead.

The second phase is to 'write the essay' having done the reading and thought about the topic. Voice recognition software will convert your dictation into printable text for your tutor to read, though because such software is not 100 per cent accurate, a sighted proof-reader should check the text. You may need to ask your tutor for extra time to allow for this. Using a less sophisticated approach, a helper could input the essay at your dictation. You could enquire if you could submit the essay as a tape recording and you might ask the tutor to record his/her comments and the mark on the tape.

It may be that you can use a computer much as sighted people do (without the need for a special Braille keyboard, for example). You could alter the size, typeface and colour of the text and background on the PC's screen or use a polarising filter or an alternative to the conventional mouse. Ask for help if any of these options seems feasible but you are not sure how to achieve it.

## Field and laboratory notebooks

For general information on field and laboratory notebooks, turn to page 20.

If you have been able to participate in field courses, laboratory classes or computer practicals, then a notebook describing what you did, your results and conclusions should be relatively straightforward. Use whatever means you normally employ for producing essays. A helper might write up the notes at your dictation, or you could submit a tape-recorded account. You might use an adapted computer to input text from speech or a personal organiser. If you do

encounter any difficulties, then discuss them with your tutor. You could ask, for example, if you could submit a 'video notebook' showing you doing the task and with your spoken commentary on the methods and results.

### Dissertations and projects – their assessment

For general information on the assessment of dissertations and projects, turn to page 20.

In this section we are concerned with how you actually produce your dissertation and how it will be assessed, rather than with the planning and fieldwork for the project.

Given that a dissertation may be 7,000-15,000 words long, it may not be unreasonable for you to ask for an extended deadline to submit the dissertation if the writing process necessarily takes you longer than other students. However, extensions of time cannot be open-ended if you are to finish your degree along with your fellow students. Whatever methods you have used already to produce essays can be used again for your dissertation, though you may have to check whether equipment and helpers will be as available over the summer vacation when you might be working on your dissertation as they were in term time.

It may be that one of the criteria for assessing dissertations in your department is the use of visual or graphic materials. If this might necessarily count against you, you might want to have a word with your supervisor to determine what is expected and what accommodations can be made.

More radically, you might want to argue for a different type of dissertation, which is less text based. It might be tape-recorded or your work might be assessed in part or whole by an oral examination rather than wholly by a long report. If such options appeal to you, discuss them early on with your supervisor.

### Oral presentations

For general information on oral presentations, turn to page 21.

If you have to give an oral presentation, you need to plan what you are going to say. Using a PC or tape, you can work on that. You might want to prepare some visual illustrations for the talk – a handout, PowerPoint display or overhead transparencies. You can decide on the text; but using the services of a sighted person might be the quickest way to format it for the audience.

When it comes to actually giving the presentation, a familiarisation tour of the place from which you will talk will be useful, including practising using the equipment. Of course, all students will benefit from doing this. An assistant to switch equipment on and off might be a useful role for one of your helpers. A dummy run, if you could arrange one, might boost your confidence.

## HEARING IMPAIRED STUDENTS

### Lectures

For general information on lectures, turn to page 14.

To maximise the benefit from your lectures you need to get good notes from what the lecturer said. Do you want to use any of your Disabled Students' Allowances to buy equipment for helping with this (e.g. a tape recorder, MP3 player or microphone/FM system)? Or you might photocopy the notes of other students to plug any gaps in your own. If extra material on a website would help you, do ask for it.

You could ask that your lectures be timetabled for a room fitted with a T loop system, and that staff wear a microphone when lecturing, if you are equipped to use that system.

Your university's Disability Adviser will be able to recruit sign-language interpreters or specialist note-takers, but do give them advanced warning of your needs as this may take some time.

You probably do this already but if you tape record lectures – you should be allowed to, but ask the lecturer first – battery-operated equipment will avoid trailing leads and finding power points. If copies of lecture notes would help you, give the lecturing staff advanced warning so they can prepare them in good time. You might also find it helpful to have in advance the list of lecture readings, particularly key readings, so that you can prepare for the lecture beforehand.

If you rely on lip-reading, you will know that speakers will be grateful to be reminded of the Lip-Reading Communication Rules, i.e. to speak clearly, at a reasonable pace; to ensure that you have a clear view of their lips at all times; that the lighting is adequate (especially if the room is to be dimmed for showing slides or video); and that they avoid turning their head or moving round the room. Guest speakers will also need to be reminded of the principles. Whatever helps you will probably help the other students too.

If the lecturer uses video material in the lecture, speak to him/her about captioned video. Your Disability Adviser can help with this.

### Tutorials and seminars

For general information on tutorials and seminars, turn to page 15.

One hearing impaired student said this of her tutorials,

*'I felt the lecturer was thinking "She is not really present, she is away in another world, she is not contributing". I knew that was what he*

*was thinking. But I couldn't hear! I was trying to hear! But I was getting lost all the time in what everyone was saying.'*

The main differences between a lecture and tutorials and seminars is that in the latter there are more speakers, the discussion comes from all round the room, and a wide range of activities takes place (not just listening to one speaker at the front of the class).

You have the right to have some or all of the following arrangements, so you can join in as much as you want:

- a seat in the room where background noise and echo are minimised and from where you can see most people's faces;
- that people speak one at a time, and raise their hand before they do, so you can 'lock on' to each speaker in turn;
- guest speakers who appreciate your needs;
- getting speakers to pass your radio-microphone around before they speak, so you can pick up everything;
- advance notice of the topic for discussion;
- the tutor summarising discussions and maybe putting notes on a handout or the web, so you can fill in any gaps;
- a briefing paper or something to read before the tutorial to help everyone 'tune in' to the topic, as well as helping your lip-reading and sign-language interpreter;
- the tutor giving you time to relax and feel confident enough to speak in a group situation, before requiring you to do so.

Of course, this will help all the students, not just you.

## Fieldwork

For general information on fieldwork, turn to page 15.

Fieldwork presents staff and students alike with unfamiliar situations, such as rooms not equipped for formal teaching, and where there are unexpected challenges. You will also be away from your normal support mechanisms. Here is what one deaf student said

*'...I have to admit that I was quite reluctant initially to discuss any needs I had within the department as regards to fieldwork. This may seem strange because I'm sure that most lecturers would do anything to help, but I wasn't keen on being treated any differently*

*than others doing the same fieldwork and I wasn't sure that there would be much in the way of helping me anyway.'*

The best thing is to contact the tutor and discuss your needs with him/her before the fieldwork starts. Getting as much information and instruction as you can on paper is perhaps the biggest single help. Here are some of the issues you might want to discuss with him/her:

- arrangements to bring your sign-language interpreter with you on the field course or ask for one to be organised locally, particularly if the visit is overseas for a long period;
- arrangements for emergency evacuation in case of fire from your accommodation – are visual fire alarms available?
- ensuring that briefing sessions are arranged so you can lip read or get full notes to read;
- checking arrangements, e.g. when and where to meet throughout the course.

Much fieldwork is done by students in groups, so your colleagues can be your informal ears. Ensure they let you participate in as much of the exercise as you can. Often you learn how to use equipment from your fellow students as much as from the tutor. They can pass on any warnings though a vibrating pager or text messages by mobile 'phone can serve this purpose equally well.

When the student group is de-briefing at the end of the day, follow the advice about tutorials and seminars in terms of your being able to lip read around the room and people speaking one at a time. Remind the tutor to summarise the discussions, as this will help the others as much as you.

Try to participate as much as you can in all the tasks, even ones which seem tricky, like on-street interviewing of the public or using complex equipment. You may be the best-placed person to devise ways round the problems and get the staff to check them over.

The most difficult type of fieldwork will be overseas. There is the additional problem of a foreign language, which many students may share with you. Sign-language interpreters of BSL will be scarcer, electrical systems will vary in voltage or frequency, electrical plugs will be different, and there may be different attitudes towards hearing impaired people. This is when advanced planning with your department and the university's Disability Adviser to overcome these problems really pays off.

## Laboratory and practical classes and online learning

For general information on laboratory and practical classes and online learning, turn to page 16.

Here is what one hearing impaired student said about his practicals:

*'We carried out experiments in a huge lab. that was very noisy. I have a hearing impairment and on my very first class I found it very stressful that I could not hear the lecturer. I spoke to my lecturer who offered to give me typed instructions at the very next class. He did! It was so much easier.'*

Whereas lecture theatres are often provided with induction loops, laboratories are usually not. You may want to ask for some of the following arrangements:

- written information about the practical in advance, including written versions of any instructions and captions, or a transcript if video material is to be used;
- advanced briefing of your interpreter for key technical terms;
- presence of an interpreter for a class which might last two or three hours;
- an individual orientation to the laboratory including equipment and health and safety procedures;
- details about procedures and any special safety issues before the experiment begins;
- a discussion of evacuation plans for fire and other emergencies and ensuring visual fire alarms or a vibrating pager system are available;
- ensuring your working partner in joint projects is happy to be the ears for both of you, but does not take over all the work;
- a system whereby text messages by mobile 'phone give prompts or brief safety reminders;
- more time in which to complete exercises, if needed.

Practical work that uses a computer, including online learning and virtual learning environments, should not present any particular difficulties, unless audio clips are being used, which is not common.

However, if it is impossible for you to look at the tutor at the front of the class and follow procedures on your computer screen, ensure that you get instructions in advance so you can concentrate on the screen and your exercise.

A new online development is 'conferencing' where students' computers are linked in an on-screen discussion. If this is purely text based, you will have little difficulty keeping up, but if it is video-conferencing, the picture quality may be too jerky for lip reading and a sign-language interpreter may be essential.

### Dissertations, projects and work placements

For general information on dissertations, projects and work placements, turn to page 17.

For every student in geography, earth and environmental sciences their dissertation is perhaps the high point of their degree. It is best to think of a dissertation as a combination of all the other forms of teaching and learning.

- There will be lectures to brief you on what a dissertation is and how to plan and manage one. See the advice on lectures.
- There may be tutorial group discussions with fellow students and perhaps one-to-one supervision with your tutor to help you refine your dissertation topic. See the advice on tutorials and seminars.
- There will be fieldwork during which you collect information. See the advice on fieldwork.
- You will have to analyse materials or data collected at computers or in laboratories. See the advice on practicals.
- You will then need to write it all up. See the advice on essays.
- Finally you may have to give an oral presentation about your topic, either as you are planning it or to display your results. See the advice on oral presentations.

The main additional point is that, since the topic is yours, you have the responsibility to review how safe it is to carry out the work, and your department must check your risk assessment and offer safety advice, equipment or training if necessary. You also need to timetable all the work involved to ensure you meet the deadline. If you run into difficulties, ask your tutor about the possibility of an extension.

In some universities, you may be able to carry out a work placement with a 'real world' employer. If this attracts you, you need to prepare carefully with your department and potential employer. Both universities and employers now have legal duties to provide reasonable adjustments in work placements. It would be reasonable for the placement provider to ask you about this (once they have been made aware of your impairment) and perhaps to arrange a visit in advance to work out what adjustments need to be made.

So, for both practical and legal reasons, you should give your work-placement host or employer any information about your impairment which affects the way you work (for example, additional equipment or use of a helper); or which has implications for your health and safety or that of any of the people working around you.

You will need to get clear information from your employer about the tasks you will be expected to carry out, so you can work out what equipment or support you will need. Bear in mind that there is a different culture about what is acceptable. Whereas on campus you may be able to tape record a lecture, at a place of work taping a client meeting may not be allowed because of confidentiality issues. You should agree on adjustments to the work environment and any necessary safety precautions there (e.g. emergency evacuation).

Finally, if you are a research student doing a higher degree, all this advice applies, and on a bigger scale. However, you will have your own supervisor(s) who can talk plans through with you.

## Examinations

For general information on examinations, turn to page 18.

One point to watch is that any oral instructions or amendments given at the start of the examination are relayed to you by a sign-language interpreter or in written form. If you need alternative arrangements (such as using equipment or having extra time or a helper) then the university should organise this for you, but do discuss your requirements in good time with the department so that they can liaise with the central administration of your university. Check what is proposed (for example, the venue of the examination if it is different from that for the rest of the class). A helper who writes at your dictation will need to practise the spelling of any technical terms they are not familiar with.

It is possible that a video-recorded BSL presentation could be used instead of a written examination, with a subsequent translation into English for the use of the markers. If that seems useful for you, do enquire about it.

If written English is a serious problem for you, you could consider asking for the examination to be replaced by an alternative form of assessment such as :

- replacing a long essay by short questions (maybe with an oral examination in BSL);
- in place of a written examination, you use BSL to give your answer, which is video recorded and translated for the markers by a BSL interpreter.

## Essays

For general information on essays, turn to page 19.

If you think there are likely to be issues for you about essay writing, consult your tutor or Disability Adviser to discuss the possibility of individual support.

If written English is a serious problem for you, you could consider asking for the essay to be replaced by an alternative form of assessment such as :

- replacing a long essay by short questions (maybe with an oral examination in BSL);
- in place of a written essay, you use BSL to give your answer, which is video recorded and translated for the markers by a BSL interpreter.

## Field and laboratory notebooks

For general information on field and laboratory notebooks, turn to page 20.

Notebooks from fieldwork or laboratory classes should be straightforward for you to compile. If there are any issues, contact your tutor.

## Dissertations and projects – their assessment

For general information on the assessment of dissertations and projects, turn to page 20.

If an oral examination on the dissertation is held (or an oral presentation made on a research proposal), the advice on oral presentations needs to be followed. During a dissertation's oral presentation you should be allowed your normal arrangements (a sign-language interpreter or note-taker, for example).

If written English is a serious problem, you could consider asking for alternative arrangements to be made.

If you run into difficulties over timetabling, ask about the possibility of an extended deadline.

If your dissertation or project involves a placement off campus, then clearly any judgment the employer makes on the quality of your work should be made in full knowledge of your impairment.

## Oral presentations

For general information on oral presentations, turn to page 21.

Oral presentations are stressful experiences for most students. However, there are various strategies to help you cope.

- Your BSL interpreter could be used, but they should be given time to familiarise themselves with the topic and its vocabulary. Give them a copy of your talk.
- You could consider doing your presentation wholly through a PowerPoint presentation.
- You write the script and prepare the handouts but get someone else, perhaps a helper, fellow student or your tutor to deliver it.
- If written English is a problem for you, use the grammar and spell check facilities on the computer, plus a proof-reader to check any handouts or PowerPoint presentations.
- A private dummy run of the presentation could be very useful.
- A question-and-answer session after a presentation could be handled through the medium of a sign-language interpreter or lip reading (if conditions are suitable); so plan for the support you will need.

You may be asked to attend an oral examination, either at the end of your undergraduate degree or if you are a postgraduate presenting a thesis. Contact a tutor to ensure they know about the practicalities of an oral examination. The room layout is important – if you lip read, ensure that the examiners are not sitting in front of a window with the lighting behind them. Written questions or use of a sign-language interpreter may help. This is one form of assessment where a little advance discussion will help ensure that it is a fair test of your ability.

## STUDENTS WITH MOBILITY IMPAIRMENTS

### Lectures

For general information on lectures, turn to page 14.

If you are a wheelchair user, lecture theatres can be difficult places to access because of their tiered seating and fixed furniture. Ramped access should soon be universal, but check on access to lifts and the width of doorways if you have a wider-than-usual wheelchair. Can you see and read the screen from where your wheelchair access point leaves you in the room? It would be wise to contact your department(s) early to check that access to lecture theatres is suitable.

You may, of course, need to visit several lecture theatres, perhaps widely separated, during the course of a day. Whether you are a wheelchair user or have any form of limited mobility, you need to ensure that the distances between the venues can be covered in the time available between lectures. One wheelchair user described herself as a 'low-flying wheelchair' so tight were the timings between lectures. Seriously, if the journeys are not possible, enquire about either getting the venues closer, or about motor transport between them, or a video link so you can watch some lectures remotely.

Is there car parking reserved or reservable near each lecture theatre? Check out the options.

The need to attend lectures is one of the major reasons why mobility is essential around the university, so helpers can be arranged. Check with your Disability Adviser who can organise such assistance.

If taking lecture notes is a major hurdle, you could tape record the lecture (you should be able to, but ask the lecturer first), and listen to the recording later at your own pace. Your Disabled Students' Allowances could help buy a tape recorder.

*'At first I did not have the sense to 'come clean' and ask for lecture notes – as [my] hands really hurt. Then I did. Most lecturers are really thoughtful.'*

### Tutorials and seminars

For general information on tutorials and seminars, turn to page 15.

Whereas major buildings like lecture theatres may well have proper ramped access, tutorials may be held in smaller, older rooms or in those of individual members of staff. If access to one is not suitable for you – do check this out in good time – it is the university's responsibility to arrange an alternative venue.

Some staff offices, with several other students already attending, may be too small to allow safe manoeuvring of a wheelchair.

## Fieldwork

For general information on fieldwork, turn to page 15.

It is worth bearing in mind this student's comments.

*'My mobility difficulties are not immediately obvious. I don't use a wheelchair and I look strong and healthy, but I have difficulty in keeping up on rough terrain and got left behind in the first-year field trip. I just wanted to go home and never come back.'*

There are advantages in talking to staff about any mobility issues which they may not have been aware of while on campus.

Fieldwork often involves moving around in unfamiliar areas over longer than normal distances and across uneven surfaces in perhaps difficult weather conditions. It is easy to see why fieldwork can be daunting for those with limited mobility. Some wheelchair users may find the gradients too steep or the surface too rough for safe travel. Wet or cold weather may be unpleasant and worsen your condition. The distances to be covered may be beyond you if asthma, arthritic or muscular conditions are severe. Yet fieldwork is both academically and socially one of the highlights of our subjects, so participating as fully as possible is important. You might like to consider some of the following possibilities.

- The staff who have adapted their classroom teaching during the year will need to work with you again to plan the new adaptations for the fieldwork.
- The Disability Adviser could arrange helpers to power you around the field sites.
- Warm and wet-weather clothing could make life much easier.
- For fieldwork, there are not only the various field sites to be considered in terms of safety and access, but also the travel to the field area, travel within it and the accommodation (bedrooms, toilets, dining room and teaching rooms). Your welfare and privacy have to be respected. Remember to identify your Personal Egress Plan, in the event of any emergency, both from your accommodation and from the field. All these need to be checked to ensure there are no surprises when you arrive; and that is the job of the tutors, not you, though you have to tell them well in advance what you need. What your tutors may not realise are your more 'domestic' needs and the effects of tiredness during long days in the field. You need to help them with

these issues. Fieldwork is about living, not just studying, and you will be away from your normal support mechanisms.

- Keep checking the arrangements throughout the course to ensure you always know when and where you should be.
- If the field course is outside the UK, there may be issues of inoculations, any medication you take, access to medical treatment, food allergies, the compatibility of electrical supplies and the weather.
- Certain types of fieldwork – surveying, digging or taking core samples, for example – may be particularly tricky. This should be obvious to the staff; if not, do remind them.

The ideal is for you to do the same fieldwork as the rest of the class in the same place as them. If that really is not possible, here are some alternatives.

- You do similar equivalent work in the same area, perhaps with minor adjustments such as videoing the field site and replaying the video in the bus or at the accommodation venue.
- You do similar equivalent work in a more accessible venue.
- You do different work in the same or a different area.
- If none of these is possible, you could participate in a virtual field course. In this, you stay at university and, via computers and the web, you research remotely conditions in a distant venue. You still gain research skills (the underlying purpose of field courses) but do so in a different way.

### Laboratory and practical classes and online learning

For general information on laboratory and practical classes and online learning, turn to page 16.

Laboratories, by and large, are less likely to have been designed for accessibility than lecture theatres. So check for access to the room and that the gangways between the benches will allow you to move around safely. Ask the tutor about how you would evacuate the building in an emergency.

If the practical work involves scientific equipment, the normal bench height may be inaccessible and/or unsafe, so arrangements could be made to raise your wheelchair to the bench or to lower the equipment so you can use it. Optical microscopy maybe difficult – projecting the image onto a screen will help the whole class.

There are a considerable number of ergonomically designed and simple aids to using standard equipment, from hand steadies to clasping devices. Your

Disabilities Adviser and tutor can help obtain these. Remember to ask for a lab coat that fits, if you use a wheelchair in a scientific laboratory. A comb-bound laboratory manual or workbook – which lies flat when opened – may be easier to work with.

*‘Some difficulties have been experienced in more accurate work that needs a steady hand; also in using bulb pipette fillers, as I am unable to operate the buttons. There are however often sliding fillers that I have used instead...’*

If you need access to a computer for practical work, the main issue is to ensure that the bench height is suitable for your wheelchair or normal working arrangements. If protracted computer use would be very tiring, an adapted keyboard, pointing device or mouse could be provided. You will know already that a lot of computer use can be very tiring if your upper-arm strength is limited. So a suggestion might be made for more time to complete the exercise or even for a typist to input for you. If timed computer exercises are used, ask for a self-paced version, if inputting is particularly slow or tiring for you. A computer with voice-recognition software could be provided if that would help you.

Advance information about the content of the practical and any instructions, might be helpful in enabling you to prepare beforehand.

The growth of ‘virtual learning environments’ (where many aspects of traditional university education are delivered through a computer) may be a mixed blessing for those with limited mobility. You may welcome the reduced need to move around different venues. The computer can bring you the lecture notes, the handouts, the links to the web, the online journals and the online tutorial. But long periods of typing at a computer can be stressful, especially if you are not a quick and accurate typist. In some cases face-to-face meetings can be easier.

### Dissertations, projects and work placements

For general information of dissertations, projects and work placements, turn to page 17.

It is perhaps easiest to see your dissertation and similar independent projects as a combination of:

- lectures (the general class briefing on how to do a dissertation);
- tutorials (the one-to-one supervision of your specific dissertation);
- library work (for background materials);
- fieldwork (when you collect your information);

- laboratory or computer work (for data analysis);
- a lengthy period of writing up a project of 7,000-15,000 words;
- perhaps an oral presentation.

You may wish to use the tips given in these sections.

At least, of course, the choice of topic is yours. So you can mould it to your academic interests and your mobility. The corollary of you being more in charge of the process is that more responsibility falls on you to plan each phase of the work and check on issues of safety. Your tutor will ensure that together you complete a safety and risk assessment of what you are planning. You can discuss with your tutor a different form of dissertation presentation if producing a lot of text is overly taxing. A later submission deadline may also be fair.

In some universities you may be able to carry out a work placement with a 'real world' employer. If this attracts you, you need to prepare carefully with your department and potential employer. Both universities and employers now have legal duties to provide reasonable adjustments in work placements. It would be reasonable for the placement provider to ask you about this (once they have been made aware of your impairment) and perhaps to arrange a visit in advance to work out what adjustments need to be made.

So for both practical and legal reasons, you should give your work-placement host or employer any information about your impairment which affects the way you work (for example, additional equipment or use of a helper); or which has implications for your health and safety or that of any of the people working around you.

You will need to get clear information from your employer about the tasks you will be expected to carry out, so you can work out what equipment or support you will need. Bear in mind that there is a different culture about what is acceptable. Whereas on campus you may be able to tape record a lecture, at a place of work taping a client meeting may not be allowed because of confidentiality issues. You should agree on adjustments to the work environment and any necessary safety precautions there (e.g. emergency evacuation).

Finally, if you are a research student doing a higher degree, all this advice applies, and on a bigger scale. However, you will have your own supervisor(s) who can talk plans through with you.

## Examinations

For general information on examinations, turn to page 18.

Examination rooms are usually fully accessible but it is always wise to check

out venues in advance. Do discuss your requirements in good time with the department so that they can liaise with your university's central administration. Universities are mostly very well practised in providing alternative examination arrangements. The types of alternatives that are available include the following:

- a separate room and desk for your computer (if handwriting for three hours is not possible) or for your helper;
- extra time to complete the examination if your writing is a little slow or you need breaks;
- if prolonged writing is not an option, a scribe or a computer with voice-recognition software might be a suitable alternative;
- an oral examination instead of a written one.

## Essays

For general information on essays, turn to page 19.

When you start an essay, you will need to brainstorm the topic and then do some background reading to see what others have written about it. Visiting the library is a key element here and most libraries will have designated staff who can, for example, show you around, direct you to low-level computers and issue desks, and help fetch books off high shelves. If carrying a lot of heavy books is unreasonable, do ask if the department or the Library could loan you a locker to store books. The growth of online journals means that traditional academic tools (articles) can now be accessed without the need to travel to the library building. The web itself of course is also a key resource for essays. The development of IT means you can minimise the amount of travelling you have to do. Essays can be submitted as email attachments.

If using a computer for long periods is problematic, there are special keyboards and arm-rests which may prove useful – your Disabled Students' Allowances could be used to buy these. Voice-recognition software avoids the need for a lot of typing at a keyboard. A joystick or rollerball might be easier to manipulate than a mouse – your local computer services department will be able to advise on this. Or a typist could input as you dictate directly or via a Dictaphone. Your local Disability Adviser could arrange for a typist. Finally, an oral examination might be organised instead of a written piece of work – universities know how to arrange these for undergraduates as well as postgraduates taking higher degrees.

## Field and laboratory notebooks

For general information on field and laboratory notebooks, turn to page 20.

There should not be any additional issues when completing field or laboratory notebooks which you will not already have come across for examinations or essays. Such notebooks tend to favour succinct reports. A comb-bound notebook which lies flat when opened may be easier to use. If you do encounter any difficulties, discuss them with your tutor.

### Dissertations and projects – their assessment

For general information on the assessment of dissertations and projects, turn to page 20.

When it comes to the assessment of your dissertation, the key point is whether you can produce one in the traditional format – a long report of 7,000-15,000 words. This may relate to issues of typing speed. You could ask for a typist to help out (as you may already have done with your essays and examinations, for example). Voice-recognition software may avoid long periods of typing. Ultimately an oral examination of your research results may be arranged, as is normal with higher research degrees. The other good thing about a dissertation is that you are more in charge of the timetable. The work pressures on you are more spread out. However, if you do run into difficulties, then ask your tutor, in good time, about the possibility of an extended deadline.

### Oral presentations

For general information on oral presentations, turn to page 21.

The only major points to watch if you are asked to give an oral presentation are these:

- access to the podium or stage from where the talk is given (usually where the lecturer normally stands);
- access to the audio-visual aids you may need for your talk (the slide projector, overhead projector or the computer and data projector for using PowerPoint).

If these are unsatisfactory, you could ask for the equipment to be re-arranged so you can use it normally, for a helper to operate it or, if all else fails, for an alternative venue.

## STUDENTS WITH MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS

### Lectures

For general information on lectures, turn to page 14.

If the number of lectures each week seems daunting, some students have successfully explored the option of taking their degree part time. This might reduce the pressure of a degree course if your condition is episodic. If the pressure is not quite so severe, then getting lecture notes from a paper handout or a website has helped many students take in the material at a pace that better suits their learning style. If the whole setting of the lecture theatre is intimidating, do remember that reading the references given out during the lecture is the best way to learn.

It might be that you cannot attend all the lectures due to your condition, hospital appointments or the effects of any medication you are taking. In this case, ensure you get the handouts or website notes so you can catch up when things ease.

Simply asking a fellow student if you can photocopy their notes might let you cross-check that you have picked up the key points from the lecture.

### Tutorials and seminars

For general information on tutorials and seminars, turn to page 15.

Because these meetings will probably be held in a small room, tutorials can be claustrophobic. The common practice of getting the students in a tutorial group to work in teams might be uncomfortable for those who are 'soloists' by nature. The expectation that students talk in the tutorial (unlike in most lectures) may pose difficulties for you as indeed it does for many students, but hopefully you will be given time to settle in before being expected to participate in the discussion. Your tutor can adjust how the tutorial or seminar runs only if they know something about your condition – a bigger room and more individual tasks, for example.

On the positive side, other students may become your friends over the session, and you will get to know the tutor. The pace of tutorials is less hectic than in a lecture, and the familiarity of the same group and tutor at each tutorial can provide welcome reassurance.

### Fieldwork

For general information on fieldwork, turn to page 15.

Fieldwork is a 24-hour-a-day experience unlike the one-hour lecture or tutorial. You will be living, travelling, working and eating with a group of students for

several days in unfamiliar surroundings, perhaps away from whatever support you normally rely on. That sudden change of surroundings can be stressful.

You have to make an informed decision about whether the field course is manageable. So, the golden rule is to ask for details about the fieldwork from the tutor well in advance. Make a checklist of issues and then talk them through with the tutor one at a time. Fieldwork might bring to the fore something like vertigo which has not been a problem on campus.

Of course, a lot of adjustments can be made so you can join in. If the staff know a bit about your concerns, they could alter the routes, the tasks you do and the accommodation arrangements. None of these is usually difficult to do if the staff have a warning, and these modest changes may be enough to keep you in the group, learning the equivalent lessons and skills to the rest of the class. If, on the other hand, you feel that a field course might aggravate your condition and you or other students might be at some risk, then it might be best to ask your tutor for an alternative but equally testing fieldwork experience. This might be based in the home area or involve more individual work. It might even be a virtual field course, based around studies of a field area brought to you through a computer and the web.

If, as we hope, you can go on the field course, remember to take any medication you have been prescribed and avoid situations you find uncomfortable (for example, vertigo or agoraphobia). A single room for you to chill out in and have some privacy might be possible – let the staff know in good time. Rest assured that confidentiality will always be preserved. Also, remember to keep checking arrangements in case of any alterations to time or venue.

If the worst happens and you need to be taken to hospital, the tutor has to build this into the planning so you are not left far from help and certainly are never alone. This need not alter the fieldwork and training you receive; it just modifies it in case your condition worsens and ensures you can be kept safe.

Remember, you are the expert on yourself; you know best what to look out for.

### Laboratory and practical classes and online learning

For general information on laboratory and practical classes and online learning, turn to page 16.

Laboratories can seem dauntingly unfamiliar. So, you can ask for a familiarisation tour of the laboratory and a briefing talk on the tasks. This may be enough to allay concerns and agree on some straightforward adjustments.

The challenge of laboratory and practical classes is that you do not know what you will be asked to do until the class itself, and each week it will be a

different task. Often the work needs to be done in some correct order and the instructions can be detailed if you are 'to get the right answer'. So, seeking the instructions for laboratory and practical classes on paper ahead of time may be a very useful request, so you can prepare yourself for when the class starts.

For some laboratory work, students will be working in groups to develop teamwork skills, for safety reasons or perhaps because there is not enough equipment for everyone individually. There is a lot of advantage in having a 'buddy' to work with for a short while when you are both uncertain of what to do. But if group work poses problems, you might ask for a one-person task to be set, if that can be done safely and is feasible given the topic. If you think your limited dexterity might be a problem, do tell the tutor.

Practicals on a computer tend to be easier as you can go back and forth through the program till it is right, but some timed programs (where the screen changes automatically at a set time) may be taxing. Your tutor might be able to give you a self-paced version which will let you perform to your fuller potential.

### Dissertations, projects and work placements

For general information on dissertations, projects and work placements, turn to page 17.

Dissertations and projects are a combination of other forms of teaching and learning – lectures, tutorials, library, laboratory, fieldwork, essays and oral presentations – so the tips given in these sections are still relevant.

The tricky part about a dissertation or project is its scale. Unlike the one-hour lecture it will take months to complete. So, a checklist you and your tutor review every so often will be a useful reassurance that things are on track. If you have a dissertation timetable, keep it flexible. At least the work is under your control – you choose the topic and can dictate the pace, the timetable and the form of work you do. You can break your dissertation down into a sequence of manageable sections and pace yourself through them. You will also have a supervisor who, while perhaps not knowing all about you, will be able to make some judgments about what will fit your needs and what should be avoided (stressful or 'trigger' situations, for example). Do talk to him/her about your plans and progress.

Clearly, the lengthiness of the dissertation means that it is important for you to keep up with any treatment or medication you are on. You have to keep going over a long period, but that period is long enough to allow for any short periods when you cannot work on your dissertation. However, if necessary, do remember to ask for an extension to the deadline for submitting your dissertation or project.

Because you choose the topic of your dissertation, you can helpfully use that freedom to design out any types of work which you find uncongenial or even dangerous. You can control the rate of work and pace yourself through the stages, avoiding stressful build-ups of tasks. Do ensure that your term-time support network will be available during the vacation when much of the work for the dissertation may be undertaken. You may wish to consider a helper to assist with any fieldwork if this might be necessary or helpful.

Of course, you and your supervisor will have to complete a risk assessment of your proposed dissertation (as do all students, of course) and this will be his/her chance to check your judgment that the work you want to do is both safe and academically interesting.

In some universities you may be able to carry out a work placement with a 'real world' employer. If this attracts you, you need to prepare carefully with your department and potential employer. Both universities and employers now have legal duties to provide reasonable adjustments in work placements. It would be reasonable for the placement provider to ask you about this (once they have been made aware of your impairment) and perhaps to arrange a visit in advance to work out what adjustments need to be made.

So, for both practical and legal reasons, you should give your work-placement host or employer any information about your impairment which affects the way you work (for example, additional equipment or use of a helper); or which has implications for your health and safety or that of any of the people working around you.

You will need to get clear information from your employer about the tasks you will be expected to carry out, so you can work out what equipment or support you will need. Bear in mind that there is a different culture about what is acceptable. Whereas on campus you may be able to tape record a lecture, at a place of work taping a client meeting may not be allowed because of confidentiality issues. You should agree on adjustments to the work environment and any necessary safety precautions there (e.g. emergency evacuation).

Finally, if you are a research student doing a higher degree, all this advice applies, and on a bigger scale. However, you will have your own supervisor(s) who can talk plans through with you.

## Examinations

For general information on examinations, turn to page 18.

Every student finds examinations stressful occasions, but only you know the particular challenge they are for you. The helpful point for you to bear in mind is that there is now more flexibility in how you sit examinations. However, you

must discuss your requirements with the department in good time, so that they can liaise with the university's central administration. Here are some of the alternatives you might consider discussing with your department:

- a different location for the examination if you need a helper with you, for example;
- extra time can be granted to allow for a more measured pace of writing;
- a separate room if you need equipment of any sort (specially adapted PCs, for example);
- a different format from the traditional examination of unseen questions (e.g. an 'open-book' format where questions are available some days before the examination so you can research your answer and then just write it out on the day).

Universities are much more aware of the need to provide conditions under which each student can perform to their best, though their flexibility is not unlimited, it has to be said.

If you become unwell during examination time and you cannot attend an examination (perhaps because of an appointment at hospital or illness), you must let your department know what has happened and provide back-up confirmation as soon as possible. They can make allowances only if they know the circumstances.

## Essays

For general information on essays, turn to page 19.

The pressures put on students by essay deadlines are not as severe as those for examinations, but cumulatively over the year they can be considerable. The best advice for all students is to start work on essays early and spread the work over the weeks of each term/semester. You do not want to find yourself with five essays to write in the last seven days of term! You can ask your tutor for alternative deadlines, if that would help because of appointments for treatment or 'bad patches', for example.

A useful tip is to ask your tutor which are the key things to read for any essay. That should let you focus on the most important items and see the wood for the trees. Working with a friend – you read each other's essay and comment on them – may also be helpful. Devices like spellcheckers are also invaluable, though check they are set to UK spelling and vocabulary.

When you get your work back, marked and with comments, try not to over-react to any criticisms. Don't take them personally – it is only an essay! Ask

your tutor what are the good points about the essay if the written comments don't tell you.

Above all, don't be a perfectionist; it is far too stressful for any student. Do the best you can; learn where you could improve; and then move on.

If the overall workload during the year becomes relentless and insupportable, rather than leaving the university, why not explore the option of a part-time registration for your degree? There are a lot of students who have chosen the part-time route for a variety of reasons. It will take you longer to complete your undergraduate or postgraduate studies but the 'journey' may be much more tolerable and rewarding. Intercalation – leaving the university for a period and then returning to pick up your studies where you left off – is another option which your tutor could talk you through.

### Field and laboratory notebooks

For general information on field and laboratory notebooks, turn to page 20.

If you have been able to participate in the programme of laboratory or computer practicals, a notebook recording what you did, your results and a concise discussion of what they show should not present many major additional problems. However, if you do encounter any difficulties, discuss them with your tutor.

If you worked in a group on the task and you think this might have affected your marks, do consult your tutor. If you worked alone when others were in teams, just remind the marker of this by adding a comment to your notebook.

### Dissertations and projects – their assessment

For general information on the assessment of dissertations and projects, turn to page 20.

Once you have done your dissertation or project, writing it up and presenting your findings is a difficult task only in so far as it is on a bigger scale than any individual essay – the report might be 7,000-15,000 words long.

Whatever devices or practices you have used in the past with essays (special equipment or a helper, for example) can be used again for your dissertation. Dividing it up into chapters – your supervisor can advise on how to do this – will make the dissertation more manageable, converting it into a sequence of smaller tasks that will fit neatly together to form the whole report.

If the final deadline for submitting the dissertation presents problems for you, do contact your supervisor in advance and let him/her know how you are getting on.

If extended writing is really not possible, then explore with your supervisor the possibility of an oral presentation of your findings if that would do your work more justice.

If all other options are not working for you, then you might like to explore the possibility of intercalating (suspended registration) for a period until conditions are more suitable for study. Some students find that a useful option.

### Oral presentations

For general information on oral presentations, turn to page 21.

Giving an oral presentation to a group is more common in degree schemes these days. For any student it is a stressful event. Alternatives would include:

- tape recording your presentation in private and letting the class or the tutor listen to you that way:
- doing your presentation wholly through a PowerPoint presentation.

## COMPLAINTS

It is unlikely that you will have cause to complain about your teaching or facilities, but it is certainly not impossible. Sometimes things are not as well set up as the staff or you would wish. It is always useful to find out the local procedure for making complaints. This should be advertised on noticeboards and in course handbooks. It is best to follow this route until you get a satisfactory result.

The principle is to try and solve the problem informally before moving on to a formal complaints procedure.

## 6 Having a life outside the course

Doing a degree at university is about much more than attending the courses and doing the assignments. Whether you have recently left school or are an adult returning to study later in life, it is likely that your degree programme will be a life-changing event. Studying at degree level is not just about accumulating knowledge to regurgitate in the examination hall; it is about looking at the world and yourself, and often re-evaluating both. So what you do outside the course may be as important as what you do within it, as far as your intellectual and personal development are concerned. You will probably find that the degree programme itself will encourage you to develop skills, knowledge and abilities that go well beyond the immediate scope of the subject matter. You will probably be required to work in groups, do presentations, become adept at designing web pages and present materials in various text and graphical forms.

You will probably also be encouraged to develop a personal profile document or reflective log of some kind. This will require you to reflect upon and record your progress in a way that will help you develop a *curriculum vitae* (your CV) and analyse your further development needs – see Section 7 for more information about this. This personal profile document will get you to think about things you do that might be helpful for your future career beyond the university. But this is not the only reason to think a bit about life outside the degree programme.

'All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy' is the adage. It is very tempting when confronted with all the work that needs to be done as part of a degree to feel that every waking hour will have to be devoted to it. Given the volume of work, it also sometimes looks as if your lecturers and tutors do not expect you to have a life outside the course! But the important thing is to be realistic. The best students are not necessarily the ones who are always in the library or laboratory, or sitting poring over books in their rooms. In fact, the best students are probably the ones who are most aware of their weaknesses and strengths, who have a well-rounded existence and who keep the whole thing in proportion.

To deal with large amounts of information, learn new skills and be creative, you need to stay fresh and interested and keep your energy levels as high as possible. If your particular impairment makes extra demands on your energy levels, it is even more important for you to pace yourself. How can you do this?

Firstly, make sure there is a good measure of fun in your everyday life. Enjoying yourself will raise your energy levels and refresh you. If you can get

some fresh air and exercise too, that will also help. As a student of geography, earth or environmental sciences it might be fun to join your department's student society or perhaps the hiking club so you can experience the countryside around you. But just reading a favourite book, relaxing in front of the television or chatting with friends might be all you need. Universities offer so many societies and activities that everyone can find a group or society that meets their interests.

Sometimes, though, you might need to think about taking a more serious break from your studies. It is fairly common for students to take some time out from their degree programme – often referred to as 'intercalating'. This will give you time to catch up with yourself and your studies and have a rest. Most institutions will look favourably on students wishing to intercalate and will have a process to allow you to do it.

Another option is to change courses, if you find that the one you are doing is making more demands on you than you can cope with. Again, most universities will do their best to help you move to a course that suits your needs better. If there is not a suitable course within the institution for you to move to, it may be possible to transfer to another institution, perhaps one that has better facilities for your needs or is closer to family or friends who can offer you more support. If you are running out of steam trying to keep going on your current course, explore all the options to make a change or have a rest.

## 7 Planning the next stages

It is never too early to think about what you are going to do after university. Many institutions will have courses and modules within their degree programmes which will get you thinking about your skills and knowledge and about future plans right from the outset of your degree. Universities are required to offer personal profiling and development planning to students and you should find this a useful way of thinking about both your development during your degree programme and your future. As a student of geography, earth or environmental sciences, you have a very wide range of skills to offer employers. Chapter 6 in *Geography@University* (Clark & Wareham, 2003) gives a summary of the skills these subjects give you.

The graduate job market is highly competitive. In 1999 the Chief Executive of the Association of Graduate Recruiters pointed out that member organisations attracted 67 applicants for every graduate-level opportunity (AGCAS, 1999). The evidence suggests that graduates from non-traditional backgrounds tend to be somewhat less successful in gaining graduate-level jobs than others. Laws are gradually changing making it illegal for employers to discriminate against people with impairments, but it takes a while for attitudes and people's practices to change. In the meantime, it is important that you think carefully about your future and plan ahead so that you are more likely to be one of those people who find the graduate job, or further study opportunities, that they want.

In seeking a job, you are entering a market where you are trying to sell yourself, your knowledge and skills to a potential employer. If you have ever had a taste of the retail trade, you will know that it is difficult to sell something if you do not know a lot about it. The same is true for selling yourself in the job market: you need to be very sure of what you are offering employers, and feel confident about how good you are. For this reason alone it is important to keep track of your developing skills and experience as you progress through your degree scheme. Where you think there are gaps or weaknesses, work out ways of compensating or filling in the missing bits.

You may be lucky enough to be on a programme which has a placement or some other form of work experience built in. Aspects of your background might have discouraged you from getting work or engaging in work experience in the past. However, a work placement opportunity within a degree programme will probably have been carefully thought out to allow you to learn new skills and deploy existing ones in a supportive environment. You can discuss with your tutors and the Disability Adviser in your institution any

particular needs or difficulties that might be thrown up by a work placement and find ways round them. Alternatively you could seek out a placement where your impairment can be accommodated so that you and the employer can both benefit from the experience.

Many universities have some form of volunteering opportunities available, which will give you valuable experience in preparation for your next move after graduating. You are also likely to find 'job shops' or some other form of casual employment opportunities within the institution and it is worth exploring these, particularly if you have had limited opportunities for work experience before coming to university. Doing some work experience within the institution where you have your well-established support arrangements might be a good idea to help you gain confidence and experience before you embark on work in the world outside.

Just about every university will have a careers service available for students. This is invariably more than just a place that advertises vacancies and recruitment rounds. You are likely to find that the careers service will offer courses (some accredited as part of your degree) to help you develop personal and transferable skills as well as individual advice and guidance. You are likely to find that some of the staff of the careers service will have particular experience and knowledge in careers advice and guidance for students with impairments. It is worth getting to know how the careers service in your university works and how you can make the most of it. All university careers services belong to the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS) which produces a range of publications, including some for graduates with impairments and disabilities. SKILL, the National Bureau for Students with Disabilities, is another very useful source of information and advice. The Hobsons Career Guide series includes a guide for students with disabilities. This is updated each year and can be an invaluable source to help you think through such issues as 'should I disclose my disability to a potential employer?', and 'how can I avoid an interview focusing on my disability rather than on me?'

'Mentoring' is one particular form of support and preparation for moving on from university. You may find that your own university has a mentoring scheme in place, or you could take advantage of other organisations offering mentoring. For example the organisation *Diversity Mentoring HE* has a programme aimed at higher education students with disabilities. See their website at <[www.diversitymentoringuk.com/](http://www.diversitymentoringuk.com/)>.

One particular aspect of recruitment that you need to be aware of is the assessment centre. This is a process used by a number of employers which puts applicants through a series of testing processes, some of them psychometric tests, which aim to identify your aptitudes and abilities. These assessment centres may seem pretty daunting as they appear to be delving

deep inside who you are and how you think, and drawing conclusions about you. They may seem particularly challenging if you have mental health problems, or have difficulty in undertaking written tasks within time limits. Some of the tests, such as Saville Holdsworth, have been designed to try to avoid bias in the kinds of questions they ask, so that they are not making assumptions about cultural background, gender, or abilities and disabilities. The careers service will offer trial assessments as part of your preparation for job applications, and it is worth taking advantage of the opportunity to practise, so that when you meet the real thing it will seem more familiar.

At the end of your degree you may decide that you would like to engage in further study through taking a higher degree or a professional qualification. By that time you will have had at least three years' experience of university study, and will probably feel much more confident of being able to cope with more. One word of caution, however. Moving to a postgraduate course may be a substantial leap, requiring further new skills and even more self-organisation and self-discipline. At postgraduate level you may no longer have access to some of the support you have had at undergraduate level. And you may find that some professional qualification courses are much more ruthless - some professional accountancy courses, for example, fail fifty per cent of those taking their examinations as a matter of principle, to restrict the number of entrants into the profession. So you may need to be a bit tougher and even more resilient than you were when you were an undergraduate.

Whatever you decide to do after your undergraduate degree don't forget that you have achieved a major goal. Doing a degree is not an easy option and does not follow naturally from school, as some people assume. And if you have taken up undergraduate study after working or raising a family, then the step to university is a substantial one. Just stop and remind yourself from time to time how far you have come and all that you have achieved.

# 8

## What Jo did next

Jo's first year at university was a big adventure, and not without a few scary bits as she got herself and her studies organised. She did quite well in the examinations at the end of her first year, but unfortunately became ill during her second year and had to take some time out. In the end this proved to be a good thing, as it meant she had the time to catch up with some of the reading in the spells when she felt a little better. So when she went back to restart her second year she felt that she was much better prepared. The rest of the course continued well and she finished up with a 2:1.

In the latter part of her degree Jo became more and more interested in environmental geography and included some environmental science courses in her programme. The field courses had given her a taste for conservation work, and she managed to organise some volunteer conservation work in her home town in a couple of the vacations. In the end she decided that this was the kind of career that would really suit her – she enjoyed working outside and on work that contributed to the environment and to communities. She applied and was accepted on an MSc in Conservation which included periods working with her local Wildlife Trust and a nearby National Park.

## 9 Further reading

AGCAS (Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services) <[www.agcas.org.uk](http://www.agcas.org.uk)>.

Clark, G. & Wareham, T. (2003) *Geography@university: making the most of your geography degree and courses*. London: Sage.

Department for Education and Skills (DfES) - Disabled Students' Allowances <[www.dfes.gov.uk/studentssupport/students](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/studentssupport/students)>.

Diversity Mentoring HE <[www.diversitymentoringhe.com](http://www.diversitymentoringhe.com)>.

Exeter University <[www.ex.ac.uk/careers/equal\\_opportunities.htm](http://www.ex.ac.uk/careers/equal_opportunities.htm)>. Most institutions will have good searchable careers information available. This site at Exeter University has an excellent range of links to various equal opportunities and careers websites.

Graduate Careers Online <[www.graduatecareersonline.com/](http://www.graduatecareersonline.com/)>. This site is run by Manchester University and has good resources for students with impairments.

Gravestock, P. (2004) personal communication.

Hall, T., Healey, M. *et al.* (2004) *The experience of teaching and learning at university by disabled students in geography, earth and environmental sciences and related disciplines: a report on a Geography Discipline Network Inclusive Curriculum Project student survey* <[www2.glos.ac.uk/gdn/icp/](http://www2.glos.ac.uk/gdn/icp/)>.

Hobsons <<http://ukcareers.hobsons.com/equality.jsp>>. You will find a range of Hobsons career guides in your careers service. The information is also available on Hobsons website.

Jobability <[www.jobability.com/](http://www.jobability.com/)>. A general job site for people with impairments.

Kneale, P. (2003) *Study skills for geography students: a practical guide*. (2<sup>nd</sup> edn) London: Arnold.

SKILL (National Bureau for Students with Disabilities) <[www.skill.org.uk/](http://www.skill.org.uk/)>. Skill is the organisation for higher education students with disabilities and has good information on its website.

TechDis <[www.techdis.ac.uk/](http://www.techdis.ac.uk/)>. The JISC TechDis service aims to improve provision for disabled staff and students in the further, higher and specialist education sectors through technology.