

Guidance for Disabled Students Studying and Working Abroad Disability Resource Centre

Advice for disabled students including those with physical disabilities, mental health conditions, specific learning difficulties, sensory impairments and long term medical conditions.

A successful study or work away experience will depend largely on making preparations and planning ahead so that your disability-related support requirements can be met whilst you are outside of the UK. This guide can be used to plan for a successful trip and to think about what you may need to prepare in advance of your trip.

What do I need to consider for my year abroad?

You should think about the way in which your disability impacts on your everyday life and the support and strategies you use, with particular regard to the following:

Support Services

Consider what sort of support you use regularly. This might include your GP, counsellor, study skills tutor, note taker or personal assistant/carers. Inform your current support service of your plans and discuss your specific disability/health and support needs including medication and strategies for managing your health. If you have received support from a support worker or personal assistant will this be available in your host country and if so how will it be funded? Will you be able to register with a GP/access psychological therapies? Many universities and employers offer some kind of counselling service but some will not. If this type of support has been helpful for you in the past you need to find out about local services (and whether there is a cost attached).

In terms of support organised via the DRC, you may be able to access the same study skills tutor or mentor when you are abroad as when you are in Cambridge, via Skype or other similar means.

Medication

You need to check if your current medication is available in your destination country and also who is able to prescribe it. Might you need to request enough from your home GP to last you the year? Will there be a pharmacy nearby? What happens if you run out or need to change

your medication?

Accommodation

Who will be organising this? Are there access issues, do you need any adaptations, en-suite, shared or individual facilities etc. Think about location/proximity to campus/work/services.

Reasonable Adjustments for Academic Study including exam arrangements/assistive technology

What do you already have in place for study? What does your new department need to know? Is your destination university able to supply the equipment or make the adjustments to exam arrangements that you need? (Please be aware that although your disability may be recognised by law in the UK, which means that British Universities are required to make reasonable adjustments, this may not be the case abroad.)

Support Networks

Think about the support networks you currently have in place e.g. friends, fellow students, family members. Maintaining sources of support will be vital, particularly in the initial stages of your time abroad. Most people moving to a new country will experience feelings of stress and isolation at some point. For disabled students, especially those with mental health conditions, these feelings can be more pronounced. Who will you contact if you are worried and need to talk, or need support, or are experiencing a crisis or emergency? It is worth finding out what formal support services are in place through your host institution or externally e.g. Student Disability Services, Rights and Advice Centres, Counselling Services etc. as well as social groups, societies and clubs. Often a University will have a Facebook page which can be a handy way of finding out more information directly from the students themselves.

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What if things go wrong?

Sometimes, despite the best of plans, your trip does not go as anticipated. For the best chance of getting back on track reach out locally and in Cambridge as soon as you can to see what changes are possible. Your College remains available to you while abroad and your trip organiser/Supervisor will have advice to offer.

Adapting to a new culture

You will experience new cultures, people, attitudes, food, music and probably a new language when you go abroad. Before you start to understand and appreciate the differences of your host country, you may experience some culture shock. Culture shock is a logical reaction to differences we encounter in a foreign culture. For students with mental health conditions the common symptoms of culture shock (homesickness, boredom, anxiety, withdrawal, loneliness, frustration and feelings of powerlessness) can be experienced more intensely. As above it is important to know where to turn to for support if you are struggling with any of these feelings.

Reading and researching about the country you are going to can help prepare you for cultural differences and attitudes to disability. Guidebooks, travel blogs, and international newspapers are great sources of information and these days there are a multitude of websites which can provide you with more information. Universally, societies have explanations for why some individuals (and not others) are disabled people, how disabled individuals are to be treated, what roles are appropriate (and inappropriate) for such disabled people and what rights and responsibilities individuals with disability are either entitled to or denied. Learning about different perspectives and attitudes to disability can help to prepare you for your time abroad.

Who should I speak to about my support requirements?

It is important that you feel confident you have made the necessary preparations for your study or work away but remember that mild feelings of stress and anxiety are normal in this kind of situation. If you wish to discuss your support needs abroad further please speak to your Supervisor/Year Abroad Coordinator/Clinical Supervisor/trip organiser in the first instance who will be your main point of contact for all issues relating to your work away.

If you have a disability, including a mental health condition or a long term illness, it is highly recommended that, if you have not already done so, you register with the DRC. It may be possible for them to assist with the organisation of support at your proposed destination.

Email us at disability@admin.cam.ac.uk or call us on 01223 332301. You will be able to meet an adviser, discuss and confirm support, and we can liaise with your department and support service abroad where necessary.

Useful Websites

Disability Resource Centre:
<https://www.disability.admin.cam.ac.uk/>

References

Equality Act Abroad:
<http://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/equality-act-abroad/>

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