

Guidance for Staff supporting Disabled Students Studying and Working Abroad Disability Resource Centre

When planning time abroad disabled students may have some additional requirements. When considering disabled students, this term includes those with physical disabilities, mental health conditions, specific learning difficulties, sensory impairments and long term medical conditions.

A successful study abroad experience will depend largely on the student making preparations and planning ahead so disability-related support requirements can be met outside of the UK. This guide is a companion to the guide that students can use to plan their trip and to think about what they may need to prepare in advance of their travel.

What do students need to consider for their study or work away?

Students need to consider the ways in which their disability impacts on everyday life and the support and strategies used, with particular regard to the following:

Support Services

Consider what sort of support is used regularly. This might include GP, counsellor, study skills tutor, note taker or personal assistant/carers. If the student is receiving support from a support worker or personal assistant they need to ascertain if this is available in the host country and if so how will it be funded? Students will need to find out about registering with a GP and availability of psychological therapies, and where to find local counselling type services and any costs attached.

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

Medication

Students need to check if their current medication is available in the destination country and also who is able to prescribe it. Students might consider whether their home GP can prescribe enough for the year, where the pharmacy is and how to get emergency refills or how to change their medication.

Accommodation

Students need to consider who will organise this and what specific requirements they might need, such as any

adaptations, en-suite, shared or individual facilities etc. and location/proximity to campus/work/services.

Reasonable Adjustments for Academic Study including exam arrangements/assistive technology

Students should consider what study support they are currently using including exam access arrangements and human support and investigate whether their destination university is able to supply the equipment and make the adjustments to exam arrangements. (Please be aware that although 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

Students should think about the support networks they currently have in place e.g. friends, fellow students, family members. Students need to understand the importance of maintaining sources of support, particularly in the initial stages of their 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. Students should decide who they will contact if they are worried and need to talk, or need support, or are experiencing a crisis or emergency. Students would find it useful to find out what formal support services are in place through their host university or employer e.g. Student/Staff Disability Services, Student Rights and Advice Centre, Student/Staff Counselling Service etc. as well as social groups, societies and clubs. Students may also find a University will have a Facebook page which can be a handy way of finding out more information directly from the students themselves.

Guidance for Staff supporting Disabled Students Studying and Working Abroad

Disability Resource Centre

What if things go wrong?

Sometimes, despite the best of plans, the year abroad 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. The '[When to Refer](#)' document offers useful information about where to turn if you have wellbeing concerns.

Adapting to a new culture

Students going abroad will experience new cultures, people, attitudes, food, music and probably a new language. Before they start to understand and appreciate the differences of their host country, they 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 for students to know where to turn to for support.

Reading and researching about the country students are going to can help prepare 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 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.

Who should students speak to about their support requirements?

It is important that students feel confident they have made the necessary preparations for their study or work away but also to remember that mild feelings of stress and anxiety are normal in this kind of situation. If students wish to discuss support needs abroad further they need to speak to their Supervisor/trip organiser and College in the first instance.

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

Email the DRC at disability@admin.cam.ac.uk or call us on 01223 332301. Students will be able to meet an adviser, discuss and confirm support, and they can liaise with the 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/>

Some content adapted with the kind permission of UCL