

Support for Blind students or students with a Visual Impairment at Heriot-Watt University

Heriot-Watt University is committed to equal opportunities for all students. Applications to study at Heriot-Watt University are judged on academic and personal merit. If you are blind or you have a visual impairment you may want to discuss what support measures can be arranged to enable you to achieve your academic goals. This information sheet details the support that is available to prevent difficulties from arising.

Studying at University is less structured than school or college. It involves an emphasis on the ability to study independently. This makes demands on a student's planning, organisation and time management skills. Other skills that are developed at University include working in partnership with other people in groups, laboratories or on projects; working on major pieces of work such as a dissertation; giving presentations individually or as part of a group and working to deadlines.

HWU Staff and Resources

HWU offer a range of resources designed to make students feel as supported as possible during their studies. These include, but are not limited to:

- **Disability Advisor** - the student's Disability Advisor is the primary point of contact for assessing/arranging support for the student
- **Assistive Technology Advisor** - Training and access to assistive software which offers support with the organisation of notes and ideas, researching and referencing for written work, proofreading and concentration issues.
- **School Disability Contact (SDC)** - the SDC distributes the student's Learning Profile and liaises with School staff to ensure that the recommended support is put in place. The SDC can advocate on behalf of the student if they are experiencing any problems.

- **Personal Tutor** - each student is assigned Personal Tutor who is their first point of contact for any academic or personal issues they may experience throughout their time at university.
- **One to One study strategy sessions** - to help students build on any academic skills they feel they would benefit from.
- **Counselling Service** to support emotional wellbeing
- **Social Anxiety Group** facilitated by the HWU Counselling Service.
- **Academic Skills Workshops** – Power Hours are a range of workshops which are free to attend and are available throughout the academic year. These include practical strategies appropriate for a range of topics including referencing, academic writing and critical thinking.
- **Support to access and use the university Virtual Learning Environment** (*VLE Vision*) includes short interactive courses made available to students via an online resource.

Accessing Support

Students' needs are assessed on a case by case basis and adjustments are never made for you automatically. Support can sometimes take a while to arrange so it is very important to contact the University's Disability Service as early as possible. If you are still deciding whether Heriot Watt is the right University for you, a Disability Advisor will be happy to meet you and introduce you to our service and everything we have to offer to help you decide. The Disability Advisor can assess your needs and arrange any relevant support well in advance of you enrolling so that it is in place for you when you start your studies. You can bring someone with you to meetings if you choose. **If you are a Braille user we will need as much advance notice of this as possible so that we can ensure that material can be reformatted and is available for you when you need it.**

We will ask you to send or bring confirmation of your impairment provided by a professional involved in your diagnosis or treatment or a copy of a study support plan from school or college. This is usually in the form of a letter or a report on your condition. We will discuss your experience of learning so far and any support that has been useful in the past so that we can develop a new support plan for you.

Assessment of need

We can arrange an assessment of need for you as well as organise personal support such as note-takers via our Disability Advisors. Some support costs can be claimed back through the government funded Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) if you are eligible and a Disability Advisor will guide you through the application process. For students who are not eligible for DSA other options are available so it is important to meet a Disability Advisor to discuss these. Support available depending on your assessed needs can include:

- Note-taker for lectures
- Assistive Software & training
- Specialised equipment
- Exam arrangements.

Guide Dogs are welcome on campus.

Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA)

This is additional funding which may be available from the Government (SAAS/SFE) to meet any additional study related costs that a student may incur as a consequence of their disability. DSA funding covers three areas;

- Equipment and Assistive Software
- Consumables (printer cartridges, paper and copying) and Non-medical
- Personal Help (e.g. mental health mentoring or specialist one-to-one study skills tuition).

If you require any funded support, we will arrange another appointment to have your needs to be assessed for funding through DSA. [Link to more information about DSA](#)

Examination and Coursework Adjustment Details

Your coursework and exam adjustments will be discussed in full at your appointment with an Advisor. Any adjustment recommended is based on the needs of the individual. Examples follow but the list is not exhaustive:

Exam adjustments:

- Extra time in exams and timed class tests
- use of a PC
- An allowance for disregarding of poor spelling, writing and grammar in handwritten exams
- A scribe, reader or a prompter to help the student stay focussed

Coursework adjustments:

- Lecture notes and slides provided in advance of the lecture
- Ability to record lectures

Study skills:

- help with organisation, time management, avoiding procrastination, pacing and managing the workload

Specialist Assistive Software

Software for students with visual impairments is available and individual needs will be accommodated. Training to use specialist assistive software and equipment is arranged through the Disability Service in conjunction with external specialists such as RNIB if necessary.

Software such as Jaws or Zoomtext is available from the University. Disability Advisors will ensure it runs on any computer on campus that you need to work from.

Jaws is a powerful state of the art screen reading package which gives you access to Windows products through clearly speaking the contents of the screen.

ZoomText is a screen magnification package which will magnify the screen between x2 and x16. The package contains a variety of features to enhance and enlarge the screen to your requirements.

Contact details for other Heriot Watt campuses

Edinburgh Campus
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disability@hw.ac.uk

Scottish Borders Campus
+44 (0)1896 89 2178
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Orkney Campus
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Dubai Campus
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