3. Practising inclusive education

3.3a Academic support

Introduction

Students returning to school after a spinal cord injury will need support in all elements of education – learning, social, extracurricular, career planning and more. For a child or young person to be appropriately and fully included, as is their right, schools should recognise and offer this multi-faceted need for support.

This section focuses on academic support, covering classroom learning, exams, and a case study.

Classroom learning and academic support

Teaching staff will need to consider what adjustments they may need to make in their classroom management and what learning activities they offer, so that all students can actively participate in lessons.

1 Gain a clear understanding of how the injury has impacted the student physically and cognitively so these requirements can be considered when planning lessons and adapting the curriculum.

2 Consider how the injury might have changed the student's learning style (i.e. do they now need to be primarily an auditory learner?) and adjust activities and management that better include that style.

3 Use existing tools and technologies in ways that support student's requirements, such as emailing or putting work on the school's Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) to help students gain easier access. Understand what assistive technologies are available and used by the student and ensure lessons incorporate and are compatible with these.

4 Understand that students may face pain and fatigue when they return to school and consider flexible schedules or starting out with reduced hours in lessons.

5 Recognise that students may need time off for medical or other health reasons and identify flexible ways to continue to meet their learning needs.

6 Support students to pursue courses they are interested in, regardless of impairment.

Case study on making academic adjustments (from SENCO, Gloucestershire):

Our student did not suffer any brain injury or learning difficulty that would mean that she couldn't take part in lessons as she would formerly have done, so it's all been about physical access at our school. What she needed in the classroom was a scribe and that was her choice. We introduced some assistive technology but she has chosen not to use it in school. She is much happier having her TA attend lessons and act as a scribe.

Our student went from being able bodied: used to sitting in a desk, carrying her own books and scribbling her own notes to no longer having that ability. If a young person uses a scribe to record for them, it is important to understand the challenges of processing their thoughts and communicating them to a second party. We are very aware that our student has become an aural learner. She has to take everything in by listening, process it and then articulate a response. This is harder than thinking in your head, writing it out and proofreading it silently.

As our student moved from GCSEs to A-Levels, the level of challenge increased, as it does for all students. The requirements on any learner get harder but we have been mindful that processing speed is an added consideration for our student. This has been in the case in something like mathematical notation which can be extremely difficult to describe. So we've been trying to think of ways that the teachers could adapt what they do or how the scribe could work differently, in order to make processing easier.

Being conscious that our student has been forced to adapt to being an aural learner, I focused on helping staff think about their delivery and the way they explain and demonstrate methods in lessons. Staff have been incredibly good at adapting strategies and classroom management. They think about how they can adapt a whole lesson by using group or paired work and shared presentations. Making lessons as interactive as possible, reducing unnecessary recording – or recording information in alternative, accessible formats is paramount. This is good practice for all students anyway.

As SENCO, you still need to remind everyone what the day-to-day challenges are [for students with a spinal cord injury]. It's very easy to forget just how tiring it is to get around in day-to-day life when you have that level of injury. Staff can also forget that it's far more exhausting being a learner who relies on assimilating information aurally and processing it, than for someone who can just pick up a pen and jot a note down. It's far more demanding on just about every aspect of a learner's processing and cognitive ability because of the physical disability that they live with.

Equipment and technology support

Supporting a child or young person with a spinal cord injury to access and use appropriate technology and equipment is a vital learning experience. Not only can it facilitate learning and accessing school activities, but it helps prepare them for independence and work in the future. The equipment and technology support that a student with a spinal cord injury needs is of course dependent on their individual physical and academic requirements.

Some students will be provided with specialist equipment to support learning from an occupational therapist or physiotherapist. Equipment may include adjustable or soft-backed chairs or adjustable ('high-low') tables, standing frames, adapted shower and toileting chairs, or adapted support for eating and drinking. Work with the health team at the spinal cord injury centre to determine what equipment might be necessary and how to obtain appropriate training.

Other students may need assistive technology to use computer equipment, such as:

- different sizes of keyboards

- an adapted mouse such as a tracker ball, switch or joystick

- an integral mouse which is used by moving the lips

- eye gaze tools that track eye movements to control and move around a computer

- smartphones or tablets can be good tools for people without much dexterity in their hands but who can swipe

- **voice recognition software**

The types of assistive technology that a child or young person requires very much depends on the physical limitations they have because of their spinal cord injury. Children or young people may get support during their rehabilitation in hospital in using technology and other organisations such as **Aspire** or **AbilityNet** can help with assessment or information about different types of assistive technology.

Remember that access to technology does not necessarily mean effective use. Make sure that staff who will also be working with the student and technology are trained and ready to support the student and to think how to use it effectively for learning. Any TA's that work with the student and the IT staff at the school should also be trained in how to use any hardware or software.

" **We encourage our student to use other learning styles and assistive technology like voice recognition software so she can be more independent. But for this student, the stage she is at is the one she is happiest with. We don't want to push her too hard but we do want to make her aware of what is out there. So that when she goes to university and then goes into the world of work, she'll be able to use these things to get through her day-to-day job.**

SENCO, Gloucestershire
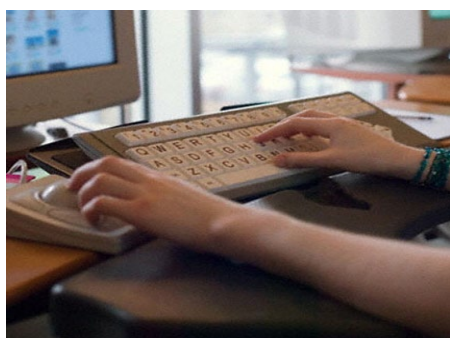
Exams

Facing exams can be hard for any pupil and especially difficult for one who has recently faced a spinal cord injury and a break from school. Students in this situation may have missed a significant amount of schooling and coursework, and some may even need to repeat a year.

A good first step to addressing this situation is a meeting with the young person, their family and the school's exam officer to determine if the student can sit exams as scheduled and how to proceed. Whatever decision is agreed in terms of exams and course completion, work closely with the student and the family to attempt to meet their concerns and needs as much and as sensitively as possible within school and national policies.

If the student is going to be taking exams, certain allowances or access arrangements can likely be made for them. These should be made as soon as possible, particularly if they require an application. See below for more details.

There are two types of access arrangements, which are outlined below. The information is taken from 'Returning to School', a resource created by charity Cerebra.

1 **Access arrangements delegated to the examination centre:**

● Additional or extra time - up to 25%

- Rest breaks and food or drink

- Separate room

- Transcript

- Prompter

- Bilingual Dictionary for use by candidates whose first language is not English, Irish or Welsh and 25% extra time for pupils who arrived in Britain less than two years ago (Not for English and foreign language exams)

2 Access arrangements requiring application to the awarding body for approval

- Additional time over 25%

- Reader

- Modified examination question paper

- Scribe (previously known as amanuensis)

- Practical assistance

- Word Processor

- Use of British Sign Language

Additionally, students can apply for special consideration and allowance of marks, enhanced grading or sitting exams in an alternative location.

Resources

- **Office of qualifications and exams**: Exam access arrangements

- **Joint Council for Qualifications**: exam access (please note these JCQ guidelines change each year)

- **Becta** information on Support Assistants and ICT

- **Ability Net**: National charity helping disabled people use computers and the internet. Host of information on assistive technology

- **Access to education for children and young people with medical needs** – a 2001 DfES guidance document

- **ALLFIE** (Alliance for Inclusive Education) Inclusive Education Guide for Professionals

- **Snapshots of Possibility**: publication from ALLFIE that provides inspiring examples of schools and colleges who are developing inclusive practices and environments: http://allfie.org.uk/pages/work/resources.html - alfres