



Equality Impact Assessment

A. Policy or Practice (name or brief description): **Removal of the reasonable adjustments providing coursework stickers to students with specific learning difficulties.**

B. Reason for screening (delete as applicable): **This is a new policy/practice, which followed on from a change to an existing policy/practice.**

C. Person responsible for the policy area or practice:

Name: **Sheila Williams**

Job title: **Director**

School/service/unit: **Student Disability Service**

D. Screening Analysis

1. Does the policy or practice affect primary or high level functions of the University? **No**
2. Is the policy or practice relevant to the promotion of equality (in terms of the Public Sector Equality Duty 'needs' set out in the introduction above)? **Yes**
3. Is the policy or practice one on which interested parties could reasonably expect the University to have carried out an EqlA? **Yes**

If the answer to any of these questions is 'Yes', an EqlA should be carried out on the proposed/revised policy or practice at an early stage and in any event before it is finalised.

E. Screening outcome

Equality Impact Assessment required: **Yes**

Record notes about the screening process or outcome here: **The initial equality Impact assessment has been carried out by a Specific Learning Difficulties Advisor in the Student Disability Service. This will be reviewed after a year.**

F. Sign-off

Screening undertaken by: **Holly Curless, Specific learning Difficulties Advisor**

Accepted by (name): **Sheila Williams, Director, Student Disability Service**

Date: **14/10/13**

G. Equality Impact Assessment

1. Overview. **The purpose of the coursework stickers was to highlight to the marker that a student has a specific learning difficulty, not to adjust marks in light of a student's dyslexia or specific learning difficulty.**

This was clearly written on the stickers, as represented in inverted commas below, and explained to the student when an Advisor created a learning profile (list of relevant support) for the student:

"Markers should be aware that this student has specific learning difficulties and has

been given appropriate support. If the work gives cause for concern then contact the Course Organiser. The marker should not adjust the marks because of the presence of a sticker.”

However many students appeared to misunderstand the purpose of the stickers and expected markers to be more lenient. Markers tended also to be confused: some thought they should mark more leniently and others adhered to School marking guidelines. There was therefore a wide disparity in the way work was being marked for students with the individual adjustment for coursework stickers.

The current status is that from August 2013 coursework stickers have been removed as a reasonable adjustment for students. Instead they have been replaced by university marking guidelines:

http://www.ed.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.120006!/fileManager/Marking%20Guidance%20July%202013.pdf

2. The main focus of the EqIA is to ensure that disabled (primarily dyslexic) students are not in any way disadvantaged or discriminated against by this change. **To a lesser extent the change may also benefit students whose first language is not English.**
3. Evidence about the needs of this group in relation to the removal of coursework stickers has been obtained by:
 - **Collating feedback from academics at The University of Edinburgh**
 - **Discussions with Coordinators of Adjustments (the key academic and support staff who are responsible for implementing students’ support in the Schools)**
 - **Ongoing feedback from students during 1-1 meetings with Specific Learning Difficulties Advisors**
 - **Feedback collated from emailing all students with this particular adjustment**
 - **SDS holding two focus groups for students with this adjustment to discuss the potential impact of removing it.**
 - **Researching policies in other Higher Education institutions throughout Scotland and the rest of the UK.**
4. Might the application of this policy/practice lead to discrimination, harassment or victimisation? Might it result in less favourable treatment for particular equality groups or give rise to indirect discrimination?

It is a legal requirement, under the Equality Act 2010, for Higher Education Institutions to anticipate the needs of disabled students by considering accessibility and providing disabled students with the same opportunity as their peers to demonstrate the achievement of learning outcomes. It is more efficient to do this, where feasible, by inclusive practice and accessible learning, rather than responding to individual needs. The removal of coursework stickers is an example of inclusive practise in learning and teaching.

Instead of the practise of implementing an adjustment for individual students, general marking guidelines have now been created for use across the University.

As markers were instructed not to adjust their marks because of the presence of a sticker, the removal of this adjustment should not result in discrimination towards students who previously had this adjustment. The intention of the stickers was to act as a deterrent to insensitive and unhelpful feedback, particularly regarding common dyslexic errors such as with spelling, grammar and punctuation. They were intended to encourage markers to refer students back to the Student Disability Service if a student’s work gave cause for concern.

It is possible that without these stickers an uninformed or insensitive marker could now provide insensitive feedback to the student and this could be particularly detrimental to students with specific learning difficulties. However, the marking guidelines now include a section on identifying work produced by students with specific learning difficulties. These guidelines should give markers a better ability to identify students who may have specific learning difficulties and refer them to the Student Disability Service, if appropriate.

The removal of the stickers may also encourage students to place more emphasis on proofreading their work more effectively, whether this is through the use of assistive technology and/or the support of a proofreader. Thus it may actually improve the quality of written work produced by students with specific learning difficulties.

5. Are reasonable adjustments built in where they may be needed?
Yes – students with specific learning difficulties have their needs assessed at The Disability Service and reasonable adjustments continue to be implemented. Common reasonable adjustments for producing written work may include the use of assistive software with specialist spellcheckers and text-to-speech software, and/or access to a proofreader.
6. Does the policy/practice contribute to advancing equality of opportunity?
The removal of coursework stickers will ensure consistency in the way work is marked for students who previously had this adjustment. It may also encourage students to develop better writing/proofreading strategies and engage with the support offered through the Student Disability Service. Students whose first language is not English may also benefit from the marking guidelines.
7. Is there an opportunity in applying this policy/practice to foster good relations between people in any protected group and those who are not¹? Will it help to tackle prejudice and/or promote understanding?
It is hoped that the change may assist in promoting understanding of students with specific learning difficulties; we hope that markers may be more likely to refer students to the Student Disability Service, if they are taking the marking guidance into account.
8. Is there evidence (or an expectation) that people from different equality groups have different needs or experiences in relation to the policy/practice? If so, what are they?
Not at the present time.
9. Is there evidence (or an expectation) of higher or lower uptake by any equality group(s)? If so, give details of the differences and the reasons for these (if known)?
The policy applies to students with specific learning difficulties/dyslexia.
10. Is any equality group excluded from participating in or accessing the service or functions? If so, why?
See response to section 9.
11. Does the policy/practice create any barriers for any other groups? For example, because of the time when the service is delivered or because of restricted income? Is the communication of the policy/practice accessible to all groups?
No
12. How are relevant equality groups or communities involved in the development, review and/or monitoring of the policy or practice?

¹ This question does not apply to the protected characteristic of marriage or civil partnership.

The Student Disability Service (SDS) held 2 student focus groups and all students with the adjustment were contacted and advised of the proposed changes before and after the stickers were removed. All affected students have been given the opportunity to discuss any concerns with an Advisor at the Student Disability Service. Ongoing feedback is being collated by the SDS and will be reviewed in August 2014, one year after the removal of the adjustment.

13. Are there any other points to note regarding the potential or actual impact of applying the policy or practice, with regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality and promote good relations? If so, note these here.

- **Continued dyslexia awareness training sessions are provided by The Student Disability and are open to all staff.**
- **The wider publication and implementation of the generic University marking guidelines is key to ensure that students with specific learning difficulties are given feedback that is both constructive and sensitive to their disability. It would be particularly beneficial to this group of students if marking guidelines could be further developed.**
- **Individual Schools are encouraged to set and communicate additional criteria, where relevant which could include spelling and grammar for assessments in which these are part of course competence standards.**

H. Equality Impact Assessment Outcome

There is a legal obligation to take account of the results of the EqIA in the development of a new or revised policy or practice. This requires considering taking action to address any issues identified, such as removing or mitigating any negative impacts, where possible, and exploiting any potential for positive impact. Clearly any unlawful discrimination must be eliminated.

Having considered the answers in section G, select one of the four options below to indicate how the development/review of the policy/practice will be progressed. Delete the options that do not apply.

I. Action and Monitoring

1. Specify the actions required to implement the findings of this EqIA.
No actions required at the present time.
2. State how the policy or practice will be monitored in relation to its equality impact (or note where this is specified above).
Views to be sought form students (in the SDS annual evaluation), academics and staff in the SDS.
3. When will the policy/practice next be reviewed?
June/July 2014

J. Publication of EqIA

EqIAs are published on the Equality and Diversity website. Can this EqIA be published in full, now? **Yes**

J. Sign-off

EqIA undertaken by: **Holly Curless, Specific Learning Difficulties Advisor**

Accepted by: **Sheila Williams, Director, Student Disability Service**

Date: **14/10/13**