Smith, Joanna, Dyer, Sally and Richardson, Sarah (2019) Using stories from disabled students: accessing specialist support to build student success in teaching and learning strategies. In: Learning & Teaching Fest 2019, 3 July 2019, University of Cumbria, Carlisle, UK. (Unpublished)

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3rd July 2019

Learning & Teaching Fest

University of Cumbria
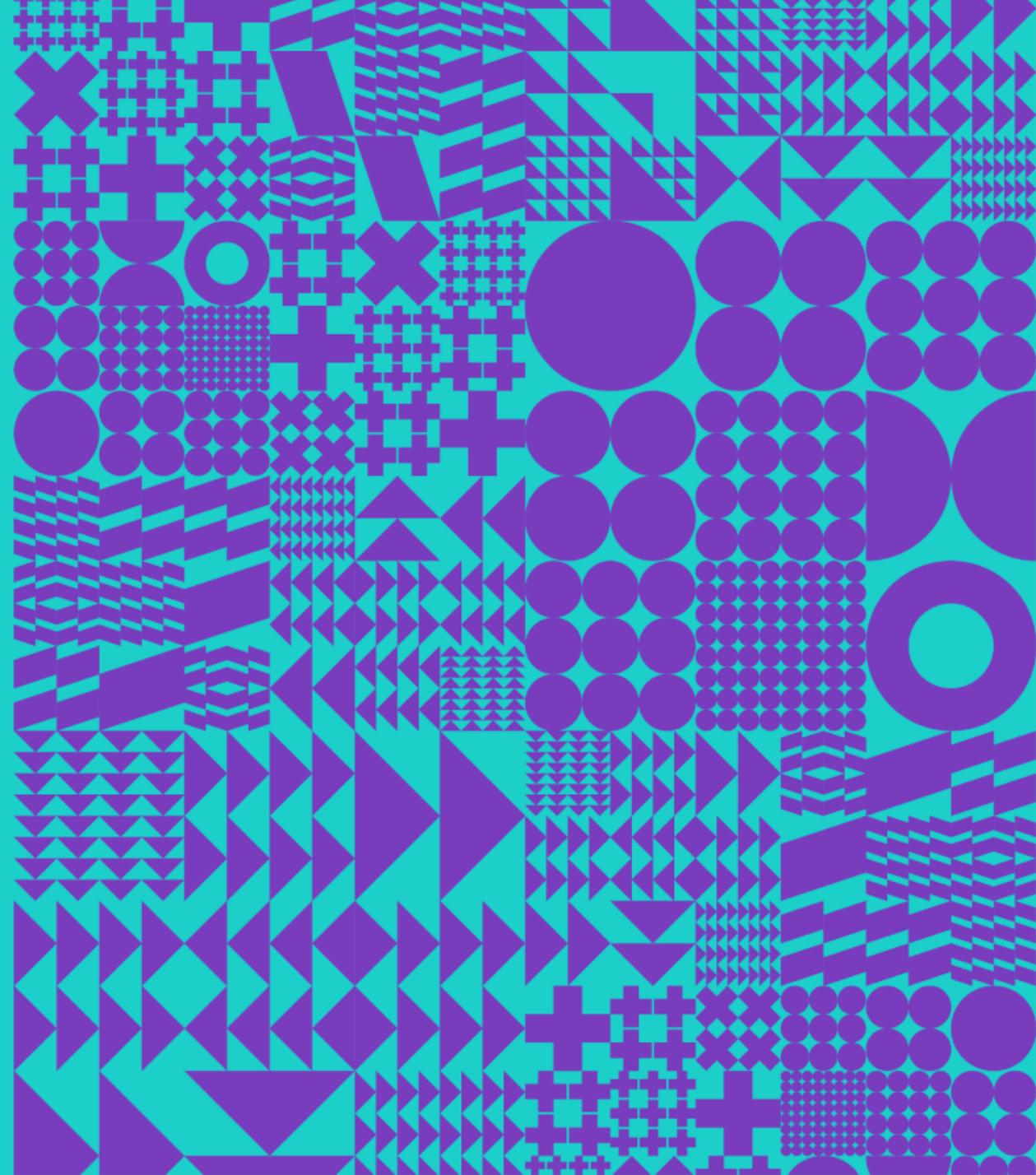
Using Stories from Disabled Students: Accessing Specialist/targeted Support to Build Student Success in Teaching and Learning Strategies.

Jo Smith (Disability Manager)

Sally Dyer (Specialist Learning Adviser)

Sarah Richardson (Disability Officer)

Introducing the Disability Team

Based on all the main campuses:

- Disability Officers : offers a range of information advice and guidance interviews

- Specialist learning Advisers: offers specialist study skills / mentoring ; screening for SpLD & ASD

- Student Learning Facilitators : offers a range of support interventions

Context

Equality Act (2010)& EU Accessibility Directive UoC

Meeting OfS Outcomes

- Reducing the achievement gap between disabled students and non disabled students
- Access and Participations Plans : Disabled Students one of the key target groups

Inclusive Learning and Teaching & Social Model of Disability

University Corporate Strategy and Plans
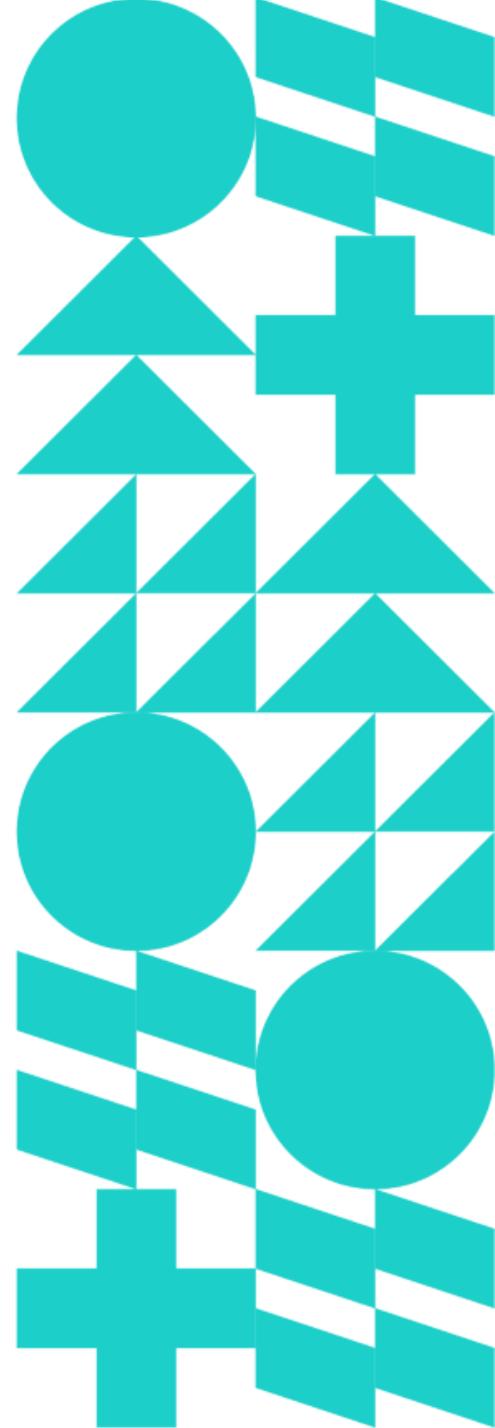
Definition of Disability

Service covers a full range of disabilities :

- Asperger's Syndrome
- SpLD's such as Dyslexia &Dyspraxia
- ADHD
- Visual Impairments
- Physical Impairments
- Mental Health Conditions
- Medical Conditions

Support Interventions

Assistance with developing time management skills

Improving personal organisation skills

Teaching mindfulness techniques to use to aid study skills – turn your procrastination into action

Individual development of memory techniques

Improving note-taking skills; with individually appropriate concise and practical techniques

Constructive teaching on academic writing skills; improve critical thinking and personal performance in academic situations

Techniques to develop spelling skills

Promote employability skills

Fostering skills in grammar

Teaching exam skills, especially towards understanding questions, planning answers and making effective use of extra time

Guidance on planning and structuring for essays and other work

Promote self-understanding of your strengths and difficulties so that you can develop self-confidence

Ways of using software effectively (including proof reading software)

Developing academic writing skills (inc. assistance in developing proof-reading skills)

We do not offer subject specific support or proof-reading

Fostering skills of punctuation

Specialist teaching to improve and develop your reading skills as the texts you need to conquer become more complex to read, understand, synthesise and remember

Introducing the Students...

Student Stories: Olivia

Oliva: BSc (Hons) Adult Nursing:

"I have dyslexia and I have coped in high school so I didn't come for screening until my second year. I wish I had come much sooner."

Student Stories: Jonny

Jonny (PhD student: Master of Philosophy/Doctor of Philosophy Psychology)

"My problem is dyslexia, particularly reading and writing and dyslexia and processing information."
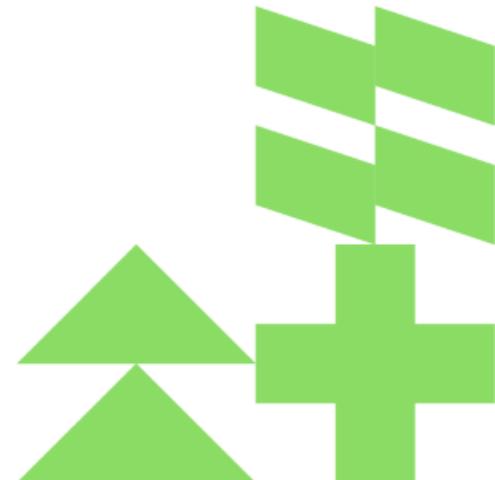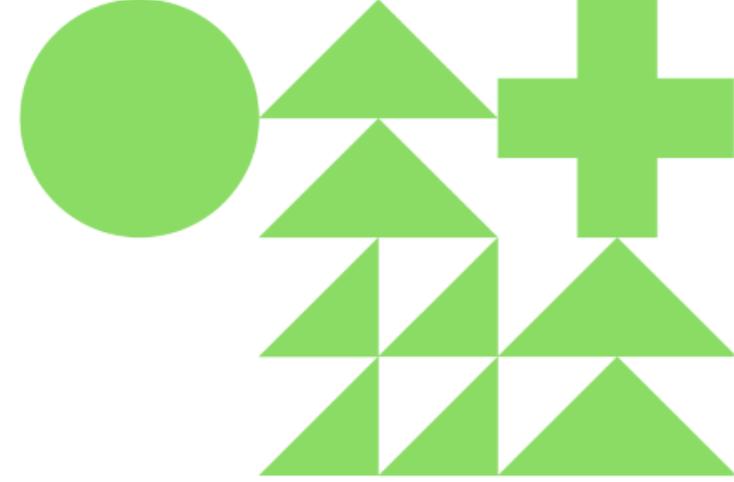
Student Stories: Johnny (continued)

"My problem is dyslexia, particularly reading and writing and processing information. My reading and writing is very, very slow and it's more the processing of info. If I try to read I can't process information. If I try to read I can't process information in my head…it just doesn't work, I can't do 2 things at once so if I'm reading my brain has to totally focus on that, I can't use my brain to analyse, so therefore whatever I read…I can read and read and read and it doesn't make a difference. It doesn't go in…there are bits but very little of it goes it".

"In life, before this, I was ok but when I came to university and had to do lots of reading and I had to get lots of information, I never would have been able to do it if I didn't have other means."
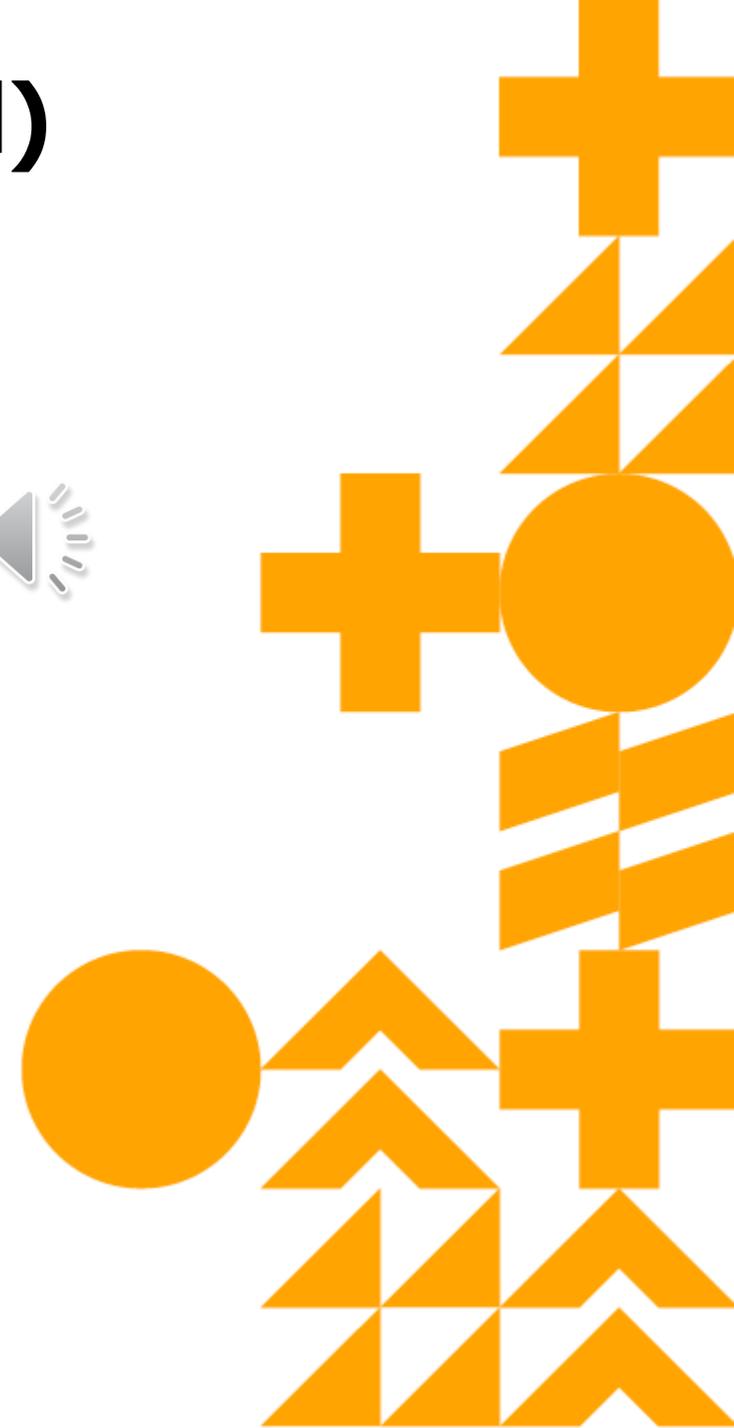
Student Stories: Michelle

Michelle: (FdSc Assistant Practitioner in Health and Social Care, Higher Level Apprenticeship)

"I was diagnosed with dyspraxia when I first started to do this course".

"Dyspraxia is different for each different pupil…mine is planning…my memory can be quite bad, spatial awareness, processing information can be quite difficult".
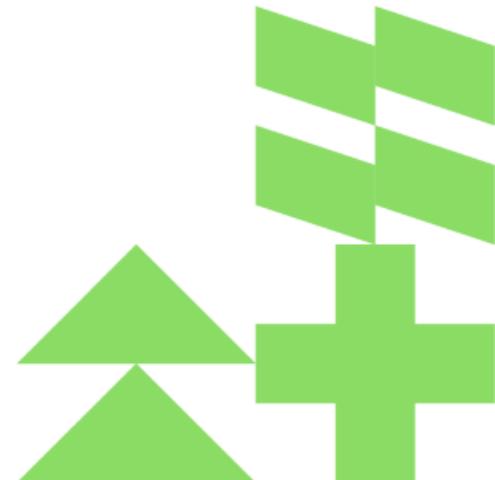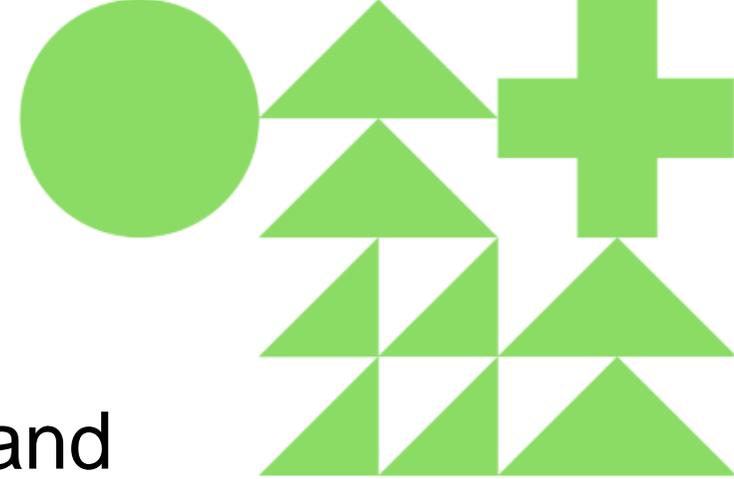
Student Stories: Lindsay

Lindsay: (Working with Children & Families)

"[I have a] visual impairment which means that I am unable to read or see anything that I need to focus on. Also it affects my self esteem and confidence as I feel judged and unable to do some things that others my age don't seem to struggle with".
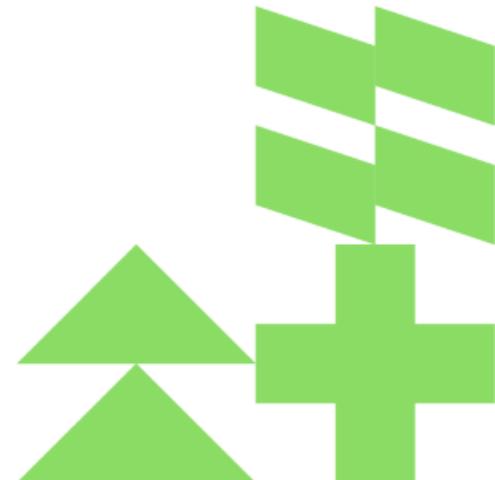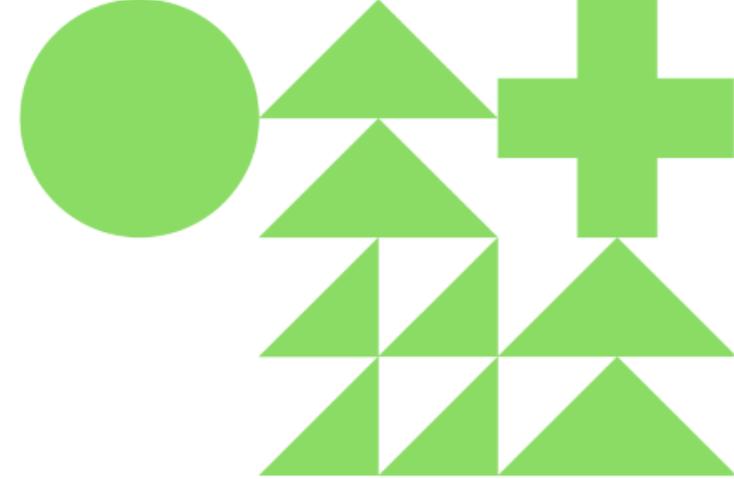
Student Stories: Walter

Walter: BA (Hons) Graphic Design

"I have ADHD and also dyslexia, I struggle with stress. I get easily distracted."
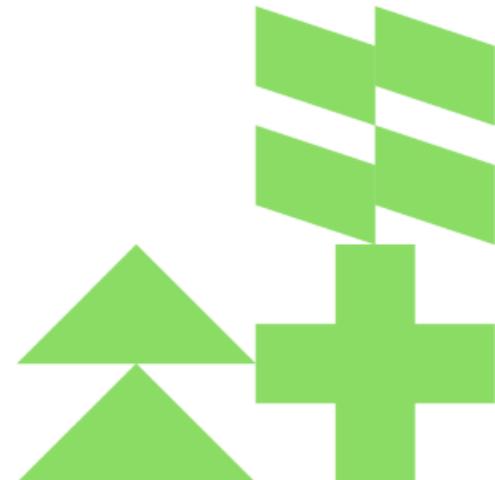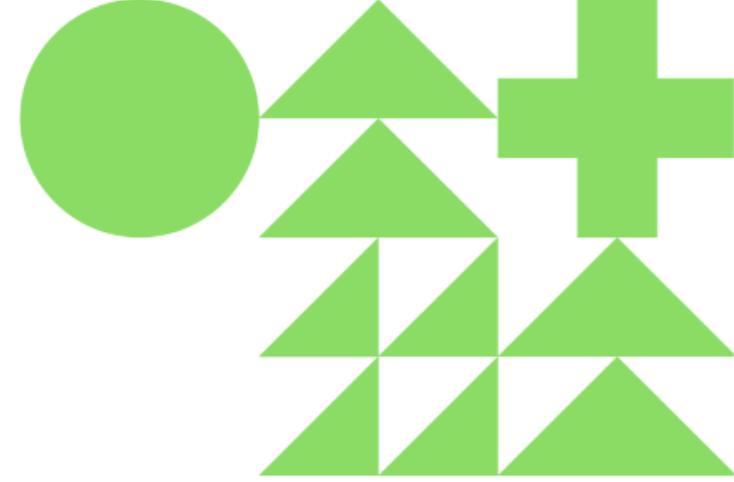
Student Stories: Patrick

Patrick: BSc (Hons) Professional Policing "Autism Spectrum Disorder".

Patrick has difficulties organising and sorting information (particularly identifying what is 'useful').
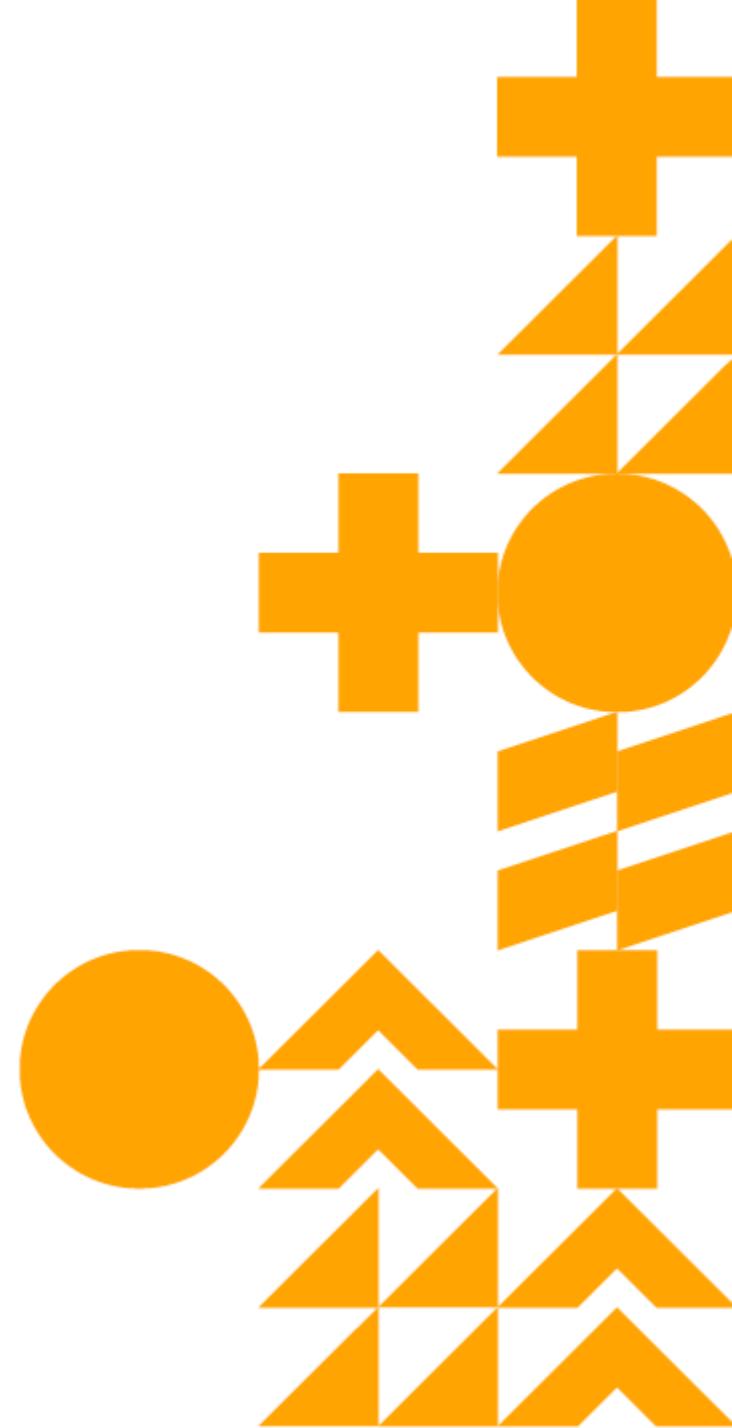
Student Stories: Paul

Paul (Dip HE Paramedic Practice) was diagnosed with an SpLD- dyslexia when he was at college.

Paul can struggle with concentration and can become anxious if he does not understand what an assignment is asking him to do.
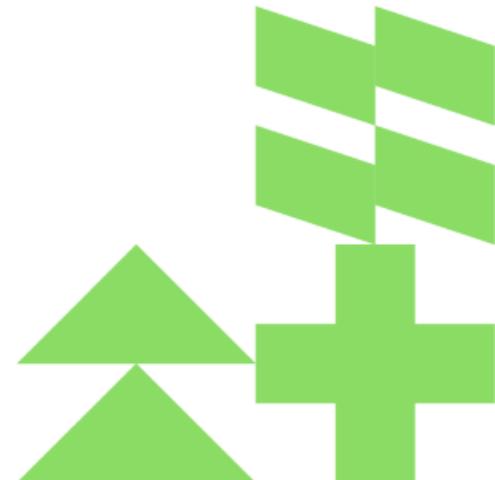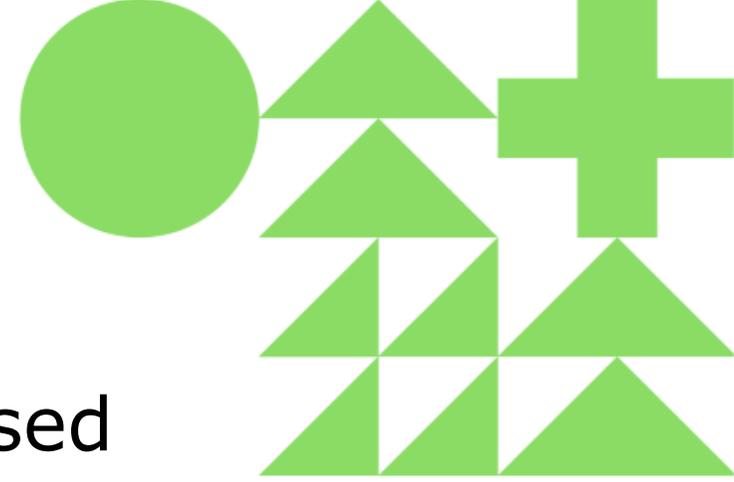
Student Stories: Hannah

Hannah: Open Studies – International Student.

Hannah has a mobility difficulty and Specific Learning Difficulties-Dyslexia. She has problems concentrating and can stammer.

Hannah says:

"I need to go through information several times".

"I need time to get into concentration and to memorize materials".

"I get distracted very easy. I do often write words in a wrong way".

"I'm stammering when I'm talking especially when I'm doing presentations but I do not want to skip presentations because I have to deal with it and get used to it".
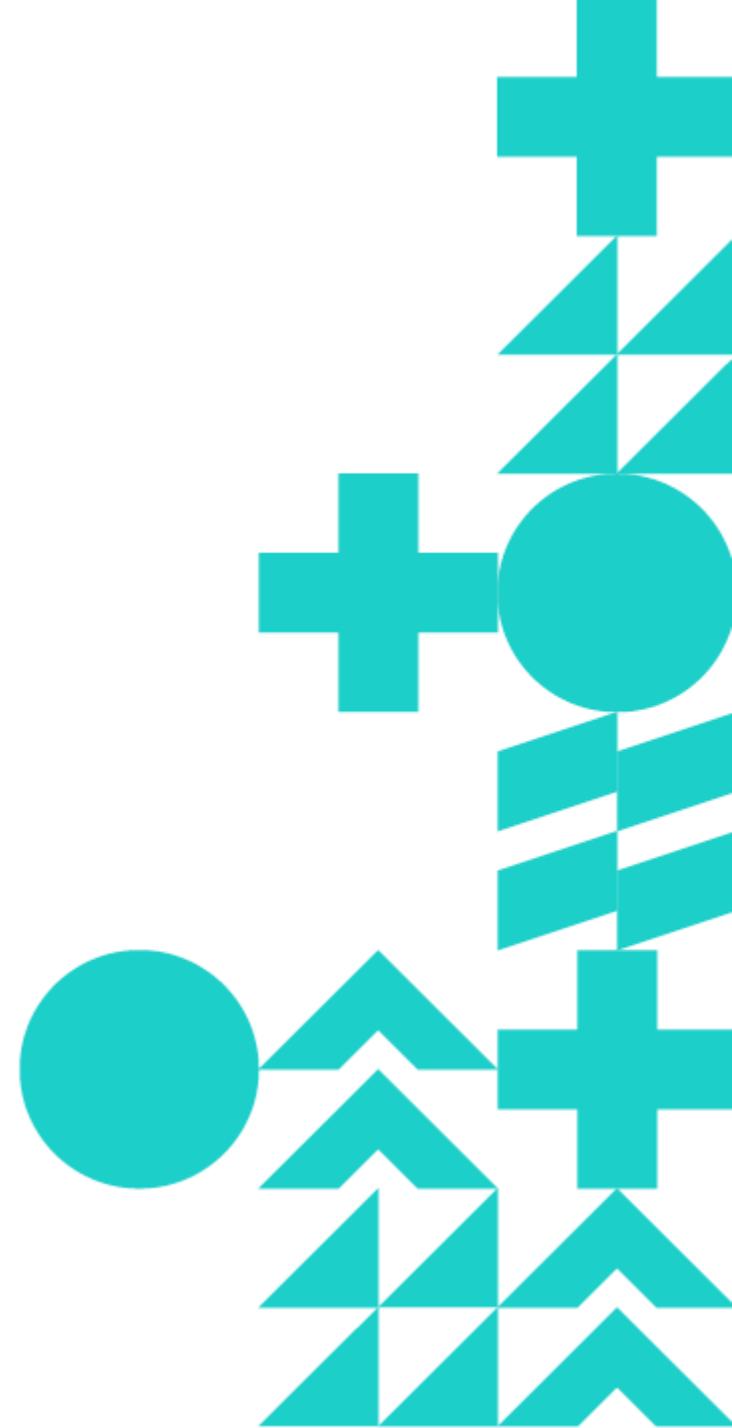
What the students had to say about their support interventions and their student experience...

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Olivia: 'Claro Read' & command words

1.) Olivia likes using assistive technology, like 'Claro Read' and has learnt how to highlight command words

- "ClaroRead to read my own work. This helps the flow and the structure because I can't always spot the mistakes when I read it."

- "I like being able to discuss work and pin point learning outcomes … also the strategy of highlighting all the command words. This have improved the structure a lot".

2.) Olivia feels that study skills is a safe space for her…

- "It is helpful to discuss the work and not feel patronised".

Jonny: using assistive technology, improving his critical writing skills, staff awareness of his difficulties.

1.) Using read aloud software (Read & Write or Claro)…

- "Whenever it is reading to me it highlight's the words…I watch [the words] and I scan. The 3 together means I can use my analytical brain and I can highlight the stuff I think is interesting without stopping it".

- "When I highlight it my brain sees it and automatically knows it's important and I'll remember it".

- "This takes the weight off so I can use my analytical brain…I've had to find a way of using the software in the right way".
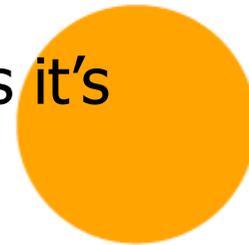
2.) By accessing study skills support Jonny's grades have improved…

- "The first mark I got was 62%…I've never had anything as low as that since, that would have been before I came to see you [Specialist Learning Advisor].

- "As soon as I started seeing you, my scores started to go up I think I've only had 1 maybe 2 assignments scored in the 60's…everything else has been over 70, so I've definitely increased my average."

Study Skills has helped Jonny to…

- "…be more critical of my work."

- "…my writing used to be all over the place…I would make grand comments".

3.) Jonny: felt anxious that because he was performing well and gaining good grades, staff wouldn't appreciate how hard he has to work.

- "It's embarrassing and highly frustrating…I was savvy enough to say, 'I've got dyslexia, I can't read this I can scan through it and pick up bits and pieces of it, but quite often when I do that I don't get it right'".
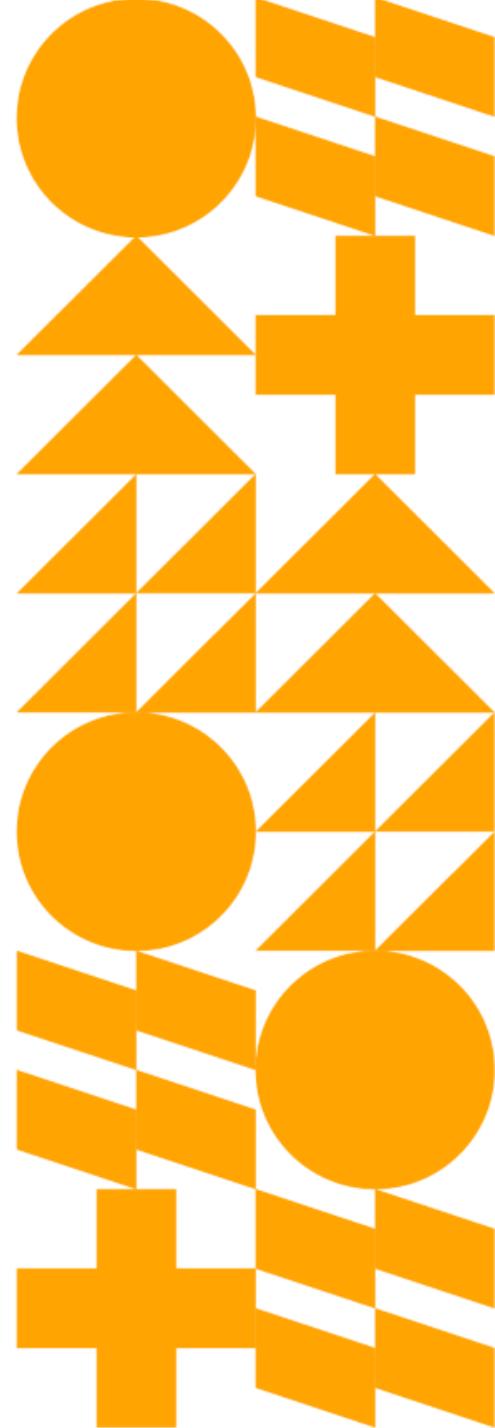
Michelle: Making a plan and remembering to reflect...

1.) Michelle describes how study skills has taught her to always make a plan...

"One of the most effective strategies that you have taught me was to always make a plan. So together we broke down a plan, we put 'so many words' for an introduction, 'so many words for a conclusion' and then we worked through it together and then I could meet my learning outcomes, look at the bullet points and tick off my list as I was going along. This I've found over the last 18 months has been a great help and it's helped me improve on my marks".

**2.) Michelle felt so nervous that she was unable to fully demonstrate her knowledge in a presentation:**

- "In the beginning, on my first presentation, I was so nervous, instead of doing 20 minutes, I whizzed through in 9 minutes because I was so nervous, but having worked with Karen and we've gone through coping strategies I've now learned that my confidence has grown just by planning and making sure what I'm going to say is the right thing".

3.) But now, Michelle feels more confident…

- "It's [study skills support] definitely helped with my confidence…I reflect more when I've been out to see a patient, I come back, I analyse why, why, how things could have been done differently and it's definitely improved my ways of working".
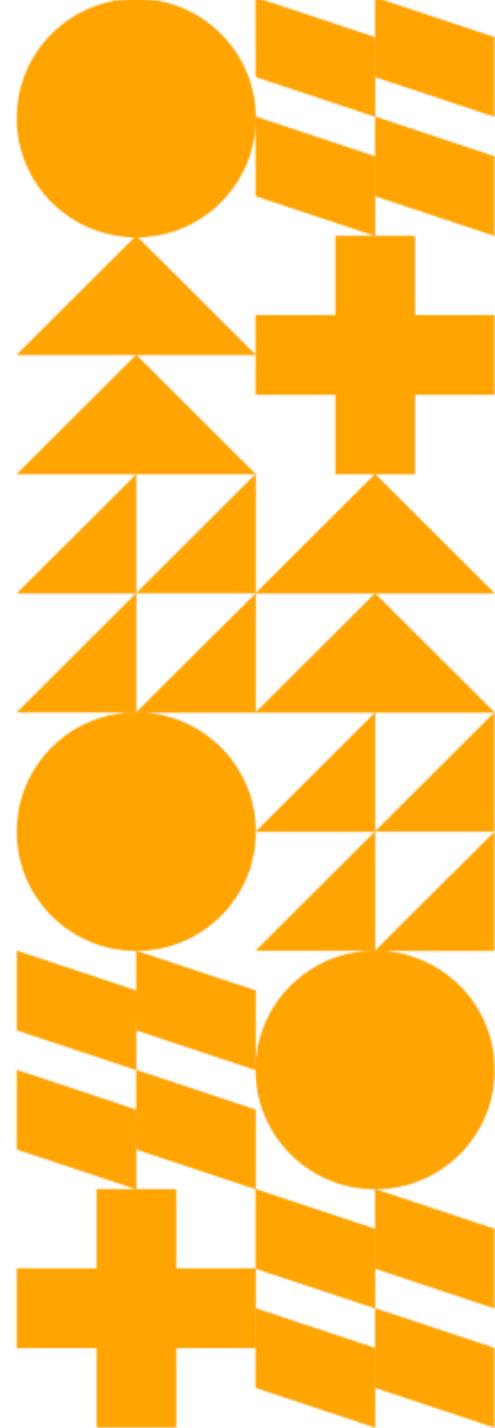
Lindsay: Using note taking support

1.) Lindsay felt supported with a combination of 1:1 support and assistive technology…

- "I have learnt my physical limits and (sessions) helped to manage these as well as given useful assistive technology".

- "This has meant that I was able to interact and participate more than I was without the technology".

- "My assignments were more focused and detailed due to the note takers. I felt supported and more confident".

Walter: Using colour and Mindview

1.) Walter likes using some assistive technology, because the colours make it easier for him to absorb information.

- "I am very visually orientated. I find colour works: time scheduling and focussing on organisation helps a lot".

- "At Support sessions we will read through my work. I then review the session and clarify a few action points. I need to verbalise my action points. I also like using dragon".

2.) His confidence has grown too…

- "Face to face support has helped my self confidence I'm now comfortable with myself since diagnosis. I call my differences super powers! There needs to be more understanding on ADHD."

Patrick: Using bullet points to break things down…

**1.) Patrick needs to break things down into manageable chunks**

- "I find making bullet points [helps to] simplifying large amounts of text and sorting the most useful information".

- "Helped a lot with a making a start on the essay and in proofreading".

- "Helpful [planning assignments] if bullet points are made to cover each area".

- [The above] helped to include everything that meets the learning outcomes and includes everything that is needed.

- I find making bullet points [helps] simplifying large amounts of text and sorting the most useful information. Helped a lot with a making a start on the essay and in proofreading.

Paul: Study Skills is a safe space and helps to manage stress…

1.) Paul finds face to face support allows him to ask questions and work at a pace that is right for him…

- "[Uses support sessions] to discuss work at my own speed and level and ask questions. They provide a safe house which takes the stress away. This avoids asking multiple questions in a class-based environment."

- "Use bullet points as it saves significant amounts of time and stress worrying about perfect sentence structure and breaks information down into manageable pieces."

- "Do a small amount of work daily is better than a lot in short space of time. This way I keep ahead of schedule".

- "On placement having regular breaks – and staying mindful of burn out and knowing when I may need 5 minutes."

Hannah: Reassurance to reduce pressure

1.) Hannah could use the feedback from her study skills appointment, to raise her own standards and it reduced her anxiety…

- "To know there is someone who is looking through my texts helped reduce the pressure of writing academic assignments".
- "I was told when a sentence did not make any sense at all or when I wrote words wrong, it helped a lot to improve the standard".
- "At first having feedback totally overwhelmed me. It was too much but next time did it earlier and then implemented in small chunks."

What do these stories tell us?

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Key overarching themes

- Students are all individuals BUT there are some common themes.

- There are a number of simple strategies that help academically and professionally

- Understanding the Psychological impact is crucial and support sessions provide a safe place to grow and explore issues

- Assistive technology is being used much more by students

- Needs to develop a greater understanding across the university of disability and some specific disabilities

Anticipatory reasonable adjustments:

- **Accessible lecture materials**- in a format that is easy to use, follow and extract information from.

- **Assistive Technology-** opportunities to use it during teaching sessions.

- **Information displayed in a variety of formats-** use of text, pictures/diagrams/charts/mind maps etc...

- **Paced-** rather than lots of information given at once, use of bullet points to break content down into manageable chunks.
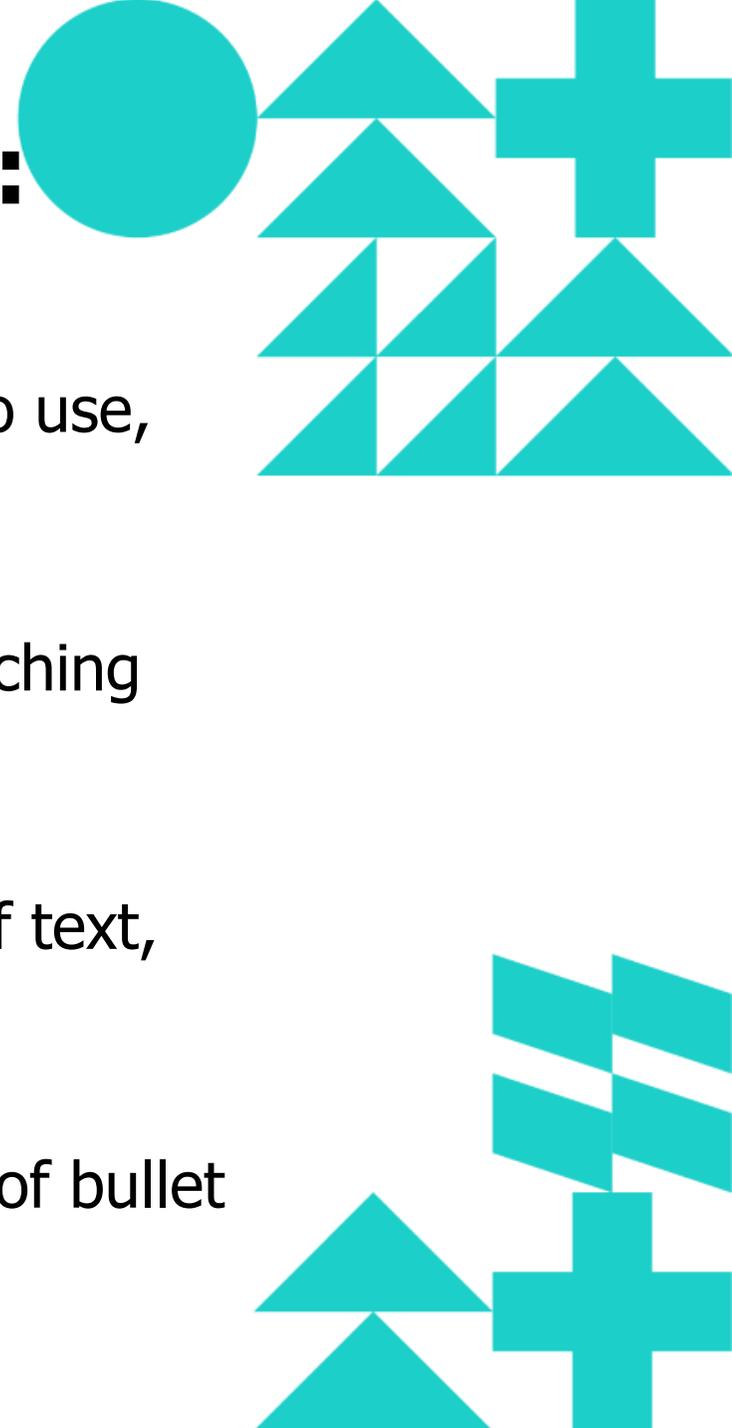
Anticipatory reasonable adjustments:

- **Repetition of key messages**

- **Frequent recaps-** reviewing what has been covered in previous lectures/sessions/seminars

- **Frequent opportunities for students to practice what they have learned.**

- **Frequent feedback-** academic staff feedback and/or peer feedback.

Critical Tips for Academic staff….

"The university needs to listen to the disability team and the individual. They (the department) want the support of the team, but then don't listen".

"We all get a support plan, sent to the programme leader. Staff don't read it. I need time to prepare to read before hand …they have to give us the information we need before we go in.

[It means] I don't have to go through this horrible, painful, angry situation where I'm handed something and they say 'read this and tell me what you think' and I feel like screaming 'I've told you, I've told you I can't do it!'

"We need student-centred care! It needs to be personalised/individualised."
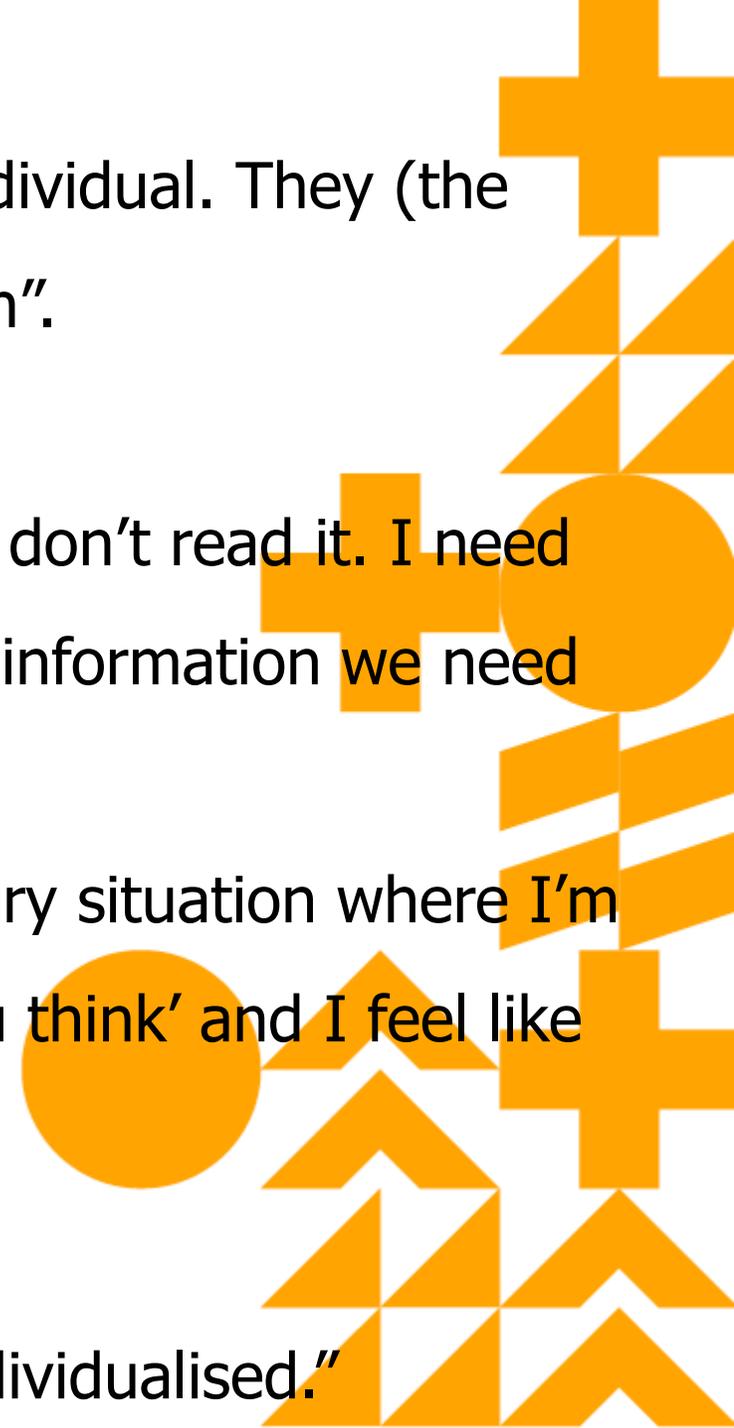
Disability/SpLD Action Plans:

- We are reviewing the style of the Disability/SpLD Action Plans.

- We want them to be more accessible (easier for staff to extract key information).

Discussion:

- What information do you need from us?

Specific Individual Reasonable Adjustments

- Staff should use the Student Progress Review (SPR) procedure to engage in discussions about support and reasonable adjustments

- An SPR is an opportunity to identify what is working well, and what isn't.

- Reasonable adjustments in the action plan can be discussed and explored further- sometimes further support from the Disability team is needed e.g. encouraging the student to book additional appointments with our advisors for study skills, or perhaps making use of their assistive technology during lectures/in a class room setting.

- Sometimes there can be tensions between reasonable adjustments and meeting professional, core competencies (e.g. supporting students on placement).
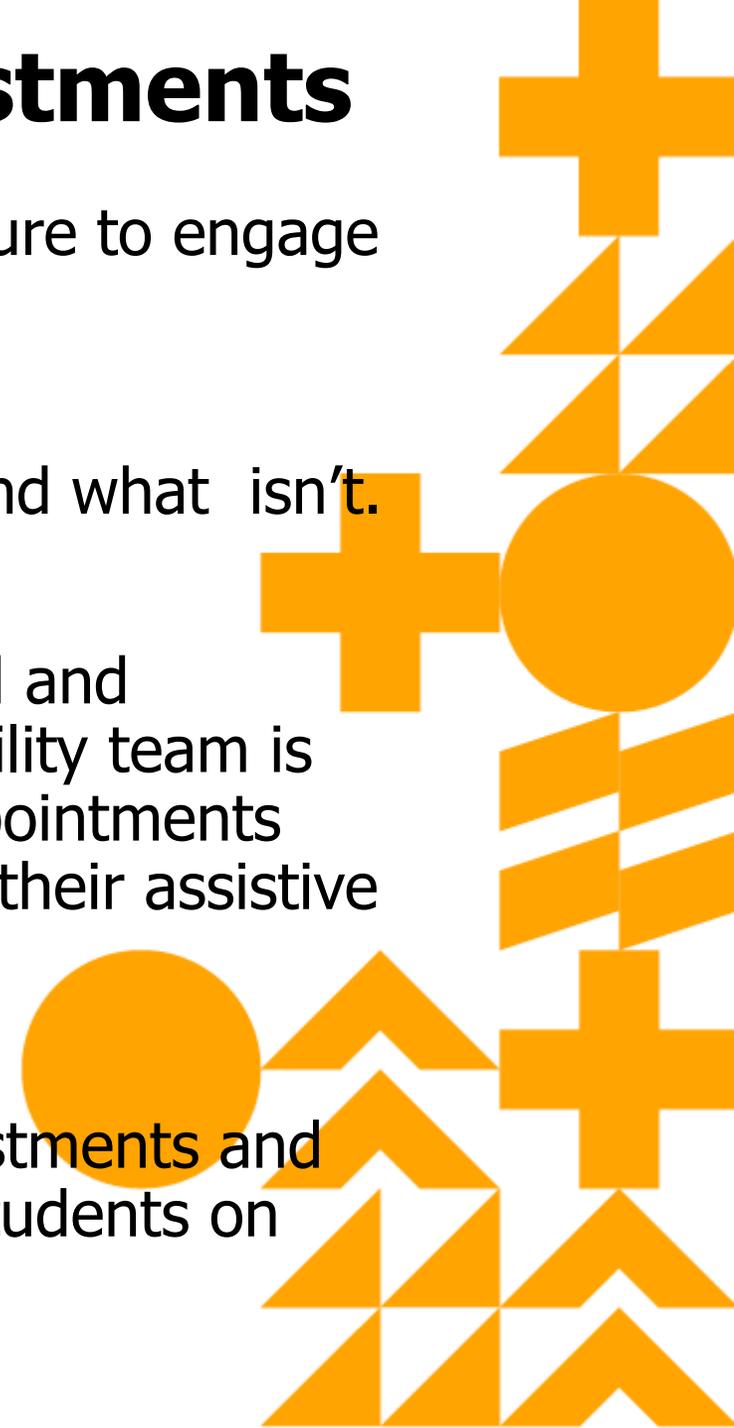
Other Guidance for Staff:

https://magic.piktochart.com/output/22605782-ideas-for-busy-lecturers

Critical tips on improving inclusive practice

https://magic.piktochart.com/output/22642588-supporting-students-flow-chart

Disability Support for Students: A quick reference guide for staff
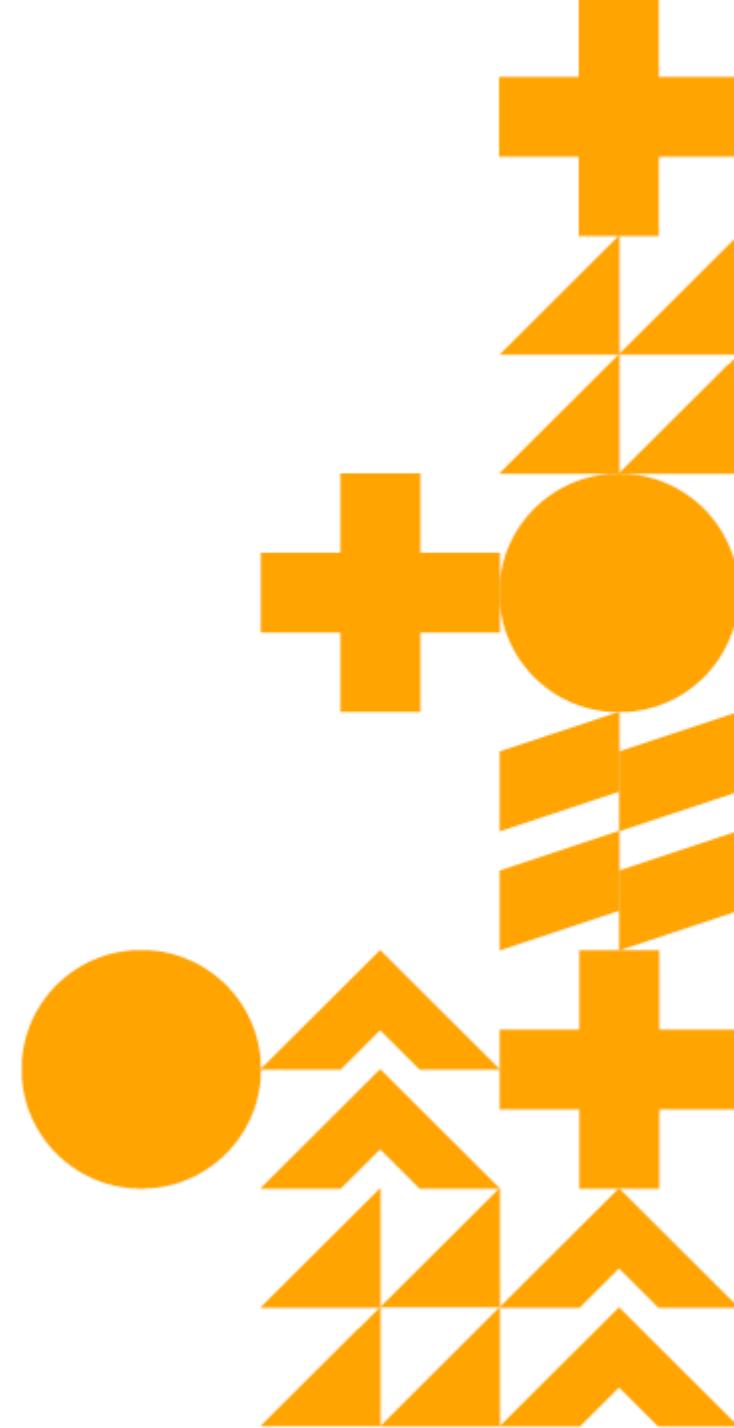
Support Services really matter to students!

Some student comments:

"you were a great help this year"

"…seemed to make my last year less stressful."

"What has helped is individual face-to-face help with my self-confidence."

"the disability team are amazing and I don't think I would have been able to complete my first year without them."
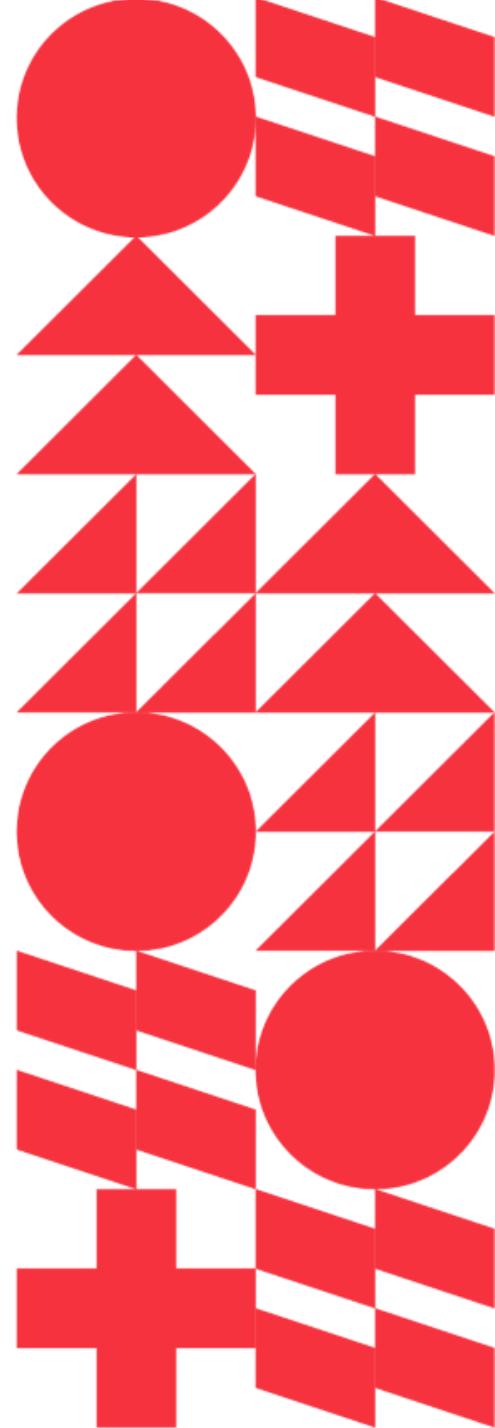
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Disabled Students Sector Leadership Group (2017) Inclusive Teaching and Learning in Higher Education as a route to Excellence available at: www.gov.uk/government/publications accessed on: 19/3/19

Kendall, L (2016) Higher education and disability: Exploring student experiences Cogent Education, 3: 1256142

Newman, I and Conway, J (2019) 'Inclusive teaching: from back seat to driving seat? PATOSS Bulletin 32 (1)