

Case Study 1

A Social Work Department requires all applicants to attend an interview. One applicant has a speech difficulty which gets worse when he is nervous. This means he needs more time to express himself. The department refuses to allow him any extra time at interview.

1. Might this be unlawful treatment on the grounds of disability?
2. If so, what reasonable adjustments might an institution make to ensure that it is not treating a disabled person less favourably?
3. What justifications might there be in treating the disabled person/student less favourably or failing to make a reasonable adjustment?
4. What systems might an institution put in place to ensure that it is meeting its responsibilities under the Act?

Case Study 2

A disabled student applies to do a Social Work course at a university. The university looks for experience of voluntary work in its admissions criteria for the social work course. The student's disability has meant that she has found it difficult to secure voluntary work in comparison to non-disabled people. The social work department refuses the student a place on the grounds that she has not done enough voluntary work.

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Case Study 3

Margaret is a second year student on a Social Work course. She has a disability but did not declare it at registration because she considered it unlikely to affect her studies. However, she informed the Disability Service and provided medical evidence of her illness, but she asked them to treat the information as confidential.

There have been no instances of her disability causing insurmountable difficulties for her in carrying out her studies to date, but there have been occasions when teaching staff have noticed that she seemed to have difficulty in concentrating, and she has had quite a few absences. These have been covered, where necessary, with rather imprecise medical evidence submitted to Registry.

In making the arrangements for second year placements you wonder whether the different circumstances and surroundings of the placement situation might cause difficulties. You decide to provide an opportunity for Margaret to discuss the forthcoming placement with you. During this meeting she states that there is a possibility that her disability could result in her developing panic symptoms when under stress, and, very occasionally, a fairly sudden onset of visual impairment, although this has never occurred during her period of attendance at university. Also, there have been occasions when she found it very difficult to attend because of fatigue. Given the nature of the placement, which is likely to involve working with children in what, at times, could be a stressful environment, you form the view that the placement provider should be made aware of her possible difficulties. The student is unhappy with this proposal, and suggests that you discuss the position with the Disability Service. If there is a concern, she suggests that she should be allowed to do the placement on a part time basis.

- What are the issues that this case raises for (a) the placement organiser, (b) the disabled student, and (c) the wider University?