



**ST MARY'S UNIVERSITY COLLEGE**  
**STUDENT DISABILITY POLICY**

## **St Mary's University College**

### **Student Disability Policy**

#### **Policy Statement**

St Mary's University College is committed to a policy of equal opportunity and seeks to ensure that students with a disability or long term condition have equitable access as far as reasonably possible to all aspects of College life.

In outlining this commitment, the College will take all reasonable steps to ensure that all students can benefit from the full range of academic, cultural and social activities that the College offers.

The College also endorses the social model of disability, thereby not focusing on the individual's disability or long term condition, but instead identifying the structural, organisational, physical and attitudinal barriers that prohibit students with a disability or long term condition from achieving equality of opportunity.

The Disability Policy applies to any prospective or current student who may require the implementation of reasonable adjustments as result of disability or long term condition as defined by the Special Educational Needs and Disability Order (2005).

The College will be guided by the Special Educational Needs and Disability Order (2005) and Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act (1998).

#### **Legislative Background**

**The Special Educational Needs and Disability Order (SENDO)** came into effect in Northern Ireland on 1 September 2005. This extended the provision of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 to education providers and has ensured that people with a disability have equal opportunities to benefit from and participate in the teaching, learning and other services available in Higher Education institutions.

Northern Ireland legislation defines 'Disability' as:

"A physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on a person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities."

For further information on what constitutes as a disability in Northern Ireland, please refer to: <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/protection-against-disability-discrimination>

Discrimination against students with disabilities and long term conditions can take place in two ways by:

- treating them less favourably than non-disabled students
- failing to make a 'reasonable adjustment' thereby placing them at a substantial disadvantage to non-disabled students for a reason relating to their disability or long term condition

The College, in recognition of its duties under SENDO, will seek to anticipate the needs of future applicants and students with disability in creating an inclusive environment within the College, as far as practically possible. To ensure best practice in relation to provision the College works closely with Equality Commission for Northern Ireland and follows closely the recommendations and examples within the Code of Practice for Higher and Further Education Institutions and Good Practice Guidelines produced by HEFCE and other disability-related organisations.

### **General Principles of Support**

The College is committed to creating an environment where students are comfortable in disclosing a disability or long term condition. Disability services are located within Student Guidance and Support to provide prospective and current students and staff of the College with appropriate information relating to disability issues. Student Guidance and Support works closely with Disability Services at Queen's University Belfast to make individual support recommendations for the student's based assessed need and the relevant resources at the College's disposal.

Any student who discloses a disability or long-term condition to the College can expect the following general principles of support to be applied:

- Applications for admission from students with a disability or long term condition are assessed on the same basis as all other applicants. The main selection criteria for entry to programmes are academic background and qualifications.
- The College endorses the principles of inclusive curriculum for all students.
- Students will have access to appropriate reasonable adjustments to enable them to participate in all aspects of College life.
- Students have the opportunity to discuss their individual requirements with an appropriate member of staff.
- Staff who are required to implement reasonable adjustments will have access to appropriate information.
- Students will be supported by appropriately trained staff.
- The College Estate will be accessible to all students, where reasonable, and Personal Emergency Plans arranged to ensure a safe environment for students who require assistance to evacuate buildings.

Information obtained regarding a student's disability or long term condition will be treated as personal and sensitive data. The information will be held in accordance with the College's Data Protection Policy and is only shared to ensure agreed supports and reasonable adjustments are implemented or when a safeguarding issue necessitates.

## **PERSONAL SUPPORT**

### **Student Guidance and Support**

St. Mary's University College welcomes applications from students who have a disability, medical condition or specific learning difficulty.

Student Support staff aim to provide guidance and support on a range of issues, academic and personal, to ensure that time spent in the College is a positive experience.

### **Declaring Additional Needs**

When applying to the College, it is strongly recommended that students disclose any disability on the application form. Discussion surrounding individual needs can take place pre-entry. Students who choose not to disclose pre-entry, may disclose post-acceptance of an offer when registering on the QSIS system at Queen's University Belfast; BEd students can also declare a disability on the Health Declaration Form they are required to complete. In addition, students may contact Student Support staff at any time. All disclosed information is treated confidentially.

### **Identifying Additional Needs**

Students who suspect they may have a learning disability, contact Student Support staff who will arrange an assessment by an educational psychologist. There is no charge to the student for such an assessment which may take place pre or post-entry to the course.

## **FACILITIES**

### **Accessibility**

The College is keen to assist, in any way possible, students experiencing permanent or temporary accessibility issues. Accessible parking is available for those with a disabled parking badge. There are four disabled parking spaces available in the back carpark for student use and two spaces in the front carpark for staff and visitors. Wheelchair accessible and ambulant toilet facilities are available throughout the campus. A map showing locations is available upon request.

Physical access can be gained to all floors of the College via ramps and two lifts, one located at the front and the other at the back of the building.

A map showing locations is available upon request.

### **In The Event Of An Emergency Evacuation (including fire)**

In the event of an emergency evacuation, an alarm will sound throughout the building. To assist those with hearing or sight impairment, strobe/flashing lights and sounders are located throughout the College which will activate to indicate that evacuation of the building is necessary. Students should evacuate the building quickly and calmly by the nearest available escape route, unless instructed otherwise by the Fire Steward, and go directly to the established Assembly Point. The Fire Stewards will assist in clearing each area of the College.

## **Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans (PEEPS)**

A PEEP will be drawn up to assist students who feel they would be unable to exit the building, without assistance, in an emergency evacuation. Students should contact Student Support staff if they feel you may require a PEEP.

## **Induction Loop System**

There is an induction loop system in many areas throughout the College, including teaching rooms. The timetable of students who are hearing-impaired will be adjusted, as far as possible, to ensure that teaching occurs in rooms that contain the loop system. To use the system the user requires a receiver and neck loop of which twenty are available. Students should contact Student Support staff to obtain the necessary equipment.

## **SOURCES OF GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT**

### **Student Support Office**

Guidance is available on both academic and personal matters in the Student Support Offices.

### **College Services**

Careers and Counselling services are available on campus and a mentoring service is also available for those who require help with study skills. Staff and peer tutors in the Writing Centre are available to advise on improving written communication. In addition, the student body appoint a representative each year to act as the Disability Officer on the Student Union Executive Committee.

### **Study Abroad**

St Mary's is keen to support students with additional needs who wish to study abroad. If appropriate, St Mary's students undertaking periods of study abroad, will be advised of the support that may be available in partner institutions and assisted to access such support. If appropriate, incoming Erasmus students will be encouraged to avail of the College's Student Support service. Every effort will be made to meet the needs of both incoming and outgoing students embarking on study abroad programmes.

## **FINANCIAL SUPPORT**

Some disabled students are entitled to financial support during their years of study. Eligibility will depend on place of residency and the impact of the disability on the individual; robust medical evidence will be required to support any application. Student Support staff can assist students with the Disabled Students Allowance application process.

## **Disabled Students Allowance (DSA)**

DSA is a supplementary allowance available in Northern Ireland to full-time and most part-time undergraduate students and some postgraduate students who have a disability, medical condition or specific learning difficulty and who are studying at a Higher Education institution. Equivalent allowances exist for disabled students from other jurisdictions; Student Support staff assist students with the application process

## **MEETING STUDENTS' NEEDS**

### **Needs Assessment - Internal Support**

When a student secures a place at the College, and declares a disability, a meeting to assess individual support needs is arranged with the College's Disability Advisor. At this meeting, the Disability Advisor will decide how best the course can be made flexible to meet individual needs through reasonable adjustment. An Individual Student Support Agreement (ISSA) will be completed and sent to appropriate staff, with the student's agreement, by secure means.

### **Needs Assessment – Externally-funded Support**

During the Needs Assessment meeting, if appropriate, students will be encouraged by the Disability Advisor to make an application for DSA funding (or equivalent) in order to purchase the resources they need to meet their support needs.