



SCHOOL OF EDUCATION - FITNESS TO TEACH AND DISABILITY SUPPORT PROCEDURES FOR ITE PROGRAMMES

The School of Education recognises the benefits that teachers with a disability can bring to education and actively welcomes applications from trainees with a disability. For teacher education courses, whilst needing to ensure that all applicants have the health and physical capacity to teach (Department for Education (DfE) ITT Criteria document), we are also mindful of the implications of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (2001), the Equality Act 2010) and the Higher Education Occupational Health Physicians/Practitioners (HEOPS) – Trainee Teachers – Standards of medical fitness to train guidance (2014). The School of Education addresses disability positively and does not discriminate against applicants with disabilities. It strives to ensure that such applicants are given every opportunity to succeed with the support of its own staff, staff in partner schools and wider University support services.

Fitness to Teach and Disability Support

It is important for applicants/trainees and ITE staff to understand the differences between the Fitness to Teach medical assessment and an applicant's rights under the Equality Act for disability support. Regular communication between the School of Education, the AccessAbility and Wellbeing teams and the Occupational Health assessment team ensures that all parties who might be involved in discussion with a disabled applicant/trainee are fully informed. To clarify, the Fitness to Teach assessment relates to a trainee's time spent in a school environment as a trainee teacher. Wider assessment from the AccessAbility and Wellbeing teams ensures that trainees with disabilities and/or learning difficulties are well supported during their academic studies.

Determining Fitness to Teach at application stage

All successful applicants are informed that the offer of a place is conditional upon being deemed Fit to Teach and they are required to complete a confidential medical questionnaire. This is returned, via a secure online portal to the Occupational Health assessment team, who make the 'Fitness to Teach' decision based on its information and if needed, a telephone interview and/or meeting with the applicant, in line with the guidance provided in the Higher Education Occupational Health Physicians/Practitioners (HEOPS) – Trainee Teachers – Standards of medical fitness to train guidance (2014) ([https://heops.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/bsk-pdf-manager/2019/09/1521730958HEOPS Teaching Students fitness standards 2014 v9.pdf](https://heops.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/bsk-pdf-manager/2019/09/1521730958HEOPS_Teaching_Students_fitness_standards_2014_v9.pdf)) . This will result in one of three decisions being conveyed to Admissions:

1. The trainee is Fit to Teach
2. The trainee is Fit to Teach with recommendations/adjustments
3. The trainee is not Fit to Teach.

Where adjustments are needed, the Occupational Health team will write an OH report detailing the adjustments advised. This is sent to the Partnership Office who are responsible for ensuring that these adjustments are provided/facilitated in the relevant placement settings. Sometimes, it may be necessary to seek further information before the Fitness to Teach decision can be made. In these cases, the Occupational Health professional, with consent from the applicant, will discuss any proposed adjustments with the Partnership Director to ensure that any such adjustments are reasonable within the teaching context. If necessary, this may result in an applicant needing to defer their studies (or interrupt if the trainee is already

registered on the course) if the adjustments required are deemed reasonable but a suitable placement cannot be found within these constraints for the appropriate period of time.

Re-assessing Fitness to Teach once training has commenced

If an applicant fails to disclose a pre-existing disability on the medical form which would have deemed him or her not fit to teach, the university has the right to reassess the trainee and if necessary, require the trainee to undergo a Fitness to Practise investigation.

If a trainee's physical or mental health changes during the year, the University, or the trainee, has the right to ask the Occupational Health assessment team for another Fitness to Teach assessment.

Accessing Fitness to Teach after a break in study

If a trainee interrupts their ITE programme or fails and returns for a re-sit opportunity, a further fitness to teach assessment will be required on their return, regardless of whether the reason for return is connected to the trainee's health or capacity to teach.

Disclosing a disability on application, at interview or at registration

Disclosure of relevant health matters and disabilities is a requirement of the fitness to teach process. However, any information disclosed via the Fitness to Teach process remains confidential to the Occupational Health assessment team and is used solely for the assessment of fitness to teach unless permission is given by the applicant/trainee for disclosure to other parties via an OH report.

Separately, all applicants are given the opportunity to disclose any disabilities at application and again at registration (and at any point during the programme thereafter) in order that appropriate support can be provided by the University.

When applicants are invited for interview, they are given the opportunity to request any reasonable adjustments they might need during the interview process. This information is passed to the Admissions Coordinator and appropriate arrangements are made. If an applicant declares a disability for the first time during the interview, the ITE Admissions Tutor should signpost the applicant to the AccessAbility/Wellbeing team for further information on support available.

Where an Admissions Tutor wishes to reject an applicant after interview and the applicant has declared a disability or requested adjustments to support their interview, the tutor is advised to run through their decision with another ITE Admissions Tutor or member of the ITE Management team before making a final decision to ensure that appropriate adjustments were made during the interview process.

If an applicant declares a disability on their application form and is subsequently offered a place, they will be encouraged to contact the University's AccessAbility/Wellbeing team before the start of the programme to book an appointment for a meeting with an AccessAbility/Wellbeing advisor who will then, if appropriate draw up an Individual Learning Plan (ILP). The ILP provides information to the relevant teaching department on what support or adjustments are required and whose responsibility it is to provide them. It will not, as a matter of course, provide information on the actual disability or medical condition; it will only provide details of the adjustments needed.

If a trainee declares a disability for the first time at registration or to a member of staff at any other point in the year, they should be encouraged at that point to contact the AccessAbility/Wellbeing team direct to make an appointment to see an advisor.

Disclosure during the Fitness to Teach Assessment process

If a disability or medical condition is disclosed during the Fitness to Teach process which is relevant to the support available from the AccessAbility or Wellbeing Services teams, the Occupational Health professional will invite the applicant to contact the relevant University team to discuss support options.

Disability disclosure and school placements

In addition to the Individual Learning Plan process and the Fitness to Teach process, there are times when it might be appropriate for a wider group of staff to be made aware of any individual support needs. If the trainee discloses a disability at registration, there is an additional process whereby the trainee is contacted by Partnership Office staff for permission for them to be able to inform the trainee's Subject Leader, Personal Tutor, placement school's ITE Coordinator and University Visiting Tutor of their declared disability so that support can be made available as appropriate. The trainee has the choice of giving consent, or not to relevant individuals. A meeting between key Partnership Office staff is held prior to each placement commencing to ensure that where a disclosure, ILP or Occupational Health Reasonable Adjustment has been received the appropriate people have all been informed, subject to the relevant permissions being gained.

Key Documents

DfE ITT Training Criteria

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/initial-teacher-training-criteria>

Higher Education Occupational Health Physicians/Practitioners (HEOPS) – Trainee Teachers – Standards of medical fitness to train guidance (2014) https://heops.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/bsk-pdf-manager/2019/09/1521730958HEOPS_Teaching_Students_fitness_standards_2014_v9.pdf

Equality Act 2010: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>

The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2001/10/contents>

The Education (Health Standards) (England) Regulations 2003:

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2003/3139/contents/made>

University of Exeter Fitness to Practise procedure:

<http://www.exeter.ac.uk/staff/policies/calendar/part1/otherregs/fitness/>

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Fitness to Teach Process for ITE Programmes

