

Thomas, G. Walker, D. & Webb, J. (1998) *The Making of the Inclusive School*, London, Routledge

## 2020/21 Annual Report

### Disability Resource Centre (DRC)

Access for disabled students

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**Figure 1: The main entrance to the DRC & the Student Services Centre**

# Annual Review: 2020 - 2021

2020 – 21 was another year dominated by the Covid-19 pandemic and responses to the challenges it presented, but also a year which saw some exciting developments related to meeting the access requirements of disabled students. The DRC remained open and offering its services throughout the period, providing a blend of on-line, in person and electronic communication routes to disabled students, and training and support to staff working with disabled students. As in 2019-20, we found that the on-line provision of some of our services, such as student appointments and the transition events we run annually for incoming disabled students increased accessibility and inclusion. The 2021 event had over 800 individual hits on the DRC website in the first week (a tenfold increase in attendance when compared to in-person events) and incorporated live Slido chat and Q&A sessions.

Towards the end of the academic year, in conjunction with UIS and the Our Cambridge team the project to streamline and make significant efficiencies to the student support document (SSD) process started. This long-planned project's objectives are to develop functionality to improve the communication of access requirements and reasonable adjustments for disabled students. Amongst many features, the project will enable more secure and efficient distribution SSDs to College and Department Administrators and to give academic and support staff the ability to securely access SSDs by placing the document within the student's CamSIS record. This centralised repository will save time and money for the DRC, for all departments and faculties, for all Colleges and for the Registry's Exams team, by radically reducing the time and complexity required to distribute the documents. It will also improve quality and experience for students by ensuring access requirements and recommendations are communicated more effectively.

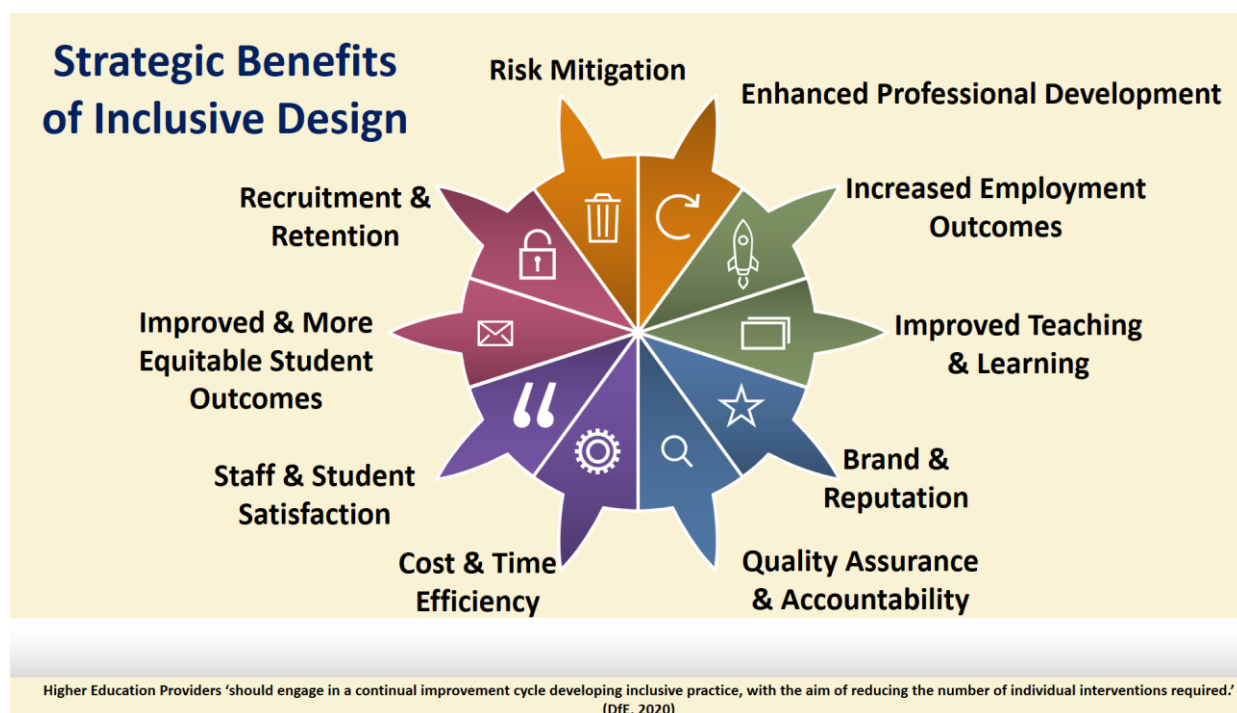
The DRC also contributed to the consultations on the University's strategic review of student mental health provision, with a view to creating a move to a more responsive, coordinated and effective collegiate approach to meeting this increasing demand. The University's Sub-Committee on Accessibility worked to develop a draft University Accessibility Policy which is hoped to be approved for the 2022-23 academic year. In Michaelmas Term 2020 the new Libraries Accessibility Service (LAS) within the University Library (UL), a service designed to enhance the provision of accessible materials for disabled students, was launched and proved to be a great success in its first year, working closely with disabled students, affiliated libraries and the DRC. Thanks to the team at LAS, the UL and to the Accessibility Sub-Committee for making this essential service a reality.

The DRC has continued to support the work of the Cambridge Centre for Teaching & Learning (CCTL) in the promotion of inclusive teaching and learning practice and diversified assessment, and to offer advice and training designed to promote and embed a more inclusive model of teaching and learning, reducing the need for so many individual adjustments (see figure 2).

The DRC's non-medical help (NMH) scheme continues to receive extremely positive feedback from students and staff with many students identifying NMH support as a key factor in keeping them engaged in their studies. The DRC will engage in a review of the scheme to further enhance its efficiency and effectiveness in the 2021-22 academic year. The DRC was successful in its bid for 2 new advisory posts; one within the Neurodiversity Team and one within the Disability Team, in response to continued increase in demand (see figure 3). These posts will be filled in the 2021 – 22 academic year.

My sincere thanks go to all DRC staff and support workers for their dedication and extremely hard work during this period. Their tireless efforts ensured that the DRC continued to operate effectively in support of disabled students and those staff working with them in challenging times.

**John Harding**  
**Head of the Disability Resource Centre**



**Figure 2: The Strategic Benefits of Inclusive Design**

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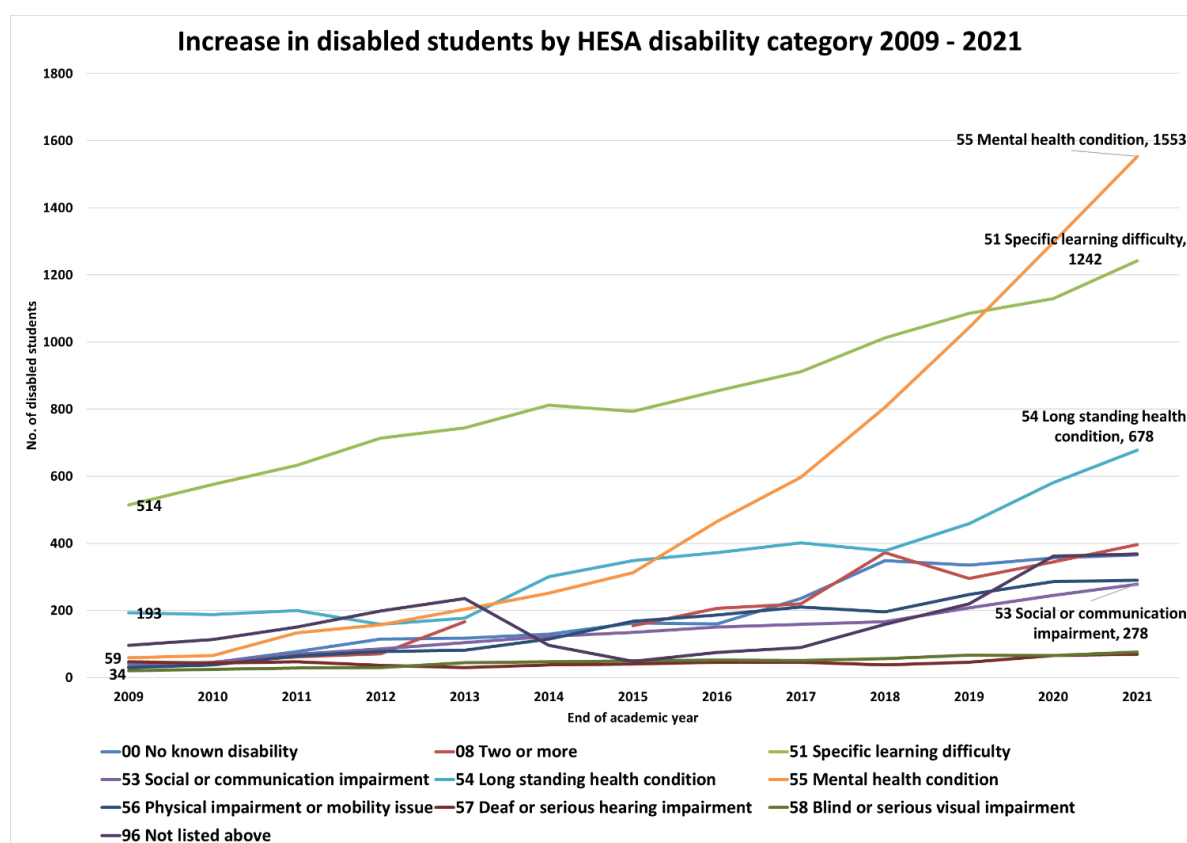
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# 1. Summary

## Service Demand

- The total number of **current disabled students** at the end of the academic year (July 2021) was **4000**, an **increase of 12%** on the previous year (**3568**)
- Students disclosing a **mental health condition** rose from **1296** to **1553** in the same period, an **increase of 20%** in one year
- Students disclosing **Autism** rose from **245** to **278**, in the same period, an **increase of 13%** in one year
- Students disclosing a **Long Term Health Condition** rose from **581** to **678**, an **increase of 17%** in one year
- Disability Adviser to Disabled Student Ratio (July 2021) = **1:811**

Full data available in [Appendix 1](#).



**Figure 3: Increases in disabled students by HESA disability category 2009-21**

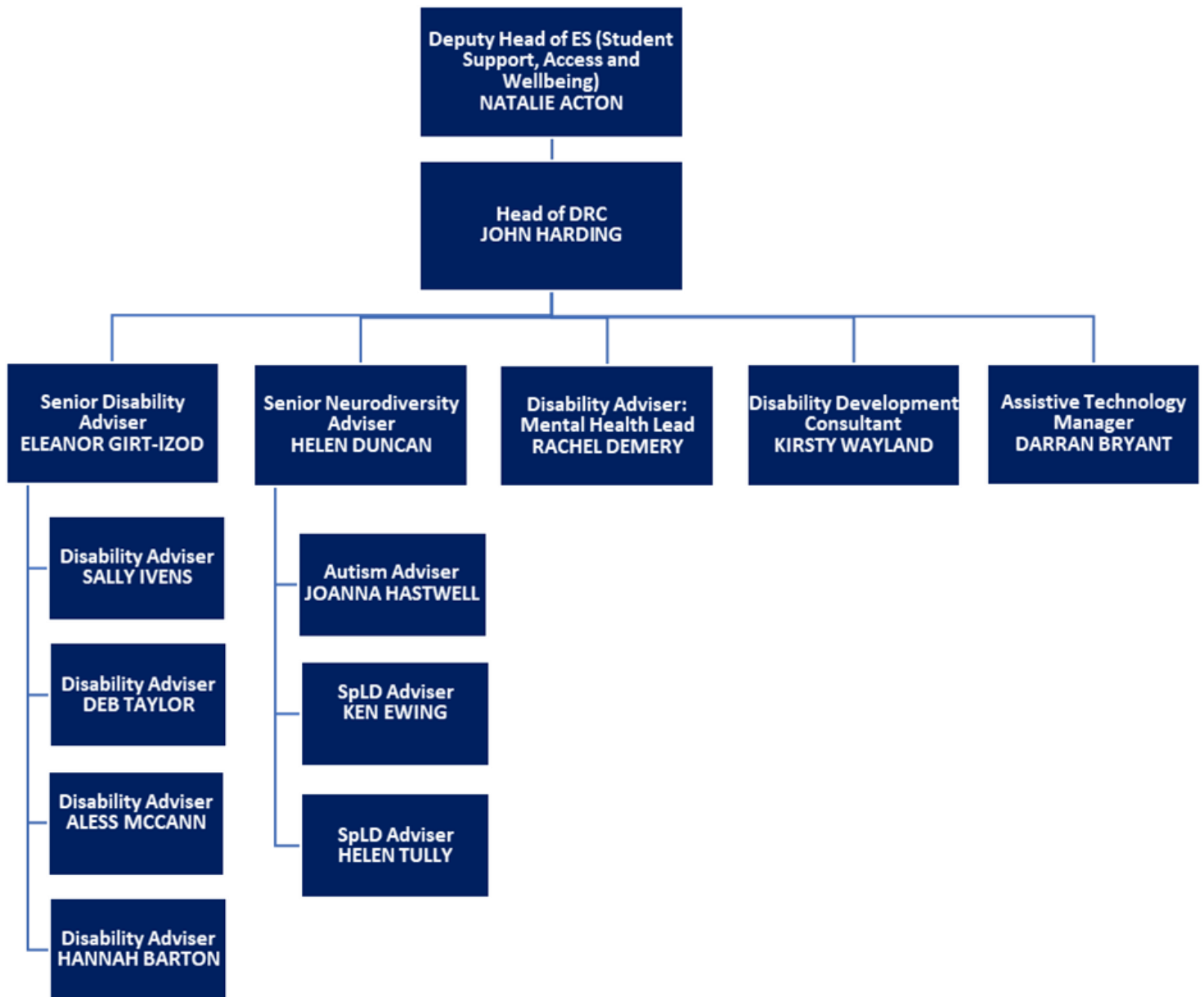


## **DRC Priorities for 2021/22**

- Continuation of the DRC/UIS/Our Cambridge: SSD into CamSIS project: Project duration July 2021 – December 2022
- Supporting the implementation of the Collegiate University's Mental Health & Wellbeing Strategy, including the restructure of central University student support services as part of the new Student Support, Access and Wellbeing team within Education Services (Academic Division)
- Launch of the revised Code of Practice: Access and Inclusion for Disabled Students
- Launch of the DRC/CCTL Moodle course: Inclusive Teaching and Learning: Disabled Students
- Supporting activity related to the University's Access and Participation Plan targets
- Working with the Sub-Committee on Accessibility in the development of a University wide accessibility policy and the wider promotion of accessibility awareness across the University
- Review and efficiencies plan for the Non-Medical Helper NMH) scheme
- Continued development and provision of hybrid services for students at the DRC
- Increased accessibility/inclusion for DRC events and training in hybrid/blended form
- Extension of the AccessAble Access guides
- Promotion of digital accessibility, through training, collaborative working with UIS, academic staff, EQPO, CCTL, ED&I, UAS and others and in development of policy and practice focused on enhancing accessibility and inclusion
- Continued Implementation of the DRC's process improvement and efficiencies plan
- Simplification of the funding mechanisms which support the Reasonable Adjustments Fund (RAF) and the International Disabled Students' Fund (IDSF) in conjunction with the Student Services Centre (SSC) central finance team and the Colleges
- Continued close collaboration and cross-functional working, with other front line students services, Cambridge SU, CCTL, the Student Advisory Service, OSCCA, EQPO, the Student Registry Exams Team and other services, with departmental and faculty academic and support staff and with college academic, tutorial and wellbeing services

## 2. DRC Team

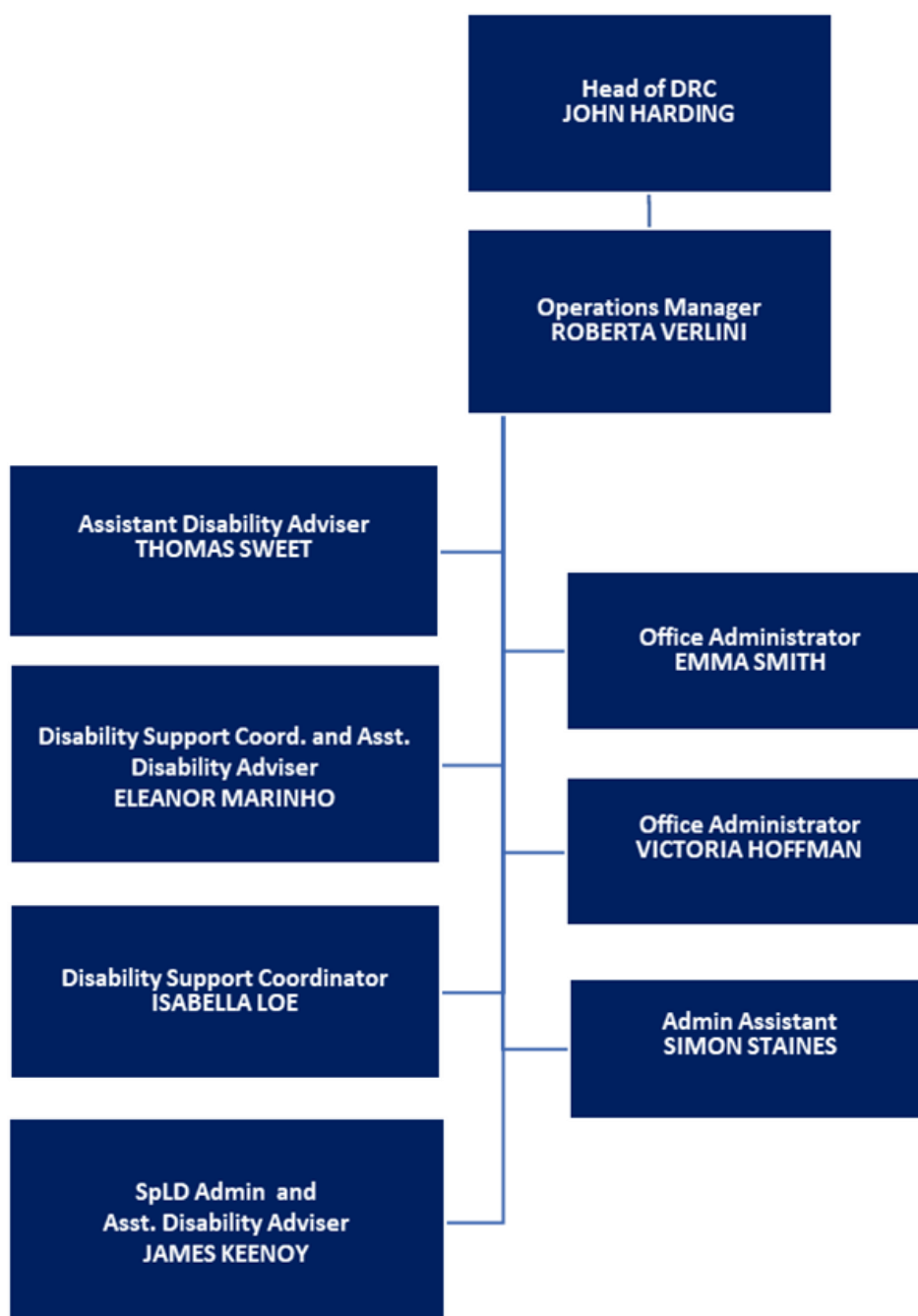
### Disability Resource Centre – Advisory Teams



\*Accurate as of 1<sup>st</sup> March 2022



## Disability Resource Centre – Operations Team



\*Accurate as of 1<sup>st</sup> March 2022

### 3. Neurodiversity Team

The concept of Neurodiversity (a term that was coined by Judy Singer, an autistic rights advocate, in the 1990s) supports a social model of disability approach. The term Neurodiversity emphasises that individuals with Specific Learning Difficulties, Autism Spectrum Conditions and ADHD have a cognitive profile that includes strengths as well as challenges, as do individuals without these diagnosis (the 'Neuro-typical'). It supports an approach which recognises **difference not deficit**.

#### Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLDs) support

Specific Learning Difficulty (SpLD) is a term that covers a range of conditions such as Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, Dyscalculia and, for the purposes of support and funding, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

#### Service Demands

The total number of current students who had disclosed a Specific Learning Difficulty was 1242 in July 2021, compared to 1129 in July 2020. This is an increase of 10% in one year. 276 students were referred for educational psychologist diagnosis in the year to July 2021 by comparison to 221 in the previous year (an increase of 25%). A second Specific Learning Difficulties Adviser will join the Neurodiversity team in 2021, in response to the increase in demand for the service.

#### Specialist 1-1 Study Skills

Specialist 1-1 study skills is coordinated by the Disability Resource Centre. In order to meet increased demand for this service, the DRC has increased its pool of 1-1 specialist study skills tutors from four in the year to July 2020 to five in the year to July 2021. These specialist study skills tutors support students who have been recommended study skills support by Educational Psychologists or DSA Needs Assessors. The DRC also has a pool of STEM study skills tutors who are providing tailored support to STEM students. This pool has also increased from two in 2020 to six in 2021, in order to meet the increase in demand for this service. Specialist 1-1 study skills is funded either by the Reasonable Adjustments Fund or by the International Disabled Students' Fund.

#### Autism Spectrum Conditions Support

The DRC has one full-time adviser assigned to supporting students with Autism Spectrum Conditions (kindly funded by the Colleges).

#### Service Demands

The numbers of students disclosing Autism Spectrum Conditions in July 2021 was 278 (an increase of 13% from 245 in July 2020). Due to the length of the NHS waiting list for ASC diagnoses, the DRC offers an evaluation of needs service for those students who identify with the characteristics of ASC, but are yet to receive a formal assessment of ASC or other diagnosis. The evaluation of need consultation aims to identify the student's educational support requirements and provide access to support. Referrals for diagnostic assessment are managed by the students' GP under current NHS referral pathways.

## 4. Disability Team

Disability Advisers carry out detailed investigations into the access requirements of incoming students who have disclosed a disability on their application. Preparation for these access arrangements and recommendations begins in the months prior to an individual's arrival at University and is communicated to academic and support staff via a Student Support Document (SSD). Disability Advisers provide on-going guidance, resources and advice to students and staff after admission. They also work closely with students who become disabled or are diagnosed, or who disclose, after admission. Advisers respond to initial enquiries from prospective students and are able to set up pre-admissions visits to Cambridge for some prospective students.

### Service Demands

Demand during the pandemic has continued to grow with many students accessing the DRC for the first time because they were more medically susceptible to Covid and/or affected after having it. Other students have approached the DRC as a result of the impact the pandemic in relation to their impairment in conjunction with changes in mode of teaching and learning and assessment. In addition, the impact on students' mental health during the lockdowns and restrictions has also meant that students disclosing mental health difficulties continue to be the highest users of DRC services. 29% of students who have disclosed a disability to the University disclosed a mental health difficulty. Student disclosures from those with a diagnosed **mental health difficulty** saw the highest annual increase of any disability category (**from 1296 students in July 2020 to 1553 in July 2021: a 20% increase in one year**).

As reported in previous years, the most pressing issues for the DRC's small team Disability Advisers continues to relate to the increase in volume of service demands and increases in cases, and case complexity which require significant advisory time and resources. **Each Disability Adviser in 20/21 had a case-load of over 800 students**. An additional Disability Adviser will join the Disability Advisory team in 2021, in response to these increases in demand, which is estimated to bring the caseload down to 700 students per adviser.

### Specialist 1-1 Support

Disabled students often benefit from the provision of Non-Medical Help (NMH), and this support is often recommended within students' specialist evidence, including independent assessments of need. Disability Advisers work with the Disability Support Coordinators to ensure that disabled students are matched effectively with support workers with the appropriate skills, experience and in some cases subject knowledge (for example note-takers and specialist mentors).

## 5. Non-Medical Help (NMH) Scheme

The Non-Medical Help (NMH) Scheme provides coordinated human support for disabled students who require assistance in order to access their studies effectively. Recommendations for the provision of human support workers are usually detailed in the DSAs external Needs Assessment Reports for students, within specialist evidence, or as a result of assessment by a specialist adviser.

### Service Demands

The 2020 - 21 academic year saw an increase in NMH provision, with the total number of NMH support hours delivered to students **increasing by 11%, from 13,175 hours to 14,649 hours**. The number of students accessing mentoring and study skills support has increased significantly during the period of the pandemic, which is unsurprising given the challenging situations many students found themselves in. Full data on NMH support administered by the DRC can be found in [Appendix 2](#).

### Specialist Mentoring

Specialist mentors provide highly specialist, specifically tailored, 1 to 1 support which helps students address the barriers to learning created by a particular impairment. The support could address a range of issues, for example, coping with anxiety and stress situations, how to deal with concentration difficulties, time management, prioritising workload and creating a suitable work-life balance. Specialist Mentors do not act as advocates or counsellors. Their role is to help students recognise the barriers to learning created by their impairment and support them in developing strategies to address these barriers.

Demand for specialist mentoring continues to grow. In 20-21, 7078 hours of specialist mentoring were delivered, an increase from 5228 in 19-20, representing a 35% increase in one year. This increasing demand has meant that the DRC has had to recruit and train additional new mentors in order to have sufficient capacity.

### Student Feedback, 2021 DRC Student Survey:

***Mentoring has been transformative for me both on a personal level and in building my academic confidence***

***The mentoring system ..., it's an invaluable service! The human support has been all round wonderful, I feel very understood.***

***Mentoring sessions are very, very helpful for helping managing my depression and anxiety during my studies***

***Mentoring has been the main source of support, without which I am not sure I would have stayed at Cambridge***

***My experience with my mentoring provision has been very important for me to manage my studies particularly when I am studying remotely and separated from usual Cambridge support community***

### Specialist 1-1 Study Skills

This specialist 1 to 1 support addresses the issues which some students might have in acquiring, recalling and retaining information in written and spoken language as

well as the range of memory, organisational, attention and numeracy difficulties that students with SpLDs or an ASC often face when working in an HE context. It is not the same as generic academic study skills. This support is primarily (but not exclusively) provided for students with an SpLD, ADD/ADHD or an ASC. This support should aim to develop students' skills and to develop independent learning. It should be tailored to a student's individual needs and professionals delivering the support should set out clear goals and timescales for achieving these goals.

In 20-21, 2422 hours of specialist study skills were delivered, an increase from 1333 in 19-20, representing an 81% increase in one year.

#### **Student Feedback, 2021 DRC Student Survey:**

**Study skills session with XXX made an enormous difference to my year at Cambridge and I am so grateful to have worked with her**

**I was very nervous about doing the essay because I had never done anything like it before (I did business studies under grad not English), so it was way outside of my comfort zone. The tutors were very helpful at keeping me focused and 'academic' in my essay. I managed to get 75%. I'm not sure I could have done it without them.**

**The support, especially provided by my study skills tutor, has been superb. She gives me great strategies for my study and we work together as a team to find solutions.**

#### **Notetaking**

This support is provided for students who require notes to be taken on their behalf, for example because they have a physical impairment or processing difficulty. The activity of note-taking is to produce an accurate record of the content of lectures, seminars, discussions, external events etc. in the student's preferred style and format.

In 20-21 the number of hours of notetaking delivered was 2018, a reduction of 24% from 19-20 when 2658 hours were delivered. This reduction is attributed to the fact that the majority of teaching and learning delivery was recorded, which reduces the need for notetaking. The DRC Annual Student Survey contained many responses which highlighted the benefits of students having access to lecture recordings, such as enhancing notetaking, helping with issues with disability related effective listening and taking notes in lectures, workload management, dealing with illness, and preparing for examinations and assessments. By providing these recordings we also remove the need for some, but importantly not all, disabled students. It is an inclusive approach, which enhances the students' experience and reduces the need to provide, organise and fund additional adjustments and human support.

#### **Student Feedback, 2021 DRC Student Survey:**

***the [notetaking] assistant was friendly and helpful and her notes were very clear.***

## 6. Training

The Disability Resource Centre offers interactive, responsive training in a range of formats across the University and Colleges, through bespoke training courses developed in response to requests, and in conjunction with the Cambridge Centre for Teaching and Learning (CCTL), as well as collaborating on courses related to mental health with the Counselling Service, and on Autism with the Careers Service. The DRC also has training materials available via Moodle.

### Training courses

The DRC delivers training in support of disabled students, staff and visitors. Sessions promote disability equality by enabling staff to meet their responsibilities under the Equality Act (2010) and to work effectively and easily with disabled people.

In 2020-21 the DRC ran 25 training events via the CCTL training platform, with 370 delegates in total, with an average attendance of 88%. Work continued around the requirements of individual disabled students, and to support departments. Within the DRC, workshops and training for mentors in the NMH scheme continued. The DRC supported a number of activities for Colleges including staff training and tutorial staff briefings.

The Head of Centre delivered on-line training to college tutors as part of the programme for new tutors in October 2020. An online course for students starting at Cambridge has also been developed. The DRC has developed an online module for academic and support staff on inclusive teaching and learning, which will be launched before the start of the 2021-22 academic year (postponed from 2020).

## 7. Assistive Technology Service

### Service Demands

During 2020-21, 65 one-to-one Assistive Technology sessions were provided to University staff and 34 one-to-one consultations were carried out for students. During the same period 12 "How to Produce Accessible Documents - An Introduction" courses were delivered online to both staff and students, training a total of 98 delegates. The Assistive Technology Manager is a member of the University's Sub-Committee on Accessibility and works closely with the Head of the DRC in the development of projects, policies and initiatives related to accessibility.

### Service Development

The Assistive Technology Manager is also tasked with keeping abreast of the latest developments in productivity tools and their application by students and staff in teaching and learning and has spent a significant amount of time redeveloping his teaching material and one-to-one consultations so they can be delivered online.

### Service Evaluation

Feedback from delegates that attended the "How to Produce Accessible Documents - An Introduction" online.

*"I really liked that the course focused on practical matters. I've been to several courses of this type over 25 years in HE and previously there was too*



*much content on general issues without giving attendees the tools to do anything about it. This course has been a real enabler.”*

*“A really helpful and informative course which I will suggest to other colleagues to attend as feel this is very important information to know.”*

*“The speed was perfect. I did like how the teacher engaged with the participants and the subject matter. They really did know what they were talking about and were keen to get their message across. I think this course should be more widely promoted as it is imperative that all people can access documents of all kinds. What is needed to produce accessible documents is not difficult but makes a huge difference to so many. I'm glad I attended. I will implement this straight away.”*

*“I don't think I expected to learn as much as I did on the course. There was plenty of focus on the most commonly used documents and the general speed of the course allowed me to absorb the information and the group time for questions.”*

### **Specialist 1-1 Support**

One-to-one assistive technology sessions are available to both staff and students. Sessions available include speech recognition training, help for those with upper mobility difficulties (including RSI), dyslexia/dyspraxia sessions and advice for those with visual impairments.

## **8. Donations and Bursary Funds**

### **The Disabled Students' Bursary Fund**

The Disabled Students' Bursary Fund was established in recognition of the additional expenses incurred by disabled students and to contribute to the costs of acquiring essential services or equipment, where other funding sources have been exhausted. It is funded solely by donations made to the DRC for this purpose. The Guardians of the Fund consider applications throughout the year, and awards are administered by the DRC. In 2020/21, 17 awards were made to fund specialist equipment, Non-Medical Help, and travel and accommodation costs. The total cost of these awards totalled £7,465.

### **Donations**

The Disability Resource Centre is extremely grateful for the continued support from a number of donors who help support disabled students at the University. These funds have assisted many disabled students in accessing their learning over the last year. The donors include: The Lady Hind Trust for funding towards a Pet as Therapy dog and the Crane's Fund for funding towards Loan Pool equipment. The City and University of Cambridge Masonic Charitable Trust and Enterprise Cars supporting the Bursary Fund. We thank the donors for their generosity.

### **The Charlie Bayne Travel Trust**

This Trust was established by the Bayne Family in the memory of Charlie Bayne (1965–90) who spent four years as an undergraduate at Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1985–89. The Trust offers travel grants to disabled undergraduate and

postgraduate students at the University of Cambridge and at Anglia Ruskin University. Unfortunately, due to the pandemic and associated restrictions on travel, the Charlie Bayne Travel Trust was not able to make any awards in 2021. Plans are in place for the Travel Trust to be operational and making awards again in 2022.

## **9. Student Support Funds and Equipment Loan Pool**

### **The Reasonable Adjustments Fund (RAF)**

The RAF provides for a range of Non-Medical Help tasks and some assistive software for UK national disabled students studying at Cambridge. The implementation of the Reasonable Adjustments Fund has been beneficial to students as waiting times for support are considerably reduced. Students are now often matched to a Non-Medical Helper within one week of seeing their Disability Adviser, rather than 3 months under the old DSAs system. This is a significant improvement on the previous waiting times and there is no longer a requirement for interim funding from Colleges. The Reasonable Adjustment Fund has been recognised by the Department for Education<sup>1</sup> as an example of best practice in strategic approaches to reasonable adjustments.

In 2020-21, 663 new awards were made with total expenditure (including that for continuing students) being £404,095.

### **The International Disabled Students' Fund (IDS Fund)**

The IDS Fund enables international disabled students to receive support equivalent to that received by their 'home' counterparts via Disabled Students' Allowances (DSAs) and the Reasonable Adjustments Fund (RAF). The Fund is managed and administered by the DRC.

In 2020-21, 181 new awards were made with total expenditure (including that for continuing students) being £112,401.

The RAF and the IDS fund are both supported by contributions from the University and the Colleges. Sincere thanks go to the University and to the Colleges for supporting this important source of assistance for the growing population of disabled students at Cambridge.

### **Equipment Loan Pool**

The loan pool for assistive technology and ergonomic equipment is funded through donations. It provides equipment for students waiting for external funding to be approved or following a referral from the DRC's Assistive Technology Manager. The loan pool service was limited during periods of lockdown for reasons of health and safety, but is planned to be fully operational in the 2021-22 academic year.

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<sup>1</sup> Inclusive Teaching and Learning in Higher Education as a route to Excellence, DfE, 2017, Case Studies, P. 37-38, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inclusive-teaching-and-learning-in-higher-education>

## **10. Events, Communications and Networks**

### **Events**

The DRC supports, co-sponsors and contributes to a range of events, both independently and within the University's wider Equality, Diversity & Inclusion programme, and with the Cambridge Centre for Teaching and Learning (CCTL). Unfortunately, the DRC was unable to hold the Annual Disability Lecture in March 2021 due to the pandemic.

Also in response to the pandemic, the DRC's transition event for incoming disabled was run virtually again in 2021 and hosted on the DRC website, with an introduction from Professor Graham Virgo, Senior Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Education. The DRC has also contributed to a range of Open Days and Widening Participation activity online.

### **Disability Liaison Officers (DLOs)**

A Disability Liaison Officer (DLO) is a named contact person within a college or department who can be approached by students, staff, and disabled visitors with questions and issues around disability. They also act as a first point of contact for the DRC in the dissemination of disability equality related information. There are currently 164 DLO's. Events for DLOs which normally run on a twice yearly basis were impacted by the pandemic, but it is planned to return to the usual schedule in 2021-22.

### **Networking and Representation**

DRC staff maintain strong links with national professional bodies, such as the National Association of Disability Practitioners (NADP), (of which John Harding, the Head of the DRC, is an Adviser to the Board, and Joanna Hastwell, Autism Adviser is a Director), and the Association of Dyslexia Specialists in Higher Education (ADSHE).

The Head of the DRC represents the University at the Heads of Russell Group Disability Services Forum, and the pan-European LINK network of disability practitioners, and is one of the University's named members of AMOSSHE (The Student Services Organisation).

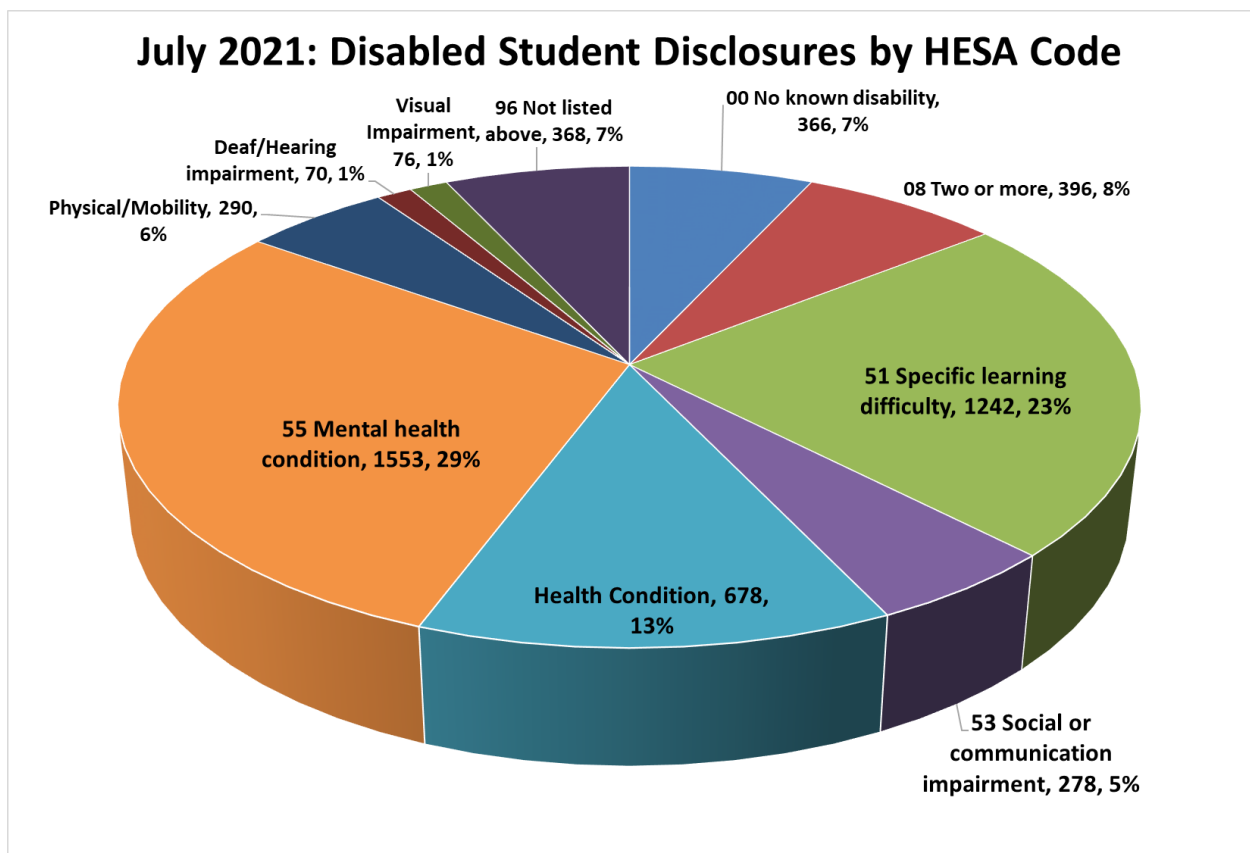
Dr Helen Duncan (DRC Senior Neurodiversity Adviser) has been appointed as a member of the national SpLD Assessment Standards Committee (SASC). Rachel Demery is the DRC's representative for The University Mental Health Advisers Network (UMHAN). DRC staff also attend national and regional Non-Medical Help groups and Funding Body Networks. The DRC receives requests and invitations for visits from UK, European and international Universities annually, in order to share best practice.

## 11. Appendices

### Appendix 1: Student Data

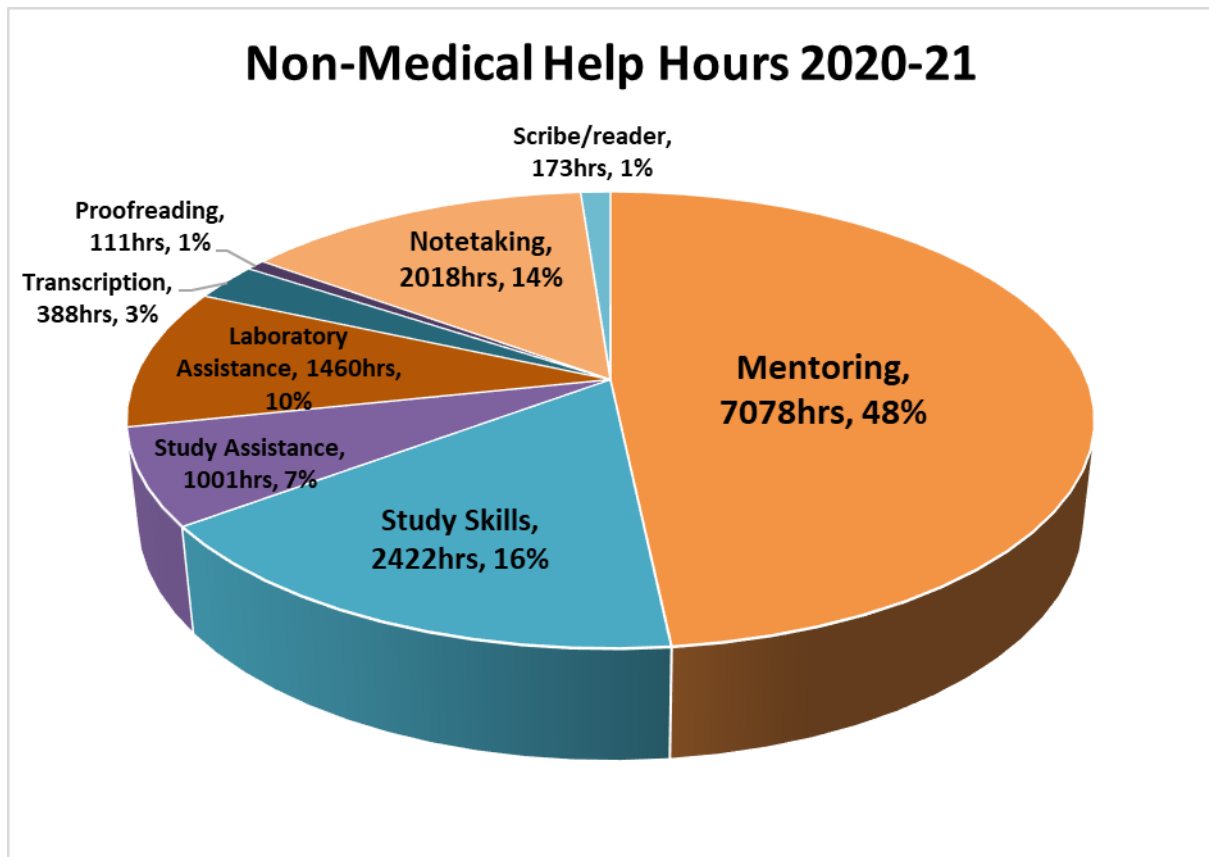
<b>Current disabled students (total)</b>	<b>4000</b>	<b>+12.11%</b>
Undergraduates	2340	+12.34%
Post-Graduates	1660	+11.78%
PG Taught	798	
PG Research	862	

**Table 1.1 Total number of disabled students as of July 2021**



**Figure 4: Disability Disclosures by HESA categories as of July 2021**

## Appendix 2: Non-Medical Help (NMH) Scheme Data



**Figure 5: Breakdown of 2020/21 NMH hours by task**

14,649 hours of non-medical help support were delivered in 2020/21.

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