Senate

Paper Title	Access for Disabled Students to teaching and learning
Outcome requested	Senate is asked to **consider** and **approve** the following actions: • Review the university's lecture capture policy to encourage as many staff to use it as possible and to tackle to problem of recordings being embargoed. • Staff to provide lecture notes in advance via QM Plus. • Staff to regularly review their module reading lists with a view to making sure that they are accessible.
Points for Senate members to note and further information	Equality Challenge Unit Recommendations
Questions for Senate to consider	The best format to provide equality and diversity training to staff. How do we make teaching at QM as inclusive as possible?
Regulatory/statutory reference points	Compliance with the Equality Act 2010
Strategy and risk	
Reporting/ consideration route for the paper	EQSB considered the report at its meeting on 21 February 2018. EQSB endorsed the report and recommendation for consideration by Senate.
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Access for Disabled Students to teaching and learning

There is a need to review the use and consistency of use for online learning tools and platforms for students at Queen Mary University of London. As a Students' Union, we understand that Queen Mary wants its students to live, study and progress well and to do this offers support systems for students. For disabled students however, we have noticed there are many inconsistencies blocking their ability to learn and engage with their courses, thawing any possibility of progression. The Disability Rep role is to represent disabled students at Student Council and regularly speaks to disabled students about their experiences. This paper is based on their and other disabled students' opinions.

Q-review
Q-review is an essential tool to assist students, especially disabled students in their learning. We are aware that a number of Schools are withholding access to the lecture recordings until the end of semester or even longer as a way of incentivising students to attend lectures; this is despite a lack of evidence that there is any correlation between lecture capture and lecture attendance.

Although this paper seeks to address the needs of diagnosed disabled students, it is important to consider how Q-review is essential in aiding the learning of a number of other students as well. Being able to use and access Q-review is essential for students who haven't been diagnosed with a learning difficulty, e.g. dyslexia or are in the early stages of a diagnosis.

The same is true of students who might be unable to attend a lecture as they are a carer for someone at home, or are an international student struggling with language. Using Q-review here would aid the students' learning as reading along would help to cement the topics covered in the lecture and contribute to developing the student's language and understanding. For those students performing carer responsibilities, Q-review would assist them in accessing lecture content they might otherwise have missed out on due to no fault of their own. It is not just these students we should be mindful of however. Mental health difficulties are on the rise, we can observe this from the amount of students currently accessing the Advice and Counselling service. This only accounts for those students who have declared mental health difficulties, there are many more students who never declare this for the duration of their time at University. For a student struggling with a mental health difficulty, no matter the severity of this, and regardless of whether they are receiving support for their condition, there will be some days when they physically cannot perform their normal day to day tasks. Getting up and dressed, leaving the house or being able to interact with other people can be difficult. This doesn't stop the student from wanting to attend their lectures, it is likely they are passionate about their course and want to learn, but for whatever reason that day their mind (and body) won't allow them to. Being able to use Q-review in this situation might put the student at ease, not feeling they are falling behind and minimising any stress they are experiencing surrounding their degree.

These examples highlight that the learning approach at Queen Mary University of London must be inclusive, as we are always unable to see a student's situation, as often there is more beneath the surface, and many situations where Q-review is required.

Lecture materials in advance
Being able to review lecture material in advance of a lecture, and certainly afterwards aids students' learning, but in a disabled student's case it is essential. Viewing lecture slides means that these students are able to read along with a lecture by accessing the information on their tablets. It is essential for students to understand the topic which is being taught and be able to contribute to later discussions with their peers. It is difficult to articulate how frustrating it is for a disabled student to feel lesser than their peers and unable to advance in the same way because they cannot access online content. It is essential that content can be accessed for disabled students as essays and assignments cannot be started until this information is available, whereas for a non-disabled student this work can be started at any time. This puts disabled students at a disadvantage to others, inhibiting them from accessing higher grades as their study time is limited.

We must acknowledge that some lecturers do post lecture slides; however, the inconsistency of this is so frustrating and disabled students never know if lecture slides will be put up or not. This impedes essay planning and is quite an upsetting feeling for students that they cannot learn adequately. Consistency varies not only between departments but lecturers as well. There needs to be a policy across all departments in the University which states all lecture slides must be put up prior to a lecture. The timeframe for when slides ought to be put up should be discussed and agreed either through conversations with disabled student representatives or through focus groups with disabled students. This would provide clarity about what would be best to assist their learning, instead of being made without consultation.

The provision of lecture notes in advance is a standard reasonable adjustment [recommended by organisations like the Equality Challenge Unit](). To provide a more consistent approach, it ought to be mandatory for staff to undertake accessibility training, as this would mean they are better informed about issues which might affect their students and plan course materials accordingly. Providing this mandatory training would also then coincide with the training which is expected for note takers before they are able to begin supporting a student.

Reading Lists
Learning resources for disabled students are difficult to access. Reading lists are often not up to date, or when they are, they are not always accessible via screen reading software programs such as ClaroRead Plus or ZoomText or 'downloadable'; this makes it inaccessible for students that rely on assistive software to access their materials, e.g. visually impaired students. We are also aware that some reading lists have well over one hundred books per module.

Readings and lecture slides need to be uploaded in a format which can be read with computer assistance, it is advisable that all lecturers ensure this. The Adobe website provide some assistance on how to do this. This can be found here https://helpx.adobe.com/acrobat/using/creating-accessible-pdfs.html. Sometimes reading before a lecture is essential for a disabled student to understand the topic which will be discussed, especially if they cannot access the lecture slides in advance. When neither can be accessed, a disabled student struggles to learn, and engage with teaching and learning. Disabled students often feel it is difficult for them to learn as the process to aid learning is not simple. To access content in an online format, a disabled student needs to access a screen reader, but the process to get this is difficult. Staff could be more inclusive and assist students by using the Reading List online tool, located on the Library Services website. The website also includes contact details for staff who might require advice or guidance in curating their reading lists in this way. https://qmul.rl.talis.com/index.html

Lecture attendance
Although it is recognised that in an ideal world that all students would turn up to all lectures, this doesn't always happen consistently. To increase attendance several departments and courses have made lecture attendance count towards some of the credit on University courses. For disabled students and students with mental health issues, this is incredibly difficult because the days when you do not feel able to come to a lecture, pressure is put on you to come so that you do not lose a portion of your grade when you are simply not able to turn up to lectures although you are finishing your work to the desired standard. Additionally, there are students within the university that have other commitments who may end up developing mental health issues due to the strain put on them by being forced to attend lectures when they simply cannot due to personal reasons. We would like to ask that attendance at lectures is no longer a required part of grades for students.