

Making the Most of Your Online DAS Appointment

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a sudden and unprecedented global shift to online working almost overnight – nobody expected they would have to adapt to working in a totally different way in the middle of an academic year. The landscape remains uncertain, but the Disability Advisory Service (DAS) wants to ensure that its services are flexible and continue to be there for you during this challenging period and moving forwards.

Online meetings with your disability advisor, specialist mentor or specific learning difficulty (SpLD) study skills tutor can be very effective and useful, if you are comfortable using technology to communicate and feel able to engage at the time of meeting. Please do make contact to rearrange your appointment if you think you will be unable to make effective use of it for any reason.

Working online is different from meeting in-person, most notably:

- the lack of physical presence in the room;
- the potential for the ‘disinhibition effect’ where you may disclose more, sooner than you might during an in-person meeting;
- the increased potential for misunderstandings, especially when using text only communication;
- differences in the way confidentiality and security is addressed.

Online meetings may understandably not suit all students and it might be helpful to consider whether phone or audio/video communication would be the preferred option for you. Your disability advisor can also offer text-based correspondence via email or the live chat function in Microsoft Teams if this is how you would rather communicate (the external regulatory framework means this is not an option for mentoring or SpLD tuition).

However, when meeting with an advisor, mentor or SpLD tutor, it is very important to treat your online meeting in the same way as you would an in-person meeting – set aside the required time, find somewhere you feel comfortable and safe to talk, and if you are meeting with video, position your computer or phone in a stable, fixed place where your face can be seen. Also make sure you ‘arrive’ on time!

You may be calling from another part of the UK or even another country and, depending on the types of support you’re accessing or require, it may be necessary for us to gather new information regarding what local provision (e.g. healthcare) is available to you where you are now. It is important to know that, wherever you are in the world, you have access to medical services, should you need their support.

After each session, you might want to allow yourself some time to reflect on what you have experienced or learnt during the session. In particular, after mentoring you may want to consider what thoughts and feelings you are left with – sometimes you might be left with questions or concerns that lead you to ruminate. If you feel you have been misunderstood or negatively

interpret the meaning or tone of the other person's words (particularly in text-based communication), you might find yourself going over and over things. Bear in mind that it can be easy to get things out of perspective when you are thinking back on a conversation, and you may want to contact the person you've met with to ask for clarity or more information.

Meeting online can also be surprisingly tiring, so consider setting aside some time and space afterwards to relax and compose yourself for what lies ahead during the next few hours and the rest of the day. If you decide to make some changes or need to take action as a result of your meeting, maybe think about your next steps. Use any support networks (friends/family) during the week, treat yourself, take some exercise, and try ways to practice a healthy eating and sleeping routine.

Confidentiality

We aim to provide a secure and confidential online service and to take reasonable and necessary steps to protect your privacy. In audio/visual sessions the member of staff will make brief notes of the discussion. All of these records will be held securely in line with the University's data protection responsibilities, as outlined in the DAS's [data and consent policy](#), which you signed when you first registered with us.

If at any point during the meeting you are in need of emergency medical support, we may ask you for your consent to contact your GP or another medical professional, and/or recommend alternative avenues of support. We may in some circumstances ask you for permission to contact a tutor/supervisor or another member of staff in your college or department so that the University can arrange effective support.

Technical difficulties

If for any reason the technology is not working and the session cannot take place, we will try to establish email or telephone contact and rearrange the session.

When a meeting is not suitable

We are unable to provide an online session if you are feeling actively suicidal or self-harming during a meeting. In these circumstances, we would need to end the session and contact an emergency service to support you. The response might include contacting your College, GP, your next of kin, and/or emergency medical services. **If you are feeling unsafe or extremely distressed please call 111, 999 or your local mental health crisis line to ensure you get the right support.**

Other sources of support

- www.ox.ac.uk/students/help
- www.ox.ac.uk/students/welfare/counselling/self-help
- **Big White Wall:** a free 24/7 online support resource for Oxford students
www.ox.ac.uk/students/news/2020-04-14-free-online-support-through-big-white-wall