

Working with students who stammer



The British Stammering Association (BSA) defines stammering as ‘a speech/fluency difficulty where the person has speech blocks, prolongations, or repetitions of sounds’. Five per cent of children will stammer at some stage during their early years and for one per cent this will continue into adulthood. It is four times more common in boys than girls.

What is stammering?

- There is no single cause of stammering, there is no single cure and there is no single best strategy for supporting students.
- Current research indicates that the cause of stammering has a physiological basis in the brain structure.

How does stammering affect learning?

- People who stammer are likely to feel a range of emotions about their verbal communications, including, frustration, embarrassment, anger and these feelings may vary over time and context.
- Students may be withdrawn and not contribute to sessions as much as they want to.
- They may fear the ridicule and ‘name-calling’ that they probably experienced as a child.
- The student may have important contributions to offer but which are not made.
- Students may not choose modules that interest them and within which they may do especially well due to an assessment pattern that relies on verbal fluency.
- Students may feign illness to avoid situations that require verbal fluency.

How can I adapt my teaching and assessments to support a student who stammers?

- If everyone in the group is expected to talk or comment at some stage in a session, do not leave the student who stammers to the end – it just prolongs to time during which anxiety will increase.
- Accommodate contributions to class discussions that may be given at slightly inappropriate times or that interrupt the flow of discussion.
- The student that stammers may have been trying for some time to make the contribution.
- Consider agreeing with the student prior to a session at what point they may want to come into a discussion.
- Consider agreeing with the student a signal that can be used to communicate to the tutor that the student wants to say something.
- Don’t leave them waiting. Allow them to make their point as quickly as possible without artificially interrupting the flow of discussion.

Please see ‘Resources’ section of the Reach webpages for further guidance