John Taylor SCITT – Neurodiversity Accessibility Guidelines
Creating Inclusive and Supportive Environments for Trainee Teachers

Introduction
This document outlines best practice guidelines for ensuring accessibility for neurodivergent trainee teachers during their Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programme at John Taylor SCITT.

The aim is to promote inclusive practices across all aspects of training whether in-person or online to enable every trainee to engage fully with their learning and professional development. These guidelines are not exhaustive and should evolve as feedback is received and understanding deepens.
Neurodivergence includes, but is not limited to:
- Autism Spectrum Condition
- ADHD
- Specific Learning Difficulty: Dyslexia, Dyspraxia and Dyscalculia.
- Sensory Processing Differences
- Anxiety, OCD, and other mental health conditions
- Developmental Learning Differences

General Accessibility Guidelines for Written and Visual Content

- **Font**: Use Century Gothic (preferred), Calibri, or Arial for clarity.
- **Font Size**: 16pt is recommended. Minimum 12pt.
- **Headings**: Should be bold and at least 20% larger than body text.
- **Letter Spacing**: Slightly increased spacing improves readability (set character spacing to +1).
- **Background Colour**: Avoid white. Use pastel shades or light contrast backgrounds. Offer trainees the opportunity to express individual preferences.
- **Text Hierarchy**: Use clear and consistent heading structures and bullet points.
- **Hyperlinks**: Clearly explain links (e.g., "Access the module handbook" instead of "Click here").
- **Avoid**:
  - Yellow or bright/neon text
  - Full uppercase or underlined continuous text
  - Italics for emphasis (use bold instead)
  - Overuse of images or text over images

Structure and Clarity
- Use left-aligned text without justification.
- Keep sentences short (60–70 characters).
- Use formatting tools for assistive tech compatibility.
- Provide a visual hierarchy to highlight key content at a glance.

Inclusive Learning for In-Person SCITT Training Sessions

Before the Session
- Invite trainees to share any accessibility needs, this may include:
    - Preferred print colours
    - Slide access in advance
    - Seating preferences
    - Anxiety around public speaking
- Send slides or resources in advance.
- Provide clear, bullet-pointed instructions in communications.
- Share venue information with directions, timings, and accessibility details.
- Notify promptly of any session changes.

During the Session
- Provide printed slides or summary handouts.
- Speak clearly and at a measured pace.
- Use chunked and colour-coded text to emphasise key ideas.
- Recap and summarise key learning points.
- Incorporate real-world examples and active tasks.
- Avoid jargon; explain acronyms and specialist terms.
- Offer regular breaks (recommended: at least every 90 minutes).
- Provide quiet spaces for breaks.
- Be mindful not to "cold call" trainees or put them on the spot unnecessarily.
- Clarify session expectations upfront (e.g., sitting arrangements, break options, when interaction is expected).
- Consider sensory triggers in the environment (e.g., lighting, background noise, smells).

Inclusive Learning for Online SCITT Sessions

Before the Session
- Offer the same adjustments as in-person training (advance slides, colour preferences, no public speaking if requested).
- Share clear joining instructions, including links, times, and session outline.
- Check all tech is functional (video, polls, breakout rooms).
- Communicate any changes with clear timelines.

During the Session
- Where possible use PowerPoint Live for access to features like high contrast and screen readers.
- Speak directly to the camera and clearly through the microphone.
- Allow participants to keep their camera and microphone off during facilitator-led parts.
- Use inclusive engagement tools (e.g., polls, Slido) to reduce pressure to speak out loud.
- Explain specialist terms.
- Avoid overloading slides with dense information. Bullet points are best.
- Offer session summaries, transcripts, or recordings for later review.
- Maintain a clear structure and schedule.
- Provide breaks and clarify expectations around interaction and use of video/audio.

Platform-Specific Guidance (Microsoft Teams)
- Encourage blurred or neutral backgrounds.
- Enable Live Captions for all sessions.
- Prioritise use PowerPoint Live to enhance accessibility options.
- Record sessions and share with transcripts for flexible review.

School Placement Considerations

In-school placements are a central part of initial teacher training. It is essential that trainee teachers, especially those who are neurodivergent, are supported to thrive in what can be a highly stimulating and demanding environment. The following guidance is intended to support mentors, school-based staff, and SCITT central staff in promoting accessible and inclusive placements.

Before the Placement Starts
- **Early Communication**: Ensure school mentors are aware (with the trainee's consent) of any adjustments or support needs.
- **Placement Briefing**: Share placement expectations in clear, written format. Avoid jargon and provide structured timelines or visual overviews (e.g., weekly planner).
- **School Visit or Virtual Tour**: Where possible, allow trainees to visit or receive a virtual walk-through of the school environment to help familiarise them in advance.
- **Timetable Transparency**: Provide a clear, consistent timetable with subject, class, room, and staff information—preferably in advance of the placement starting.
- **Ask Trainees**: Offer the chance to express any specific needs (e.g., time to process verbal feedback, preference not to present at staff briefings, colour overlays, etc.).

During the Placement
- **Mentor Support**:
    - Schedule regular, structured mentor meetings with a consistent format.
    - Allow time to process feedback before requiring a response or action.
    - Provide written or visual feedback summaries if helpful.
- **Communication Style**:
    - Use clear, direct language in verbal and written instructions.
    - Avoid assuming knowledge of school systems or acronyms—explain as needed.
    - Provide reminders and breakdowns of multi-step tasks.
- **Workload and Planning**:
    - Scaffold planning expectations—share model lesson plans and allow additional time for lesson preparation where needed.
    - Encourage early access to resources and schemes of work.
    - Break down weekly targets into smaller, manageable steps.
- **Classroom Environment**:
    - Minimise sensory distractions where possible (e.g., noise levels, lighting).
    - Allow flexibility in desk placement or room movement if needed.
- **Professionalism Support**:
    - Clarify unspoken expectations (e.g., dress code, staffroom etiquette).
    - Offer feedback in a solution focused, supportive tone.

Wellbeing and Reflective Practice
- Encourage trainees to reflect regularly and discuss what is working well and where support is still needed.
- Provide access to wellbeing check-ins with school or SCITT Central Staff.
- Reassure trainees that requesting support or adjustments is a professional strength, not a weakness.

Additional in-school placement adjustments may include:
- Encourage trainees to dedicate time at the beginning/end of the day for organisation and decompression.
- Flexibility around observations—providing a plan in advance or conducting them in less pressurised ways.
- Avoiding high-pressure public scenarios (e.g., whole-school assemblies) early on in the training programme.

Inclusive Practice for Assessment and Submissions

Assessment is a key part of teacher training, but it can pose specific challenges for neurodivergent trainees. Ensuring clarity, flexibility, and appropriate support around assessment and written submissions helps create a fair and inclusive environment where all trainees can demonstrate their capabilities.

Before an Assessment or Submission
- **Clarity of Expectations**:
  - Provide clear written instructions for each task, including word counts, formats, referencing expectations, and deadlines.
  - Use bullet points, checklists, and visual breakdowns of what is required.
  - Offer model responses or annotated exemplars where possible.
- **Advance Notice**:
  - Share assessment dates and deadlines well in advance.
  - Remind trainees through multiple formats (e.g., email, calendar invites, verbal reminders during sessions).
- **Flexibility and Adjustments**:
  - Offer deadline extensions where required and appropriate, especially when processing time or executive functioning is a barrier.
  - Allow for alternative formats where possible (e.g., video reflections, recorded presentations, audio summaries).
  - Encourage trainees to disclose support needs without fear of penalty.

Support During the Process

- **Scaffolded Guidance**:
  - o Break larger assessment tasks into smaller steps with interim deadlines or check-ins.
  - o Provide writing frames, templates, or guided structures to help with planning and organisation.
  - o Offer opportunities for peer or tutor feedback on drafts.
- **Accessible Materials**:
  - o Ensure all guidance documents are formatted in line with accessibility principles (clear font, contrast, spacing).
  - o Provide materials in editable formats (e.g., Word rather than PDFs) so trainees can use assistive technology.
- **Communication**:
  - o Avoid ambiguity in marking criteria—explain descriptors in plain language.
  - o Provide opportunities for trainees to ask clarification questions.

After Submission

- **Feedback**:
  - o Provide written feedback alongside any verbal discussion so trainees can refer back at their own pace.
  - o Highlight strengths as well as areas for development.
  - o Allow time to digest feedback and follow up with a scheduled discussion if needed.
- **Reflection**:
  - o Encourage reflection through guided questions or prompts.
  - o Support neurodivergent trainees to identify what helped them succeed and what might help next time.

Additional Adjustments May Include:

- Extra time for written submissions without penalty.
- 1:1 tutorials to go through assessment briefs.
- Mind-mapping software or planning tools to support with organisation.
- Offering submission reminders across multiple formats and platforms (email, Teams, in person).

At The John Taylor SCITT, our commitment to inclusive practice is rooted in the understanding that neurodiversity is a strength, and that equity in education begins with accessibility.

We adopt a proactive, flexible approach across all areas of the programme—from centre-based training and school placements to assessment and communication—ensuring that trainee teachers are supported to thrive both professionally and personally.

By creating clear, structured, and sensory-considerate environments; offering choice and flexibility in how trainees engage with learning and assessment; and fostering open dialogue around adjustments, we aim to build a teacher training culture that empowers every individual to succeed. This is not a one-size-fits-all model, but a living commitment to inclusive excellence, reflective practice, and human centred teacher development.

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