LEAP Online

Learning Excellence Achievement Pathway Online Tutorial

Raising Awareness of Disability Inclusion at University and Beyond

LEAP Online

Contents

Introduction

At the University of Bolton, we believe in the power of inclusivity and the importance of fostering an environment where everyone, regardless of their abilities, can learn. Disability inclusion is about more than just removing physical barriers – it's about creating an equitable and supportive community for all students. By raising awareness of both visible and non-visible disabilities, we aim to empower students, promote understanding and ensure that everyone has the opportunity to achieve their potential during their journey with us.

80 years of Disability Inclusion

Historical context and legislative milestones (1944 – 2024)

The journey towards disability inclusion in the UK has been shaped by key legislative changes. This section will focus on some of the pivotal changes that took place from 1944, that ensured education for children with disabilities, to the comprehensive legal protection introduced by the Equality Act (2010) and the SEND Code of Practice (2014) (updated 2024). Not only did these changes provide rights, but also laid the foundation for practical changes in how people with disabilities are treated in their education, employment and everyday life.

Throughout this period, real-life cases have driven awareness and shaped policy development. By reflecting on these historical developments and case studies, we gain an insight into how far society in the UK has come and how legislation continues to shape inclusion today. Understanding these changes is crucial for raising your awareness and supporting the University of Bolton to create an accessible and equal environment for all.

1944 – Education Act

Under the 1944 Education ("Butler") Act, children with special educational needs were categorised by their disabilities defined in medical terms. Many children were considered 'uneducable' and pupils were labelled into categories such as 'educationally sub-normal' and given special educational 'treatment' in separate schools.

Case Study: Alice: [Strive to be Normal](#)

1978 – Warnock Report

The 1978 Warnock Report, which was shortly followed by the Education Act (1981) radically altered the concept of special educational needs. SEN (Special Educational Needs) statements were introduced, together with an 'integrative,' later known as an 'inclusive,' approach, based on common educational goals of all learners, namely, independence, enjoyment and understanding.

Case Study: [Ajay (difference in schooling)](#)

1988 – Education Act

Case Study: [Nadia - YouTube](#)

Nadia, born in 1992, talks about her experiences of inaccessible exams in mainstream secondary school.

The Education Reform Act (1988) introduced the National Curriculum, a system of league tables and GCSEs examinations. According to the Select Committee on Education and Skills (2006, n.p.) Warnock (n.d.) subsequently criticised the position for children with SEN as 'far worse from 1988 onwards...' as they were not 'going to help the league tables.'

1994 – UNESCO Salamanca Statement

In June 1994 representatives of over ninety governments and twenty-five international organisations form the World Conference on Special Needs Education in Salamanca. They called for inclusion to be the norm. Additionally, a new Framework for Action was adopted, in which the guiding principle was that ordinary schools needed to accommodate all children, irrespective of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions (UNESCO, 1994).

1995 – Disability Discrimination Act

[The Disability Discrimination Act. The campaign for civil rights](#) – YouTube

The Disability Discrimination Act (1995) – made discrimination against disabled people illegal. Arguably, an important milestone in the campaign for full civil rights for all disabled people (Scope, 2015).

1997 – Excellence for all Green paper

'Excellence for all Children – Meeting Special Educational Needs' set out a five-year plan. For the first time, the English education system was aligned with the international movement towards inclusive education. In a lot of ways, the government positioned itself at the forefront of decision-making, ensuring it would be a world leader on inclusion (Department for Education and Employment, 1997).

2001 – Special Educational Needs and Disability Act

SENDA (2001) extended disability discrimination legislation to schools, colleges and universities and gave disabled learners more rights in mainstream education.

2004 – Children Act (Every Child Matters)

Based on the earlier Green Paper, 'Every Child Matters,' this Act set out a framework to services for children and young people, from birth to nineteen years old, living in England. This aim was to ensure that all people and organisations working with children have a responsibility to safeguard children and promote welfare. Ultimately, the Act aimed to make the UK a safer place for children and focused on key principles, such as supporting children: to be healthy, enjoy life and succeed (Every Child Matters, 2003).

2005 – Disability Amendment Act

Disability Amendment Act (2005) introduced a duty on the public sector to promote disability equality.

2010 – Equality Act

Protected Characteristics – YouTube (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2020).

The Equality Act (2010) is a landmark piece of legislation in the UK that consolidated and strengthened previous anti-discrimination laws, aiming to promote fairness and protect people from unfair treatment. It covers nine protected characteristics that safeguard Protected characteristics individuals against discrimination and harassment in the workplace and wider society, including education. These characteristics are: **age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.** The Act ensures that people with disabilities are entitled to reasonable adjustments, removing barriers to full participation in society and promoting equal opportunities. It plays a crucial role in fostering a more inclusive and equitable society where everyone is respected and treated fairly (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2020).

2014 – Children and Families Act

The Children and Families Act (2014) was a transformative piece of legislation aimed at improving support for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in the UK. One of the key changes introduced by the Act was the replacement of Statements of Special Educational Needs with **Education, Health, and Care (EHC) Plan**.

These plans provide a more holistic and coordinated approach by combining education, health, and social care services into a single, comprehensive document. The Act also extended support to young people up to the age of 25, ensuring a smoother transition from school to further education or employment, and empowering families by giving them more control over the support their child receives (Department for Education, 2014).

2024 – (Updated from 2015) SEND Code of Practice

First introduced in 2015 (updated in 2024), the SEND Code of Practice provides practical guidance on the law relating to SEND for professionals, families, and education providers. The Code outlines the duties local authorities, schools and other organisations in identifying, assessing and supporting children and young people with SEND. It emphasises person centred approaches ensuring that children, young people and their families are fully involved in decisions about their care and education (Department for Education, 2024).

What is Disability Inclusion in the UK?

Disability

Disability is defined by Section 6(1) of the Equality Act (2010) as any physical or mental impairment that has a substantial long-term adverse effect on a person's ability to carry out normal daily activities. This broad definition covers a variety of conditions, including both visible disabilities e.g. mobility impairments and hidden disabilities e.g., autism, mental health conditions and learning difficulties. Recognising disability in this way ensures individuals receive the appropriate adjustments and support to participate fully in society.

Inclusion

Inclusion is about creating environments where individuals with disabilities have equal access to opportunities and can contribute without facing barriers. In education and workplaces, this means making reasonable adjustments e.g., such as providing assistive aids and services, flexible working arrangements, or additional learning support – to ensure that everyone, irrespective of their disability, can succeed (Department for Education, 2024).

Types of SEND

The Department for Education (2024) categorise SEND Into four broad areas. These areas help educators and institutions provide tailored support to students, ensuring they can succeed in their studies and personal development. The following is an overview of these categories, with examples of how they might appear in a university setting.

Category 1 – Communication and Interaction

This category includes difficulties in understanding, using, or processing language. Students with conditions like an **Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)** or **speech, language, and communication needs (SLCN)** may struggle with social interaction, group discussions, or processing instructions.

Example: A university student with autism may find it challenging to participate in group work or give presentations, requiring structured support or alternative ways to communicate their ideas.

Category 2 – Cognition and Learning

Students with cognition and learning needs may have difficulties with processing information, understanding complex concepts, or retaining knowledge. This group includes **specific learning difficulties (SpLD)** like **dyslexia, dyscalculia** and **dyspraxia, and moderate learning difficulties (MLD)**.

Example: A student with dyslexia may struggle with reading large amounts of text or writing essays, benefitting from assistive technology or additional time for exams and assignments.

Category 3 – Social, Emotional, Mental Health

This area includes conditions that affect a student's emotional well-being or behaviour, such as **anxiety, depression**, or physical symptoms that are medically unexplained. Individuals may also have disorders, such as **Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)** or other mental health challenges. These students may have difficulty managing stress, concentrating in lectures, or forming peer relationships.

Example: A student with anxiety might require flexible deadlines, quiet study spaces, or support from Life Lounge to help manage academic pressures and social interactions.

Category 4 – Sensory and/or Physical needs

Sensory and physical needs refer to disabilities that affect a student's ability to engage with their environment, **such as visual impairments (VI)**, **hearing impairments (HI)**, or **physical disabilities**.

Example: A student with a hearing impairment may need assistive devices like hearing loops or captioned lectures, while a student with a physical disability might require accessible buildings, adapted seating, or mobility aids.

So, what does it mean to the person to have a disability?

What is a learning disability – YouTube (Mencap, 2019)

Non-Visible Disabilities

Non-visible disabilities, also referred to as hidden disabilities, are conditions that are not immediately apparent but can significantly impact an individual's daily life. Unlike visible disabilities, which may be recognised through mobility aids or physical characteristics, hidden disabilities often go unnoticed, making it crucial for people to be mindful and understanding in their interactions. In the UK, the Equality Act (2010) protects individuals with hidden disabilities, ensuring they are entitled to the same rights and accommodations as those with visible disabilities.

Why is it called a non-visible disability?

According to the Disability Unit (2020), disabled people will often self-identify in different ways when talking about non-visible disabilities. For some, they prefer the phrase 'non-visible' because the word 'invisible' can imply the disability does not exist. The phrase 'hidden disability' can imply that the person is intentionally hiding their disability. Some non-visible conditions are visible or obvious. However, everyone is unique so it's important to remember, if a disability cannot be seen, it doesn't mean it doesn't exist.

Types of non-visible disabilities

According to the Disability Unit (2020) non-visible disabilities and conditions include, but not limited to:

- Mental health conditions, including anxiety, depression, schizophrenia, personality disorders, obsessive compulsive disorder
- Autism and Asperger's syndrome
- Visual impairments or restricted vision
- Hearing loss
- Sensory and processing difficulties
- Cognitive impairment, including dementia, traumatic brain injury, or learning disabilities
- Non-visible health conditions, including diabetes, chronic pain or fatigue, respiratory conditions, incontinence

What This Means For Your Everyday Interactions at University

Supporting students with non-visible disabilities at the University of Bolton involves awareness, respect, and consideration. Non-visible disabilities and conditions might not be obvious to others, but they can significantly impact daily activities, including academic work and social interactions. It's essential to recognise that even though you can't see a disability, it still exists, and the person may need adjustments or support to thrive.

Consideration 1 – Respect Privacy and Individuality

People with non-visible disabilities want to be treated with respect, just like anyone else. While some may choose to disclose their condition, no one is obligated to explain their disability.

What you can do: Avoid making assumptions about someone's abilities based on appearance. If someone chooses to disclose their disability, listen without judgment, and respect their privacy. Some students may prefer to keep their condition private, and this choice should be respected.

Consideration 2 – Awareness of Lanyards and Badges

In some cases, students with non-visible disabilities may choose to wear a lanyard (Sunflower) or badge to discreetly signal that they might need extra support. This practice is common when travelling or in public places, but some students may also wear these on campus.

What you can do: Be mindful that a lanyard or badge may indicate a need for patience, assistance, or understanding. For example, a student wearing a sunflower lanyard might need more time to respond in conversations or additional support in navigating campus facilities. However, not everyone will wear such identifiers, so always approach interactions with empathy.

Consideration 3 – Avoid Making Assumptions

Just because a disability isn't visible doesn't mean it isn't there. Non-visible disabilities can range from conditions like ADHD or dyslexia, to health conditions or other issues unrelated to their disability.

What you can do: Offer help if someone appears to be struggling, but avoid assuming that because someone "looks fine," they don't have a disability. If you're unsure, a simple "Is there anything I can do to help?" can go a long way. If you're in doubt, get support from a member of staff.

Consideration 4 – Be Flexible and Supportive

Students with non-visible disabilities may need flexibility with deadlines, extra breaks, or a quiet space to work. Recognising the need for adjustments can help create a more inclusive environment.

What you can do: If you're working on group projects or attending social events, be understanding of any accommodations they may require. For instance, a student with chronic fatigue syndrome might need more frequent breaks or flexible group meeting times. Support their needs without drawing unnecessary attention to them.

Consideration 5 – Create a Culture of Inclusion

Creating an inclusive environment means ensuring that all students, regardless of their disability status, feel valued and supported. A student with a non-visible disability may face challenges that others are unaware of, so fostering a culture of openness and empathy is crucial.

What you can do: Encourage a positive and inclusive atmosphere by being kind, respectful, and approachable. If a fellow student appears overwhelmed or anxious, offering quiet support or simply showing understanding can make a big difference in their university experience.

Make Yourself Ableism Aware

What is ableism?

Ableism is discrimination or prejudice against people with disabilities, based on the belief that non-disabled people should be prioritised (Sense, 2024). This bias can be intentional or unintentional, and it often manifests through systemic barriers, stereotypes, and exclusion.

Key Features of Ableism:

- Assuming people with disabilities cannot achieve certain goals or perform tasks.
- Designing spaces, systems, or events without considering accessibility
- Using language that devalues or patronises individuals with disabilities
- Telling someone that they "don't look disabled" as a compliment

(Sense, 2024)

Recognising ableist assumptions

Read the following infographic for further information.

- Assumes disability is a tragedy

- Erases intersectionality

- Focusses only on limitations

- Disregards individual needs

- Seeks to "Fix" rather than accept

- Denies disabled people's expertise

- Views disability as inherently negative

- Implies disabled lives are less valuable

- Views disabled people as burdens

- Assumes everyone experiences disability the same

- Normalises paternalistic attitudes

- Expects disabled people to "Overcome"

Disability terminology

To foster respect and inclusivity at the University of Bolton, it's essential to use appropriate language. Here's how:

Person-First Language (PFL)

Emphasises the individual before the disability.

Example: "A student with a visual impairment."

Identity-First Language (IFL)

IFL highlights the disability or condition first as an important part of the person's identity.

Example: disabled student, autistic student.

How people 'label' or identify themselves is personal and respecting and accepting personal preference is essential.

Outdated Terms to Avoid

Instead of "handicapped," use "accessible."

Replace "wheelchair-bound" with "wheelchair user."

Neurodiversity Terms at University Academia

Replace "low-functioning" or "high-functioning" with "student requiring additional support" or "student thriving independently."

Examples of Ableism in Language

"That's so lame." → Replace with "That's frustrating."

"Are you deaf?" when someone doesn't hear you → Replace with "Did you catch that?"

(adapted from NHS, 2024)

Summary

Key Takeaways

Disability inclusion in the UK has evolved significantly since the mid-20th century, with milestones shaping the landscape of rights and protections for people with disabilities. These legislative changes have helped shift the focus from exclusion to empowerment and inclusion, ensuring that individuals with disabilities can participate fully in education, work, and society.

As you interact with your individuals at the University of Bolton, it's essential to be mindful of the various types of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), specifically ASD and non-visual disabilities and conditions. Always treat people with respect, offer help when needed, and avoid making assumptions about someone's abilities.

To ensure we create an inclusive and supportive community at the University of Bolton, remember that inclusion is everyone's responsibility. By practicing empathy, respecting individual needs and privacy, and advocating for accessibility, you contribute to a culture where all students and staff feel valued and able to succeed.

Final Guidelines and Support

Your Personal Academic Tutor (PAT)

Your PAT is here to support you throughout your studies, providing guidance and advice tailored to your academic journey. Whether you're seeking help with your coursework, managing your time effectively, or exploring ways to improve your grades, your PAT is a valuable resource. They can also help you navigate challenges, connect you with additional university services, and ensure you're making the most of your time at the University of Bolton. Don't hesitate to reach out - they're just an email away and ready to help you succeed.

University of Bolton guidelines and policies

The university has clear guidelines for supporting students from diverse backgrounds, including policies on Dignity at Study. Familiarise yourself with these policies to ensure that you are offering appropriate and sensitive support. For more information, consult the University's Student Policy Zone.

UoB Wellbeing team

The Life Lounge is the University's student mental health and wellbeing service, offering free and confidential specialist support to students experiencing a range of mental health and wellbeing difficulties. The support offer at the Life lounge includes Mental Health Advisor Service, a Counselling Service, a Cognitive Behavioural Therapy Service and a Wellbeing Team.

The Life Lounge also offers a range of wellbeing workshops and resources to support you to feel connected with others and develop skills around mindfulness, self-care and compassion, emotional resilience and stress management to name a few.

Raising Awareness of Disability Inclusion at University and Beyond

How can I access support?

Students wishing to access Life Lounge Counselling, Mental Health Advisor and/or CBT services should be directed to the online [registration form](#).

Telephone: 01204 903566
Email: lifelounge@bolton.ac.uk
Call in: The Life Lounge, Chancellors Building, Eagle Tower, T2

Disability Service

The Disability Service at the University is here to implement and/or recommend study-related support to students who have disclosed and provided evidence of a disability as defined by the Equality Act 2010. This includes the following conditions or impairments: Specific Learning Difficulties, such as dyslexia; Mental Health Conditions, such as depression or anxiety; Social and Communication Impairments, such as autism; Long-standing Illnesses, such as diabetes or cancer; and Physical Impairments, such as visual or hearing.

Disability Advisors can also advise students who are not sure if they have a disability, and can provide information on how to arrange to be tested for a Specific Learning Difficulty such as dyslexia. They also offer confidential advice and guidance on disability issues in relation to accessing your chosen course of study, as well as the relevant support funding.

Disabled students can access support such as car parking for blue badge holders, Individual Learning Support Plans, support with Disabled Students Allowance applications, equipment loans with specialist disability-related software and individual exam arrangements.

How can I access support?

Students wishing to access Disability Service support should be directed to the online [registration form](#).

Raising Awareness of Disability Inclusion at University and Beyond

Telephone: 01204 903478

Email: disabilityinfo@bolton.ac.uk

Student Centre, Chancellors Mall

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