

Empowering colleagues through Disability Equity training: a social model approach

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About me

- Senior Lecturer in Creative Education at University of the Arts London (UAL).
- Previously worked in UAL's Disability Service for 10 years.
- PhD student researching disability equity in art and design Higher Education.



UAL Disability Service: Our Values

- Individual
- Inclusive
- Empowering
- High quality and professional

<https://www.arts.ac.uk/students/student-services/disability-and-dyslexia>

Social model of disability

- **People are disabled by barriers, not medical conditions.**
- **Barriers can be environmental, attitudinal, procedural.**
- **The social model allows us to focus on practical, not personal, information.**

Rationale for our social model approach

- **Inclusive practices for disabled students benefit everyone.**
- **Disabled students often have multiple diagnoses or impairments.**
- **Reliance on diagnosis can exacerbate existing inequities (e.g financial barriers, access to UK healthcare, inequities stemming from racialisation).**
- **Taking a social model approach is a tool to respond to these issues.**

University of Bristol v Abrahamart (2024)

- University of Bristol vs. Abrahamart (2024) highlighted that it is the responsibility of all staff – not just Disability Services – to implement adjustments.
- The case also highlighted that medical evidence may not be required to make adjustments.
- However, colleagues often feel disempowered to make adjustments.

Training context

- Very little existing training makes connections between disability, Higher Education, and concrete educational practices.
- Colleagues often request impairment-specific training about autism, ADHD, Specific Learning Differences and neurodiversity.
- Existing 'awareness' training does not always embody the social model approach which is so central to our work.

Our response

- Developed a range of staff development focusing on inclusive practices.
- Workshops are designed to empower staff to recognise disabling barriers and develop problem-solving in their context and sphere of influence.
- Impairment-specific information is provided, but situated within a social model context – which allows us to consider ways to remove barriers which are not reliant on diagnosis and disclosure, and apply across impairment groups.

Typical session outline

- **Introducing key concept:** Brief introduction to neurodiversity, autism and/or Specific Learning Differences etc.
- **Introducing key frameworks:** Equality Act 2010, Social Model of Disability and Inclusive Practices.
- **Case studies:** How can we identify and remove barriers for individual students?
- **Scenario-based problem-solving:** What barriers exist in common HE environments, and how can these be removed by inclusive practices?

Role-modelling inclusive practices

"The session 'practiced what it preached': materials were provided in advance for those who may need longer to process the information... Language was inclusive at all stages. In the session itself, the facilitators were really welcoming, warm and friendly. They gave opportunities for breaks, feedback and questions at regular intervals. The session was really well-planned - good-sized chunks, logical etc."

“What next?” Participant responses

- **"Send resources prior to workshops I deliver instead of waiting until afterwards."**
- **"Offer choice where possible."**
- **"Have a less rigid punctuality policy."**
- **"Have smaller teaching group sizes and repeat sessions regularly."**
- **"Make more use of online tools that allow students to submit questions anonymous – thus creating a safe and non-intimidating space."**

Key Challenges

- Not all colleagues can access ‘real-time’ workshops – so we developed a bespoke e-learning course.
- Workshop resourcing as a barrier – so we developed a ‘train the trainer’ model to upskill colleagues to deliver the workshops.
- No additional budget has been allocated: it is a ‘labour of love’.

Discussion questions

- What does staff development relating to disability equity look like at your institution?
- What challenges do you encounter in terms of wider staff confidence and knowledge?
- Are there any of the approaches discussed today that might work in your context?

Any questions?

Here are my contact details. Feel free to get in touch!

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