

A social model approach to neurodiversity inclusion training at UAL

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Who we are

- Angelina Hewitt – Specialist Study Skills Coordinator
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University of the Arts London (UAL)

- Over 21,000 students
- Specialist art and design colleges with multiple sites:
 - Camberwell College of Arts
 - Central St Martins
 - Chelsea College of Arts
 - London College of Communication
 - London College of Fashion
 - Wimbledon College of Arts



How we work with students

- 17% of all students declared themselves disabled (28% of UK based students); 15% of staff are disabled
- Large Disability Service team
- We offer diagnostic assessments free of charge
- We are piloting flexibility around evidence

Disability Service values

- Respect the **individual**.
- Promote **inclusive** practices.
- **Empower** students and colleagues.
- Ensure **high quality and professionalism**.

The Disability Service champions the **Social Model of Disability**, focusing on practical steps to remove disabling barriers to study.

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 neurodivergent students benefits everyone.
- Neurodivergent students often have other diagnoses or impairments (e.g. chronic illness, mental health difficulties).
- 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.

Equality Act 2010

- We have a duty to make **reasonable adjustments**. This duty is **anticipatory** for students.
- University of Bristol vs. Abrahart
- Staff development focuses on **social model** and **inclusive practices**

The challenge

- Disability Equality Training, focusing on the social model of disability, is our core staff development offer.
- Colleagues often request impairment-specific training about autism, ADHD, Specific Learning Differences and neurodiversity.
- Very little existing training which makes connections between neurodiversity and concrete educational practices.
- Existing training does not always embody the social model approach which is so central to our work.

Our response

- Developed a range of staff development workshops (e.g. 'Supporting Neurodivergent Students through 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 neurodiversity:** 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?

The reach of the staff development offer

- UAL's Disability Service staff development offer has increased its reach every year since its inception.
- Our offer now reaches 400+ participants each year (up from 152 participants in 2016-17).
- There is also an e-learning course (Introduction to Disability Inclusion at UAL) which is under consideration for mandatory status.

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."

Next steps

- More targeted work with course teams with awarding, retention and continuation gaps and/or low NSS scores.
- Re-developing sessions which focus on inclusive assessment, in response to the Bristol case.
- Advocating for mandatory staff development.

**Thank you for listening.
Any questions?**

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