Disabled Students UK's

Access Insights Report 2023

Framework and Baseline

Table of Contents

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Foreword – Disabled Students Speaking

In 2021, when we asked disabled students what they most wanted their university to learn from the pandemic, the second most important lesson they recounted was for their university to listen to disabled students. Some of the starkest differences between disabled and non-disabled students on the National Student Survey regard whether students perceive their voice to be valued. Through the years we at Disabled Students UK have seen how the insights of this group have been overlooked. With conventional routes being unsuccessful, we realised that we needed to build a way for disabled students' voices to be heard, systematically and in large numbers.

With 1372 respondents in its first year, the Annual Disabled Student Survey is the largest survey into university accessibility to date. Comments from respondents confirmed its importance:

- *"Thanks for giving me a voice in some way"*
- *"Nice to know someone out there is collecting this information and cares."*
- *"Thank you so much for doing this survey. I've been too scared to complain / offer feedback to [Disability Services] or occupational health until I'm graduated and definitely don't need to rely on them any more, but my experience has been terrible and I haven't really had anyone to share that with"*
- *"I hope that this survey is taken seriously and listened to"*

Because of the large sample size, the data will enable us to understand subgroups such as disabled second generation British students, disabled international students and disabled PhD students. Together, disabled students donated approximately 572 hours to fill in the survey. This Disability History Month, we are proud to continue the historical Disability Movement's slogan "Nothing About us Without us" by finally being able to provide a platform for their voices.

Platforming is only half the process. The next part is up to you. One interesting lesson from the survey is that students who feel that the disabled student voice is being listened to by their institution are 3.2 times more likely to have the support they need. I'll leave you with the one-word answer of one of our Annual Disabled Student Survey Respondents, when asked what their university could do to improve the disabled student experience:

"Listen"

Mette Anwar-Westander
Founder and Chief Executive, Disabled Students UK

Introduction

Background

Disabled students made up 19% of home student enrollments in 2021/22 (HESA), a proportion that has doubled since 2010. If this growth trend continues, by 2033 disabled students will make up more than a third of home students. At the same time disabled students are the second least satisfied group responding to the National Student Survey.

The increase in disabled student numbers, coupled with an increased reporting of the issues experienced by this group, is leading the sector to realise that we lack information about disabled students' experiences. In light of this insight gap, reports have called for the sector, including Higher Education providers, Office for Students and the Department for Education, to increase their monitoring of disabled students' experiences and those university practices which would allow institutions to meet disabled students needs (Arriving at Thriving recommendation 11, Models of Support recommendation 11 The Disabled Student Commitment recommendation 34). Most recently TASO called for improved research into best practice regarding reasonable adjustments for disabled students. Despite these calls there has yet to be a systematic year on year survey of the experiences of disabled students.

The Annual Disabled Student Survey and the Access Insights Project

In light of this insight gap, In 2021 Disabled Students UK started building the Annual Disabled Student Survey – a survey designed to map disabled students' experience of university accessibility over a ten year period, allowing us to find solutions and track progress over time.

For two years we worked on the design of the survey to evaluate the most important aspects of the disabled student experience, building on the findings of previous reports including Models of Support, Arriving at Thriving, Going Back is Not a Choice, The Disabled Student Commitment and countless local disabled student reports. We collaborated with university accessibility staff and accessibility consultants, however, fundamentally, the survey was written by disabled students, for disabled students, investigating issues and solutions only this group had experienced:

- Do your lecture recordings have captions?
- Once your adjustments have been agreed, are they implemented?
- Have you ever been told your adjustments will not work in the real world?

In its first year, the survey gathered responses from 1372 disabled students, making it the largest survey into university accessibility to date. The survey contains more than 116 questions and takes on average 25 minutes to complete meaning that students together donated approximately 14 workweeks to fill it in.

The Access Insights Project developed around the survey as a way of inviting the sector to join in. The largest disabled student–led project to date, it connects the sector with disabled student's insight and brings a data driven approach to HE accessibility. Universities that disseminated the survey are able to see a snapshot of their results on the Access Insights website while universities that became members can receive a full report of their institutions' results, allowing them to tailor their accessibility work to their specific institution. Access Insights membership has been recommended by the Disabled Students' Commission and in 2023 Disabled Students UK was crowned Changemaking Organisation of the Year in Disability Power 100 for our work on the project.

We are very thankful to Snowdon Trust and our pioneering university members, which were the first to come onboard and invest in their disabled students: University College London, University of Exeter, University of Bath, University of Essex and London South Bank University.

The Access Insights framework – how to read this report

The Access Insights project is built on the work of students who filled in our survey and we are committed to making sure their voices are heard. In the section "The Disabled Student Experience" we measure the disabled student experience against 6 principles:

1. Universal design – Disabled Students should be greeted by an environment, practices and policies designed with accessibility in mind.
2. An inclusive culture – Disabled students should experience a positive culture at their institution, which promotes inclusion, belonging and a healthy approach to productivity.
3. A barrier-free path to support – Disabled students should not have to go through a process that is so difficult that it puts them at a disadvantage in order to receive individualised adjustments.
4. Sufficient adjustments – Disabled students should receive all reasonable adjustments needed to enable them to access their degree on equal terms with their non-disabled peers.
5. Somewhere to turn – Disabled students should have a person or place to go to within their institution to effectively resolve accessibility issues.
6. Equal opportunities – Disabled students should be provided with the same non-academic opportunities from their institution as their non disabled peers.

The 2023 results are compared against a 2033 goal. By setting actionable targets on a 10-year timescale we hope to provide a standard for the sector. The goals, which have been created in consultation with disability staff, take into consideration both the current state of the sector and that there are best practice examples enabling the sector to reach the goals within 10 years.

In "Structures Underlying Accessibility" we focus on the questions which relate most directly to university practices, policies and structures, facilitating conclusions about positive policies which may improve the disabled student experience.

Our annual "Positive Policies deep dives" provide insight into which policies and practices are associated with positive student outcomes. The 2023 Access Insights deep dive reveals that UK wide only 36% of students state that all the adjustments that have been agreed for them are actually put in place – showing that implementation of support is a clear problem area for the sector. It also uncovers solutions, such as providing academics with accessibility training: students

who find that non-disability staff are knowledgeable about the practicalities of implementing disability support are three times more likely to have had all their agreed support implemented.

Together, the 2023 disabled student experience statistics, 10 year goals, Structures Underlying Accessibility and Positive Policies create a framework allowing the sector to see where we are, where we want to go and how to get there.

As different institutions will face different challenges in improving the disabled student experience, the Access Insights project shares a snapshot of the results of those universities with sufficient respondents. With the help of both student activists and various institutions who disseminated the survey to their disabled student mailing lists, this year we were able to include 11 universities in this comparison. Ultimately our aim is to include every UK Higher Education Provider, allowing each institution to see a snapshot of their disabled students' experiences.

Positive Policies Deep Dive:
Sufficient adjustments

By 2033 our goal is for 75% of disabled students to have the support they need. Each year we will be selecting an area for a deep dive, which gives universities practical and actionable steps on how to meet the 2033 goals, based on what the data from the Annual Disabled Student Survey shows to have an impact.

This year we are taking a look at which policies are likely to lead students to have "Sufficient Adjustments", our 4th Principle for The Disabled Student Experience. In order for students to have sufficient reasonable adjustments, based on our data, we recommend that universities do the following:

1. **Give students enough information about different adjustment**
Students who felt they had received sufficient information about different possible adjustments that could help them were 4.3 times more likely to have the support they needed.

2. **Approve the requested adjustments.**
Students who had not had a requested adjustment rejected were 3.5 times more likely to have the support they needed.

3. **Implement the approved adjustments**
Students who had all agreed adjustments actually put in place were 2.7 times more likely to have the support they needed.

Of students who had the three factors above, 85% reported having enough support, surpassing the 2033 goal of 75%. Actioning all three recommendations can therefore significantly increase the percentage of students who receive the support they need. Below we go into greater detail on each of these factors.

1. Disabled students need to be informed

Currently 45% of declared disabled students state that they have been given enough relevant information about different possible adjustments that could help them. This figure is especially low (37%) among second generation British students, students whose parents migrated to the UK. By 2033 our goal is for this figure to be 75%.

Being given enough information about adjustments is correlated with other measures of being informed such as knowing your rights, having been told enough about the course to be able to plan your access needs and finding it easy to understand where one should turn for disability support at the university.

We found that the biggest predictors of students feeling that they had enough information about adjustments was their disability advisor. Students who felt their disability advisor was helpful and knowledgeable were 4.6 times more likely to have been sufficiently informed. However, resourcing of Disability Services was also important. In other words, whether Disability Services had adequate staff, funding and training to effectively support students. Students who felt that disability staff had enough resources to do their job were 2.4 times more likely to be sufficiently informed. This indicates that the importance of Disability Services for dissemination of information goes beyond the individual meetings between student and advisor, for instance through measures such as displaying information about adjustments on the university website, making it accessible to students even before declaring a disability.

Students who both felt that their disability advisor was knowledgeable, and that disability staff at their university had enough resources, had an 89% likelihood of having been provided with enough information about different adjustments.

To increase students' knowledge about disability adjustments, we recommend that universities:

- Provide Disability Services with enough resources to disseminate information about disabled students' rights and the support they can get. Information can be communicated through the application process, student-directed campaigns, the university website and information sheets provided when students first reach out to Disability Services.

- Ensure disability advisors have the time and knowledge to be able to appropriately inform students who reach out for support.

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2. Disabled students need to have support approved

Currently 45% of students who declare a disability report that their university approved all the adjustments they could to make their experience as equal as possible to the experience of a non-disabled student. This figure is lower among non-EU international students (34%).

Of students who had had an adjustment rejected, 54% had been offered a harmful or inadequate adjustment as the only option, possibly indicating that their university takes a tickbox approach to support with students being offered standardised solutions, regardless of their individual needs. Staff gave a variety of reasons for the rejection: 33% percent of students who had support rejected were told the adjustment would not be fair to other students, 25% were told they did not really need the adjustment, 22% were told they should interrupt their studies instead of asking for adjustments and 20% were told they did not have the right evidence for the adjustment.

We would like to see the percentage of disabled students that have all requested support approved to increase to 75% by 2033. Toward this end let us look at which policies are associated with students having their support approved.

The biggest predictor of having had all requested support approved was whether students had somewhere to turn to appeal a decision regarding accessibility. Students who felt that they did were 2.3 times less likely to have had a requested adjustment rejected. This could be someone within their department, someone within Disability Services or even a complaint process they could go through.

Other important factors included whether the student estimated that disability staff had enough resources and which staff attitudes they had encountered. Students who had encountered a staff member who saw accessibility as a responsibility rather than a favour were 1.5 times more likely to have had all their support agreed and students who had encountered the attitude that access needs can change were 1.7 times more likely to have had all their support agreed.

According to our data, if students encounter these three factors: well-resourced disability staff, positive staff attitudes and somewhere to turn to appeal, they have an 86% likelihood of having all their support approved.

To increase the number of students who have the support they need approved, we recommend that universities:

- Resource Disability Services to provide support tailored to the individual students, rather than tick box adjustments.

- Train disability staff in disability law to ensure that they see accessibility as a responsibility.

- Have a policy of taking a flexible approach to support and following up with students after support has been agreed to enquire about whether their support needs have changed.

- Ensure that Disability Services have a clearly signposted process of appeal in place, so that students who have an adjustment rejected have somewhere to turn.

- Create a process whereby each student who has a requested adjustment rejected is given a reason in writing.

3. Disabled students need to have the approved support implemented

Currently 36% of students who have had any support approved by their university have all that support put in place. This figure is particularly low among students from a low socioeconomic background (29%). 70% of students state that they go without agreed adjustments because it takes too long to follow up and ensure it is implemented.

The biggest predictors of having support put in place relate to internal communication, staff training and clear structures of responsibility.:

- Students who reported that everyone who needed to be informed about their adjustment has been quickly informed they were 4.6 times more likely to have the support implemented
- Students who reported that staff members who did not have disability as their primary job were knowledgeable about how to implement adjustments were 3 times more likely to have the support implemented
- Students who felt that staff members prioritised their wellbeing were 3.4 times more likely to have the support implemented
- Students who did not feel that they were being pushed from person to person were 2.9 times more likely to have their support implemented.

For those students for whom all of the factors above were true, they had an 82% chance of having all agreed support put in place. 40% of students have had someone check up on whether the agreed adjustments have put in place, increasing their likelihood of having all support implemented by 59%.

To increase the number of students who have their agreed support implemented, we recommend that universities:

- Have a clear communication system between Disability Services and implementing staff. Many universities use an online list of a student's adjustments but the correct staff members are not always notified of the need to check this list or how to do so.

- Train academic and administrative staff outside of Disability Services in the implementation of reasonable adjustments, how to access students' lists of adjustments and who to contact if issues arise.

- Ensure that academic departments have structures defining who is responsible for which access needs to ensure that students are not pushed from person to person.

- Conduct training and campaigns to improve decentralised staff attitudes toward wellbeing generally and disability specifically.

- Ensure that academic staff have enough time and support for their own work that they are able to appropriately support students.

- Have a policy of Disability Services following up with students and staff after support has been agreed to enquire about whether their support has been implemented.

The Disabled Student Experience

In this section statistics illuminating the disabled student experience in 2023 are compared to goals for the sector in 2033. The results are divided into 6 areas relating to 6 principles for the disabled student experience. Interspersed with the statistics are quotes from student responses to the question "What would you advise your university to do in order to improve their support of disabled students going forward?" Please note that totals may not always sum to 100% due to rounding.

Summary

1. Universal Design

While only 16% of disabled students feel that their modules as a whole have been designed with accessibility in mind, the pandemic necessitated great leaps in online access: A small majority of disabled students now have most of their lectures recorded and a third have the option of attending a majority of their lectures live at a distance. However online access is not always accompanied by digital accessibility. Despite the 2018 public sector body accessibility regulations, only 37% of students state that the vast majority of their recordings have useful captions.

Universal design for assessment is still elusive with half of disabled students believing that they have received a lower mark due to inaccessible assessments. While university campuses are doubtlessly improving with time, only 36% of students with mobility disabilities find them accessible. Universal design measures vary hugely from university to university. University of Exeter and University of Leicester have already met the 2033 goal of 80% of students having access to recordings of the vast majority of their lectures.

2. An inclusive culture

The most common attitudes that students face from staff are positive, with 65% of students reporting that a staff member has stated or implied that it is ok to need support. However 26% also report having been made to feel unwelcome by staff at the university due to their disability, with a fifth reporting that a staff member has had the attitude that their access needs are a

nuisance or unreasonable. Such attitudes especially make implementation of support difficult. Students who felt that staff sufficiently prioritised their wellbeing were three times more likely to have all their agreed support implemented. This explains why University of Leicester, which demonstrates more positive staff attitudes, also had improved implementation of support. At both University of Leicester and Heriot-Watt University significantly fewer students reported having been made to feel unwelcome by a staff member.

3. A barrier-free path to support

51% of those who hold back from disclosing a disability cite the burdensome administrative process as a reason. While disability advisors are generally thought to be knowledgeable and helpful, Disability Services do experience significant delays. Once adjustments have been agreed they are not always coordinated but rather depend on students acting as a go-between and communicating with staff members meant to implement the support. 73% report that they often have to explain the same thing about their disability or access needs to different staff members while 70% state that they go without adjustments because it takes too much time and energy to ensure they are put in place.

4. Sufficient Adjustments

In order for students to have all the reasonable adjustments they require, they need to: be provided with enough information to ask for the right adjustments, have the adjustments they ask for agreed and have the agreed adjustments implemented. Only 16% of students state that all three of these things happened, with implementation of support being a particular difficulty. In addition, 36% find that most of the adjustments that have been provided are ineffective.

5. Somewhere to turn

45% of students hold back from raising most of the access issues they encounter. One of the most common reasons is that they think it will take them too long to advocate for themselves. This is not without reason – 47% of those who have raised access issues have never had one resolved. The majority of students feel there is someone they could turn to with their access barriers within the university, however they are less certain about how to appeal or escalate an issue that is not being taken seriously. Out of those who have escalated a disability issue only 34% felt heard. University of Leicester has already reached the 2033 goal of 75% of students feeling that they have somewhere to turn, demonstrating the important relationship between staff attitudes and students being able to raise issues.

6. Equal opportunities

Students come to university not only to study but to build networks, gain experience and find career opportunities. These opportunities must be equal for disabled and non-disabled students. Although a majority know of other disabled students they can talk to, only 42% feel part of a community at the institution. Three quarters of those who have pursued a placement or internship have not had its quality affected by their disability however only half of students feel that they are getting the same value for money on their degree. With 83% of students reporting that their physical or mental health has suffered from their degree, 45% of students have considered leaving their university in the last year. University of Oxford and University of Cambridge have the best scores in terms of students feeling part of a community, both reaching halfway to the 2033 goal.

1.   Universal Design

Principle: Disabled Students should be greeted by an environment, practices and policies designed with accessibility in mind.

To have the same access to their studies, disabled students need accessibility to be built into teaching and learning, assessment, policy and the digital and physical environment in an anticipatory way. Universal design saves students from having to go through the administrative process and reaches more students than individualised adjustments can. While we cannot ask students about the full range of universal design required for different disabilities, this section provides a snapshot of measures which are relevant to a large proportion of disabled students. Our university comparison shows that universities vary widely in their application of universal design.

1.1.   Teaching and learning

NSS showed that students who reported having a disability were 6 percentage points less likely to feel that their course was well organised in the National Student Survey (NSS) compared to non-disabled students. Our evidence shows that while some universal design measures are widely spread, such as providing lecture slides or notes in advance of lectures, only 16% of disabled students believe their modules as a whole have been designed with accessibility in mind.

Given the pandemic and the subsequent request by disabled students to retain some aspects of online delivery, it is especially interesting to note the development in online access: most students have had a majority of their lectures recorded in the last year and 30% are aware of having the option to attend a majority of their lectures live at a distance. There are vast differences between universities here: University of Exeter and University of Leicester have already met the 2033 goal of 80% of students having access to recordings of the vast majority of their lectures. Online access is still one of the most commonly requested improvements students in our survey ask for.

"I feel like my modules have been designed with accessibility in mind"

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal

Agree	16% (50% Disagree, 33% Neither)	>60%

"I feel able to actively participate in classes and lectures"

Of taught students

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal
Agree	52% (22% Disagree, 26% Neither)	>75%

"Are lecture slides or notes made available to students before the lectures more than 80% of the time?"

"Not applicable" removed

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal
Yes	62%	>80%

"I find in-person lectures/classes accessible"

Of those who have attended at least one lecture/class in person in the last year

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal
Agree	64% (29% Disagree, 31% Neither)	>80%

"Do you have the option of attending a majority of your in-person lectures/classes live at a distance?"

Of taught in-person students

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal

Yes	30% (52% No, 18% I don't know	>75%

- 89% of taught in-person students had had some in-person teaching in the last year
- 46% of taught in person students had attended some lectures live online in the last year
- 69% of taught in-person students had watched lecture recordings in the last year

"What proportion of your lectures in the last year have been recorded?"

"Not applicable" removed

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal
A majority or all	61%	>80%

1.2.   Digital accessibility

The pandemic necessitated great leaps in the use of digital tools for teaching, however this was not always accompanied by digital accessibility. Despite the 2018 public sector body accessibility regulations only 56% of students find their module platforms accessible and only 37% state that the vast majority of their recordings have useful captions.

"I find the online platform(s) for my modules (eg. Moodle, Panopto, Blackboard) easy to navigate and use"

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal
Agree	56% (24% Disagree, 20% Neither)	>75%

"I find the online library resources easy to navigate and use"

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal
Agree	56% (24% Disagree, 20% Neither)	>75%

"I find the live online lectures/classes I attend accessible"

Of those that attended some online lectures

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal
Agree	66% (14% Disagree, 20% Neither)	>80%

"I find the recorded lectures/classes I am provided with accessible"

Of those that watched some lecture recordings

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal
Agree	65% (17% Disagree, 18% Neither)	>85%

"Do more than 80% of recorded lectures have useful captions?"

"Not applicable" removed

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal
Yes	37%	>90%

Disabled Student Insight:

"Add captions to tutorials, not just suggest to use chrome auto captions on a computer which is inaccurate and not possible to access on a tablet or mobile device, which are easier for me to use physically. I have to choose between pain or not having auto-captions."

1.3.   Assessment

49% of disabled students believe they've received a lower mark because an assessment wasn't accessible to them. Solutions including alternative assessments and the option to delay exams are not currently widely available. Although extensions are common, they are sometimes difficult to obtain.

"Do you think you've ever received a lower mark because an assessment wasn't accessible to you?"

"Not applicable" removed

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal
Yes	49%	<15%

"Sometimes the style of assessment doesn't allow me to demonstrate my knowledge or skill effectively."

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal
Agree	58% (19% Disagree, 23% Neither)	<30%

"For what proportion of your assessments do you/will you have the option of alternative forms of assessment (eg sitting an exam as an alternative to delivering a presentation)"

"I don't know" removed

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal
The majority or all	12%	>35%
None	75%	<20%

"If you are unable to take an exam at the intended time due to being unwell are you generally allowed to take it at a later time (without the results being capped)?"

"Not applicable" removed

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal
Yes	24% (22% No, 53% I don't know)	>60%

"I find it easy to get extensions when I require it due to my disability."

"Not applicable" removed

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal
Agree	55% (27% Disagree, 19% Neither)	>85%

Disabled Student Insight:

"Something I think would benefit other people as I saw it with my friends is if someone is filing extensions frequently with doctors' evidence on health conditions without it being an access [arrangement], gently suggesting that they register with the disability service so the flexibility becomes an access arrangement (this was an access arrangement that, for me anyway, was consistently respected and I never had issues). This could save so many students time and money and I think could generally be quite beneficial."

1.4. Physical environment

This section was only asked of those who have had some in-person teaching/supervision at their university. 35% of students with any disability have been unable to attend in-person teaching due to physical/sensory inaccessibility and 24% cannot name an accessible workplace for them on campus. Looking at those with mobility difficulties 40% find their campus inaccessible with 48% lacking confidence that they would be able to get out of university buildings in case of emergency.

"Have you ever been unable to attend an in-person teaching session/supervision at this university because the location was not physically/sensorily accessible to you?"

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal
Yes	35%	<15%

"If you have access needs that relate to housing, does your student housing meet your access needs?"

"Not applicable" removed

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal
Yes	64%	>90%

"Do you know of any available work spaces on campus that are completely accessible to you?"

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal
Yes	76%	>90%

"I find the physical environment on campus accessible"

Mobility disabilities only

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal
Agree	36% (40% Disagree, 25% Neither)	>75%

"Are you confident that you would be able to get out of any university building in the case of an emergency?"

Mobility disabilities only

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal
Yes	63%	>95%

"Are the accessible toilets on campus sufficient, easily located and well maintained?"

Mobility disabilities only

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal
Yes	45%	>80%

"Have you ever felt isolated by your adjustments at this university, for instance if you have been made to use a separate entrance or sit apart from your peers?"

Mobility disabilities only

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal
Yes	43%	<10%

Disabled Student Insight:

"If they've got the money for lavish end of term and graduation parties, they've got the money to implement bare minimum accessibility on campus, no excuses"

2. An Inclusive Culture

Principle: Disabled students should experience a positive culture at their institution, which promotes inclusion, belonging and a healthy approach to productivity.

An inclusive culture is crucial for disabled students' experience not just because it minimises the overt ableism that students encounter. An inclusive culture also underpins staff members considering accessibility in an anticipatory fashion, agreeing to and implementing adjustments and being understanding when students raise issues.

The most common attitudes that students face from staff are positive with 65% of students reporting that a staff member has stated or implied that it's ok to need support. However 26% also report having been made to feel unwelcome by staff at the university due to their disability. The most common negative staff attitudes reported are that their access needs are a nuisance or unreasonable, that adjustments won't work in the "real world", that their adjustments are unfair to other students and that their disability means that they should interrupt their studies. Each of these have been experienced by a fifth of students. University of Leicester is substantially ahead of other universities with only 9% of students at the university having been made to feel unwelcome, reaching more than halfway to the 2033 goal.

Despite the crucial relationship with personal tutors or supervisors being generally positively rated (56% find them supportive and flexible when it comes to their disability and access needs) the sometimes harsh academic environment, with staff having limited time is also noticeable in these statistics: only 38% reporting that they feel that staff members sufficiently prioritise their wellbeing. 70% feel confident that they have not been harassed or bullied. Half of students have held back from raising access issues because of fears of how they would be perceived.

"Staff members are understanding when my disability impacts my attendance or performance"

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal
Agree	39% (22% Disagree, 39% Neither)	>65%

"I feel that staff members sufficiently prioritise my wellbeing"

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal
Agree	38% (25% Disagree, 37% Neither)	>65%

"In lectures, academic materials or academic discussions at this university, have you ever encountered teaching that devalues disabled people or is built on stereotypes of disabled people (ableism)?"

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal
Yes, and the educator didn't identify it as prejudice	20%	<5%

"Have you ever been made to feel unwelcome at the university by staff members due to your disability?"

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal
Yes	26%	<5%

"Have you experienced bullying or harassment by staff or students at this institution?"

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal
No	71% (15% Yes, 10% I don't know, 3% prefer not to say)	>90%

"Which of the following attitudes do you feel have been stated or implied by staff members at your university?"

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal
"It's ok to need support"	65%	>80%

"Mental health problems are valid"	52%	>70%
"Not all disabilities are visible"	48%	>65%
"Accessibility is the responsibility of all staff members, not just disability staff"	33%	>55%
"Accessibility is a responsibility, not a favour"	30%	>55%
"Being disabled can bring strengths as well as limitations"	29%	>50%
"It is understandable for access needs to change from day to day"	21%	>45%
"Your accessibility needs are a nuisance or unreasonable"	22%	<5%
"Adjustments won't work in the "real world""	21%	<5%
"Your adjustments are unfair to other students"	19%	<5%
"If you are so disabled you should interrupt your studies"	19%	<8%
"You are lazy or incompetent"	16%	<3%
"You are not as disabled as you say"	16%	<3%
"You are trying to 'cheat the system' by asking for adjustments"	15%	<3%
"You are 'too disabled' to do x, eg go on a field trip or take a	8%	<3%

specific module"		
"People with disabilities shouldn't be at this university"	7%	<2%
"As a disabled person you don't have the same capacity to make your own decisions"	3%	<2%
None of the above	8%	

Disabled Student Insight:

"Don't just encourage us to take a leave of absence the second anything goes wrong"

"Actually meet [students'] access requirements. Don't just tell them they should drop out."

"Has a staff member at the university ever treated the adjustments that have been agreed for you as mere suggestions?"

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal
Yes	49%	<20%

"My personal tutor/supervisor is supportive and flexible when it comes to my disability and access needs"

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal
Agree	56% (17% Disagree, 27% Neither)	>75%

Also see the responses to the question "If you have ever held back from raising an accessibility issue/asking for disability support at the university was this because:"
- "I didn't think the particular staff member would understand or believe me"
- "I didn't want others to see me as difficult, incompetent or like I'm trying to get an advantage over other students"
- "I was afraid I would be treated worse or that it would affect my academic prospects"

And these responses to the question of why students haven't disclosed:
- "I don't think staff would understand or believe me"
- "I am afraid I would be treated worse or that it would affect my academic prospects"

3. A barrier–free path to individualised support

Principle: Disabled students should not have to go through a process that is so difficult that it puts them at a disadvantage in order to receive individualised adjustments.

Too often the process of applying for support is difficult enough that it creates barriers to students receiving the support they need. 51% of those who hold back from disclosing a disability cite the burdensome administrative process as a reason.

In order to receive individualised support, students have to:
- Know where to turn, their rights and what access adjustments to ask for.
- Disclose their disability.
- Go through the administrative steps of applying for support including evidencing their access needs.
- Chase up Disability Services if there are any delays in the agreement of support.
- Repeat their access needs to different staff members who may be involved in the implementation of support if this is not done for them.
- Chase it up if the support fails to be implemented.

3.1. Information

Students must know where to turn, know their rights and what access adjustments to ask for. Currently only half of students feel that they know their rights.

"It is easy to understand where one would turn for disability support within my university"

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal
Agree	69% (Disagree 16%, 15% Neither)	>85%

"I know my rights as a disabled student in terms of accessibility and support at my university"

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal
Agree	50% (22% Disagree, 28% Neither)	>75%

See also:
- "Do you feel you have been provided with enough relevant information about different possible adjustments that could help you?"

See also the following response to "If you have ever held back from raising an accessibility issue/asking for disability support at the university was this because:"
- "I didn't know who to raise the issue to"

3.2. Disclosure

We were able to achieve a sample of 75 students who had not disclosed their disability to their university, a group that is otherwise difficult for universities to survey. Ignorance around the definition of disability, lacking evidence for their disability and dreading the administrative process are all key reasons why students do not disclose, however attitudinal reasons and not knowing of any university adjustments that may be useful to them are other important reasons.

Of those that do disclose to their university as a whole, the vast majority disclose to Disability Services, 77% disclose to their personal tutor or supervisor and half disclose to at least one teaching or assessment staff member in their department. Disclosure to other staff groups is less common.

Students who had not disclosed their disability selected the following explanations:

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal
I don't want to go through the administrative process of applying for support	51%	<20%

I don't think I have the evidence they require	50%	<10%
I didn't think my condition counted as a disability	48%	<20%
I don't think the adjustments the university can offer are going to make my experience much more equitable to the experience of a non-disabled student	47%	<20%
Others need the resources more than me	45%	
I feel embarrassed to be needing adjustments or like I should be able to study without adjustments	41%	<20%
I am afraid I would be treated worse or that it would affect my academic prospects	29%	<10%
I don't think staff would understand or believe me	25%	<10%
I don't know who I would raise it with	20%	<10%
I didn't have a disability until recently	20%	>70%
My university has not asked me if I have a disability	17%	<10%
I mentioned my disability in the application process but there was no follow up on this	8%	
Other	5%	

Disabled Student Insight:

"I've never felt able to raise any issues due to my lack of diagnosis"

All below questions in "A barrier–free path to individualised support" and "Sufficient Adjustments" apply only to those who stated that they had disclosed one of their disabilities.

"Please select the staff members/bodies who you have told that you have a disability"

	2023 UK wide
Disability services or equivalent	91%
My supervisor or personal tutor	77%
A teaching or assessment staff member in my department	49%
An administrative or technical staff member in my department	27%
An administrative or technical staff member that is neither in disability services nor my department (eg staff members that work on accessibility within digital or estates services)	13%
Occupational health or human resources (if you are a PhD student for instance)	13% (26% of research students)
Other	2%
None of the above	1%

3.3. Disability Services

Students must be supported in going through the administrative steps of applying for support. We know from previous reports that funding of Disability Services is an issue, and this is reflected in our data. While disability advisors are generally thought to be knowledgeable and helpful, students

who send in their evidence more than 2 months before the start of term only have a 60% chance of getting a support plan in place before they start. 50% report Disability Services having delays that have impacted them.

This section applies to those who disclosed their disability to Disability Services.

"My disability advisor was knowledgeable and helpful"

"Not applicable" removed

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal
Agree	67% (13% Disagree, 19% Neither)	>85%

"Do disability services (or equivalent) communicate in a way that is accessible to you?"

"Not applicable" removed

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal
No	14%	<5%

"Are disability services (or equivalent) quick to respond and put you in touch with someone who can help when you contact them?"

"Not applicable" removed

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal
Yes	61%	>80%

Of those that disclosed their disability to Disability Services, 96% spoke to a disability advisor and 94% were invited to agree on a support plan.

Of those who sent in evidence of their disability to their university and could remember when they did so, 57% did it before they started their course. 37% did it more than 2 months before they started.

"When was a student support plan created for you?"

Only those who sent in evidence at least 2 months before starting included.

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal
Before start of term	60%	>95%

"Has disability services (or equivalent) had delays which have impacted you?"

"Not applicable" removed

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal
Yes	50%	<20%

See response under the question "If you have ever held back from raising an accessibility issue/asking for disability support at the university was this because:"
- "It would take too much of my time to advocate for myself"

Under question about reasons behind nondisclosure, see response.
- "I don't want to go through the administrative process of applying for support"

Disabled Student Insight:

"DSA is not fit for purpose. It took over 18 months for my support to be correctly put in place. My supervisor was brilliant but hit brick walls of administration, which were ultimately up to me to keep hitting. […]Universities cannot rely on this system to ensure equality and need to have safeguards in place to identify and take action when DSA fails."

3.4. Evidencing

Disabled students must not face a prohibitive evidencing burden. Half of students who have not declared a disability cite lack of evidence as a reason. A third of students who have declared find the type or amount of evidence required burdensome.

"The amount or kind of evidence that the university has asked me to provide in order to receive adjustments has been burdensome"

"Not applicable" removed

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal
Agree	31% (44% Disagree, 25% Neither")	<15%

Under reasons not to disclose see the response:
- "I don't think I have the evidence they require"

Under reasons adjustments were rejected, see:
- "You do not have the right evidence for this adjustment"

Disabled Student Insight:

"Don't demand evidence for a recent injury to access adjustments to stay on the course. When [one] is in lots of pain and struggling to access healthcare and scans and therapy, it really doesn't hurt to just be considerate and help us work around things and figure out what might help us stay on the course."

"Make support accessible. I'm still awaiting my medical evidence form from my GP after 3 months and had to pay. Nothing will be put in place until this is received. I also haven't been offered to speak to a disability Advisor, so I have no idea what support I could receive."

_____

3.5. Coordination of support

When coordination of support does not happen automatically students have to repeat their access needs to all the staff members involved in the implementation of their agreed support.

"Do you often have to explain the same thing about your disability or access needs several times to different staff members?"

"Not applicable" removed

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal
Yes	73%	<33%

Disabled Student Insights:

"Talk to each other – so much isn't implemented because my needs aren't communicated between staff"

"Make it clearer for students on how to find out if the support plan has been passed to the department and that the requirements are put in place – or better, to avoid the students' stress make it clear that these adjustments are there from the start of the term"

3.6. Follow up

If staff members responsible for implementation are not informed or do not heed the information about a student's access needs, the student must then chase up support. Because this is so common, 70% of students sometimes go without agreed adjustments because they take too much time and energy to chase up.

"Assuming that an agreed adjustment is to be implemented as soon as possible, on average how long does it take for the adjustment to be put in place?"

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal
Less than two weeks	52%	>85%

"After an adjustment has been agreed, how common is it for you to have to chase it up at least once in order for it to be put in place?"

Out of of those who have had at least one accessibility adjustment agreed

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal
More than half the time/always	41%	<10%

"Do you ever go without adjustments because it feels like it takes too much time and energy to chase them up?"

Out of of those who have had at least one accessibility adjustment agreed

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal
Yes	70%	<20%

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4. Sufficient Adjustments

Principle: Disabled students should receive all reasonable adjustments needed to enable them to access their degree on equal terms with their non-disabled peers.

In order to receive all reasonable adjustments they require students need to:

1. Be provided with enough information to ask for the right adjustments
2. Have the adjustments they ask for agreed
3. Have the agreed adjustments be implemented
4. Have the implemented adjustments be effective

In addition the adjustments they are offered must not be isolating, dangerous or humiliating. We go into greater depth on this issue in the 2023 deep dive, however it is clear from the statistics below that implementation is one of the biggest challenges for universities, resulting in only 35% of students stating that they have the support and adjustments they need.

"I have all the support and adjustments I need to be able to access my studies on equal terms with my non-disabled peers"

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal
Agree	35% (49% Disagree, 16% Neither)	>75%

4.1. Asking for the right adjustments

Students must be provided with enough information to ask for the right adjustments. Currently 55% are not sufficiently informed about different possible adjustments.

"Do you feel you have been provided with enough relevant information about different possible adjustments that could help you?"

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal
Yes	45%	>75%

See also:
- "My disability advisor was knowledgeable and helpful"
- "I know my rights as a disabled student in terms of accessibility and support at my university"

Disabled Student Insight:

"I would want them to be more proactive, especially when they know about a [student's] disability. Currently, it is [up] to the student to ask for adjustments/help but if I don't know what help I can get, I cannot ask for it."

4.2.   Adjustments agreed

Once students have been informed and asked for adjustments these adjustments must be agreed by the university. There are valid reasons why an adjustment may not be agreed, however 55% are currently being refused an adjustment which they believe the university could provide. 18% have been refused an adjustment with the reasoning that it would not be fair to other students.

90% of students who disclosed to DS have at least one accessibility adjustment agreed (regardless of whether it has been implemented or not).

"I have felt empowered to have sufficient influence over what is in my support plan"

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal
Agree	60% (17% Disagree, 24%	>85%

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal
	Neither)	

"Are there any adjustments that the university could provide to make your experience more equal to the experience of non-disabled students, which they have refused to provide?"

"Not applicable" removed

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal
Yes	55%	<25%

"If you have been discouraged from/refused an adjustment at the university, which reasons have you been given?"

	2023 UK wide	2033 goals
"It is not something we provide"	28% (51% if N/A removed)	
"It would not be fair to the other students"	18% (33%)	<5%
"You do not really need this adjustment"	14% (25%)	<3%
"You do not have the right evidence for this adjustment"	11% (20%)	<3%
"Needing this adjustment would call into question your fitness to study"	10% (19%)	<3%
"If you are so disabled you should interrupt your studies instead"	12% (22%)	<3%

"This is not an adjustment you could expect after university"	10% (18%)	<3%
"This is not something we are legally obligated to provide"	9% (16%)	
"This adjustment affects competence standards"	8% (16%)	
"This adjustment would not help you"	8% (15%)	
"It is better for you if you do not receive this adjustment (eg from a career perspective)"	8% (15%)	
"It is too costly"	8% (14%)	
"This adjustment may lead to disciplinary action (eg reduced attendance)"	5% (10%)	<3%
"It would constitute a health and safety risk"	3% (5%)	
Not applicable – I have never been discouraged from/refused an adjustment	45%	
Other	8% (14%)	

"Have you ever been in a situation where the only adjustment the university offered to resolve an access barrier put you at a disadvantage compared to your peers, took away your independence, or was isolating, dangerous or humiliating?"

"Not applicable" removed

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal
Yes	33%	<5%

4.3.   Implementation

"What proportion of the adjustments that have been agreed upon by your university have been provided?"

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal
All	36%	>80%

See also:

- "Assuming that an agreed adjustment is to be implemented as soon as possible, on average how long does it take for the adjustment to be put in place?"

Disabled Student Insight:

"To have more check-ins with disabled students, meaning that instead of the student having to be the one who follows everything up, someone else is following it up for them and is able to put support in place quickly if needs change"

"Require staff to confirm they have read learning profiles/support plans for students *before* classes begin for that semester. "

4.4.   Effectiveness

Once support has been agreed and implemented, we asked students whether it is effective. Most students find the majority of their adjustments effective. We focus here especially on one-on-one support funded by the university. 44% of disabled students receive some form of one-on-one

support but only half find the staff skilled, perhaps reflecting the increased budgetary constraints related to disability support.

"Out of the adjustments that have been provided for you by your university, what proportion have been effective in completely removing the disadvantage they were supposed to remove and allowing you to access your studies on equal terms with your non-disabled peers?"

"Not applicable" removed

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal
The majority or all	64%	>85%

Disabled Student Insight:

"Stop using blanket adjustments for everyone as though every disability can be mitigated in the same way."

One on one support effectiveness

"Some students receive one-on-one support funded by their university instead of DSA (eg. if they are international students or receive university counselling etc). Please select any one-on-one support your university has funded for you (do not select any support funded by DSA)."

	2023 UK wide
Some kind of one on one support funded by the university	44%
Mentoring	21%
Counselling	19%
Study skills tuition	17%
Note taking	5%
Physical assistance	2%

Text assistance (eg scribing or reading aloud)	3%
Transcription services	2%

"I feel that one-on-one support staff members are skilled in providing the support I need"

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal
Agree	56% (24% Disagree, 20% Neither)	>85%

"The one-on-one support I have received has been helpful"

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal
Agree	65% (16% Disagree, 19% Neither)	>85%

Students who had received counselling in particular, were 19% more likely to feel that they had enough support.

Tools

"Do you have the assistive technology, software, access equipment and ergonomic furniture that you need to be able to access your education on equal terms with your non-disabled peers?"

"Not applicable" removed

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal
Yes	67%	>80%

5. Somewhere to turn

Principle: Disabled students should have a person or place to go to within their institution to effectively resolve accessibility issues.

There are many reasons students may need to update individualised support after their degree has already started:

- Students who did not initially disclosed their disability or know they were disabled may come to realise that they need support as their degree continues
- Students who have undergone the initial support application process may encounter new accessibility issues as students face new tasks and environments or their condition changes
- Students who have had adjustments agreed in principle may not get them implemented in practice

These students must have somewhere to turn to resolve their accessibility issues.

5.1. Proactivity

"When you have been struggling, has someone at the university recognised this and offered effective support?"

"Not applicable" removed

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal
Yes	51%	>70%

5.2. Raising issues

At the moment 45% of students hold back from raising most or all of the issues they encounter. One of the most common reasons is that it takes too long to advocate for oneself. This is not without reason – at the moment 47% of students who have raised access issues have never had one resolved.

78% of disabled students have encountered at least one accessibility barrier/support need since starting their degree. The questions in 5.2. apply to them.

"Of all the times you have encountered accessibility barriers/support needs, what proportion of the times have you raised this with someone?"

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal
A majority or all	55% (32% fewer than half, 13% none)	>80%

"If you have ever raised an issue with accessibility, please select all statements that you agree with:"

Of those who have raised at least one access issue

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal
"At least one accessibility issue I have raised was left unresolved"	53%	<15%
"At least one accessibility issue I have raised was resolved"	53%	>75%
"At least one accessibility issue I have raised took so long to sort out that it affected my health or studies"	43%	<20%
"At least one accessibility issue I have raised was handled quickly and proactively"	35%	>75%

"I was treated worse as a consequence of raising an accessibility issue in at least one case"	16%	<2%

"If you have ever held back from raising an accessibility issue/asking for disability support at the university was this because:"

Among those with at least one access barrier

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal
University operations		
"It would take too much of my time to advocate for myself"	43%	<10%
"I didn't believe it's something the university can do anything about"	41%	<20%
"I didn't know who to raise the issue to"	29%	<10%
Staff attitudes		
"I didn't want others to see me as difficult, incompetent or like I'm trying to get an advantage over other students"	49%	<15%
"I didn't think the particular staff member would understand or believe me"	29%	<5%
"I was afraid I would be treated worse or that it would affect my academic prospects"	29%	<15%
Internalised attitudes		

"I don't like to ask for too much support"	48%	<25%
Not applicable		
Not applicable, I always raise accessibility issues/ask for disability support	15%	
Other	4%	

5.3. Somewhere to turn

The majority of students feel there is someone they could turn to with their access barriers within the university, however they are less certain about how to appeal or escalate an issue that is not being taken seriously. Out of those who have escalated a disability issue only 34% felt heard. University of Leicester has already reached the 2033 goal of 75% of students feeling that they have somewhere to turn, demonstrating the important relationship between staff attitudes and students being able to raise issues.

"Sometimes I feel I am pushed from one person to the next because it is unclear who is responsible for my access"

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal
Agree	40% (35% disagree, 25% neither)	<15%

Also see:
- "My personal tutor/supervisor is supportive and flexible when it comes to my disability and access needs"

5.4. Escalating issues

Knowledge is power. Students who have been told how they can escalate issues are more likely to have had them resolved quickly.

"There is a person or system within the university that I could turn to who would be able to effectively address access barriers I may face"

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal
Agree	59% (17% Disagree, 23% Neither)	>75%

"If someone made a decision about accessibility that put you at a disadvantage, do you know who you could "appeal" the decision to?"

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal
Yes	24%	>70%

"Do you know how you could go about making a formal disability–related complaint at the university?"

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal
Yes	24%	>55%

16% have at some point made a complaint or otherwise "escalated" a disability issue.

"Did you feel heard when escalating a disability issue?"

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"Not applicable" removed

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal
Yes	34%	>75%

Disabled Student Insight:

"Perhaps more of an open culture about what to do when you have issues – I was never given advice on the fact my advisor of studies didn't reply to any emails, and how to get a response or further support. Some general guidelines would be very useful."

"Part of the reason I had so little support at University is because I was afraid of the backlash I would receive if I asked for them."

"improve reporting structures when abuse of students with disabilities takes place. Current structures [have] left many students in fear of reporting abusive behaviour from supervisory teams or those in positions of authority because they are worried they will lose their research or study positions."

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6. Equal Opportunities

> **Principle:** Disabled students should be provided with the same non-academic opportunities from their institution as their non disabled peers.

Students come to university not only to study but to build networks, gain experience and find career opportunities. These opportunities must be equal for disabled and non-disabled students. Although a majority of students know of other disabled students they can talk to, only 42% feel part of a community at their institution. University of Oxford and University of Cambridge have the are closest to the 2033 goal of 65%.

Three quarters of those who have pursued a placement or internship have not had its quality affected by their disability however only half of students feel that they are getting the same value for money on their degree. With 83% of students reporting that their physical or mental health has suffered from their degree, 45% of students have considered leaving their university in the last year.

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Disabled Student Insight:

"I want – to feel included, to be recognized, to have opportunities which are accessible and interesting to me, to have part time opportunities […] which are accessible and affordable, […] to not feel excluded or that I am taking too much space or asking for too much."

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6.1. Career

Students must have equal access to field trips, placements and internships. At the moment they do not.

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"If you have had access needs related to field trips, have these been met?"

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"Not applicable" removed

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal

Yes	53%	>80%

"Has a placement or internship via your university been delayed, denied or of lower quality because of your disability?"

"Not applicable" removed

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal
Yes	23%	<7%

Disabled Student Insight:

"I ended up taking an exit award as my university and placement insisted I was too unwell to participate in a 100 day placement, rather than make any accommodations for me."

6.2.   Health

Students' health should not suffer from their degree.

"Has your physical or mental health ever suffered from doing this degree?"

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal
Yes	83%	40%

Disabled Student Insight:

"When looking back at the advice I have given, I am left upset. It is saddening that even through taking the time and labour of this questionnaire, I continue to feel I must advocate for myself and my needs. I wonder why it is so incredibly challenging for

institutions to be inclusive. I worry about the long–term impact feeling like an after–thought in a field I have worked for so many years to sit within, will have on my happiness.”

6.3. Satisfaction

Disabled students should get the same value for money at their university and should be supported to keep from dropping out.

"I feel satisfied with my university"

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal
Agree	46% (30% Disagree, 23% Neither)	75%

"In the last year, have you considered…"

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal
Leaving your university	45%	<35%
Switching to a different degree	20%	
Interrupting your studies	48%	
Switching to part time studies	21% (of full time students)	
None of the above	34%	

"As a disabled student, do you feel you have received the same value for money on this degree as your non–disabled peers?"

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal
Yes	53%	>80%

6.4.   Social, representation

Students should have the same access to community and should feel represented at their university.

"I feel part of a community at this university"

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal
Agree	42% (34% Disagree, 24% Neither)	>65%

"Extracurricular activities related to the university are accessible to me eg sports, societies, socials"

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal
Agree	40% (29% Disagree, 31% Neither)	>65%

"Are there other disabled students at the university who you can talk with about your experiences and get practical tips from?"

"Not applicable" removed

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal
Yes	61%	>75%

"Are there any openly disabled academics at your university that you look up to? (This includes academics who have disclosed their disability to you privately)"

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal
Yes	25%	>55%

6.5. Advocacy, Student Union

"I feel represented by my Student Union"

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal
Agree	23% (34% Disagree, 43% Neither)	>55%

"I feel supported by my Student Union"

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal
Agree	24% (32% Disagree, 43% Neither)	>60%

Disabled Student Insight:

"SU needs to take disability as seriously as other inclusivity"

6.6. Other

"Do you believe you have been discriminated against at this university because of your disability?"

	2023 UK wide	2033 goal
No	55% (20% Yes, 24% I don't know, 2% prefer not to say)	>90%

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Structures Underlying Accessibility

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1. Administration

Budget

"Do you feel those staff members who work to make the university accessible have enough resources to do so?"

	2023 UK wide
Yes	10% ("No" 44%, 39% I don't know)

Disabled Student Insight:

"Better fund the disability service, they are underfunded."

The process of applying for disability support

"Have you had the opportunity to speak with a disability advisor or equivalent at the university about your access needs?"

"Not applicable" and "can't remember" (8%) removed

	2023 UK wide
Yes	90% of those who disclosed to Disability Services

"Have you been invited to agree on a support plan/list of adjustments to make your degree more accessible to you?"

	2023 UK wide
Yes	83% of those who disclosed to Disability Services

Implementation

"Do you think different parts of the university which are supposed to provide support for disabled students, such as disability services and your academic department, communicate well with each other?"

"Not applicable" removed

	2023 UK wide
Yes	34%

Disabled Student Insight:

"Join up support between departments, colleges, Disability Services, and the library more effectively to ensure people don't slip through the cracks"

"Once adjustments had been decided for you, were all relevant staff members quickly informed of this?"

Only those with at least one adjustment in place

	2023 UK wide

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Yes	35% (36% No, 29% I don't know)

"Has someone followed up with you to make sure the agreed adjustments are being implemented and to check whether you need any changes to your adjustments?"

	2023 UK wide
Yes	40%

2. Staff Training and campaigns

"I think my educators are aware of how to make their teaching and material accessible for disabled students"

	2023 UK wide
Agree	31% Agree (38% disagree, 31% Neither)

"Do you feel that staff members within your department understand how disability support works practically at the university, for instance how to access your list of adjustments?"

"Not applicable" removed

	2023 UK wide
Yes	43%

"Do you feel that staff members at the university who do not have disability support as their primary job, are knowledgeable regarding how to provide the adjustments that have been agreed?"

"Not applicable" removed

	2023 UK wide
Yes	37%

"Do you feel that staff members understand their legal responsibility to make your experiences as a disabled student as close as is reasonably possible to the experiences of non-disabled students?"

	2023 UK wide
Yes	57%

"I feel like staff members understand what ableism is and how to avoid it"

	2023 UK wide
Agree	27% (31% Disagree, 42% Neither)

Disabled Student Insight:

"increase regular training for employees at the university on supporting and being an ally to students with disabilities"

3. Policies

"If you fail to attend a lecture for disability reasons, is this counted toward your attendance average?"

"Not applicable" removed

	2023 UK wide
No	14% (45% Yes, 41% I don't know)

"Have you ever had disciplinary action at this university as a result of your disability?"

	2023 UK wide
Yes	7%

"If needed, would you be able to interrupt your studies for a year?"

	2023 UK wide
Yes	42% (15% No, 42% I don't know)

"Do you think you would be allowed to study this degree part time if needed?"

	2023 UK wide
Yes	30% (34% No, 36% I don't know)

4. Leadership and responsibility

"Do you know who within university leadership is ultimately responsible for university accessibility?"

	2023 UK wide
Yes	14%

Disabled Student Insights:

"Make disability access a priority, not an added, optional extra"

5. Complaints and Accountability

"Have you ever been told how you could escalate an unresolved accessibility issue?"

Including only those who have raised at least one access issue

	2023 UK wide
Yes	20%
Yes (among those have had an access issue remained unresolved after raising it)	16%
Yes (among those who had an access issue resolved quickly)	25%

"If you have ever been treated poorly by a staff member due to your disability, eg refused reasonable adjustments or presumed incompetent, were you made aware of any consequences for that staff member?"

"Not applicable" removed

	2023 UK wide
In the majority of cases or always	7%

6. Evaluation and learning

"In the last year, have you been asked by the university in a survey, focus group or module/staff evaluation whether you find your teaching or wider university experience accessible?"

	2023 UK wide
Yes	37%

"Do you feel the institution has made sufficient and appropriate changes as a result of this evaluation?"

	2023 UK wide
Yes	16% (30% No, 54% I don't know)

7. Student voice

"I feel that the university listens to the disabled student voice"

	2023 UK wide

Agree	29% (34% Disagree, 37% Neither)

"Is there a group of disabled students who advocate for disabled students' interests at the university?"

	2023 UK wide
Yes	40% (11% No, 50% I don't know)

Disabled Student Insight:

"The University needs to speak to disabled students and stop silencing or ignoring us when we make our concerns known. [...]I was part of a group that wrote an access report to the university detailing everything that is unacceptable and needs improvement. It's been about 2/3 years now and I've seen very very little change. They created working groups from this but it was clear they didn't actually want to change. [...]The University has access to a wealth of resources from disabled students who have been fighting over the past 4/5 years and they really need to listen."

University Comparison

In this section you can see a snapshot of how the 11 institutions with the most respondents performed in our Annual Disabled Student Survey 2023. The tables demonstrate how each institution's results compare to the sector and to the 2033 goals. First we take a look at what we consider one of the most important questions in the survey – whether students feel they have enough support. After this we look at one key question concerning each of the 6 Principles of The Disabled Student Experience.

Our goal is to include every Higher Education Provider in this mapping. As we move closer to 2033 we want to see these tables turn green – so that no matter which university you attend you will have the same opportunities as a non-disabled student.

The tables use the following colour code:

Below UK average
Reached UK average
Halfway to 2033 goal
Reached 2033 goal

This comparison is a snapshot of the Annual Disabled Student Survey results. Encourage your university to become an Access Insights Member to receive a full university-specific report.

Dissemination and sample sizes

We want to thank the countless disabled students and staff members who supported the dissemination of our survey. In particular we want to thank the Disability Services departments at the following institutions for showing their commitment to improving the experience for disabled students in the UK by sharing our survey with their students: Bath Spa University, Leicester University, Heriot-Watt University, Cambridge University, London South Bank University,

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Canterbury Christ Church University, Edinburgh Napier University, University of Manchester, Royal Holloway University of London.

On statistical significance
Those who filled in the Annual Disabled Student survey are only a sample of disabled students at the university. For any survey filled out by a sample of a population, there is a level of uncertainty regarding what the population as a whole would respond to the same questions. Based on HESA's estimates of how many disabled students there are within each university, we can be 90% confident that the statistics for each university reported below are at most 6-12 percentage points away from the statistics we would find if the whole disabled student population at that university had completed our survey.

Sample sizes:

- Cambridge University = 138
- University of Manchester = 102
- Oxford University = 86
- University College London ☆ = 80
- University of Exeter ☆ = 79
- Canterbury Christ Church University = 70
- University of Plymouth = 64
- University of Leicester = 56
- Bath Spa University = 49
- Royal Holloway = 47
- Heriot-Watt University = 46

Summary Question

Proportion of disabled students who feel that they have the support and adjustments they need to be able to access their studies on equal terms with non-disabled peers

2033 goal	75% agree
University of Leicester	49% agree (29% disagree)
Bath Spa University	49% agree (35% disagree)
Heriot-Watt University	46% agree (41% disagree)
University of Manchester	43% agree (44% disagree)
University of Exeter ☆	40% agree (40% disagree)
Canterbury Christ Church University	35% agree (45% disagree)
UK wide	35% agreed (49% disagreed)
Oxford University	33% agree (54% disagree)
Cambridge University	32% agree (49% disagree)
University College London ☆	29% agree (62% disagree)
University of Plymouth	30% agree (46% disagree)
Royal Holloway	30% agree (46% disagree)

☆ Universities with this star are members of the Access Insights project, meaning that they are investing in understanding the situation so that they can improve the experience for their disabled students.

Universal Design

Proportion of disabled students who had a majority of their lectures recorded in the last year

2033 goal	80%
University of Exeter ☆	91%
University of Leicester	82%
University of Plymouth	71%
Cambridge University	71%
University of Manchester	70%
UK wide	61%
Canterbury Christ Church University	60%
Bath Spa University	54%
Oxford University	50%
Royal Holloway	45%
University College London ☆	42%
Heriot-Watt University	33%

An Inclusive Culture

Proportion of disabled students who have been made to feel unwelcome at the university by staff members due to their disability

2033 goal	5% yes
University of Leicester	9% yes
Heriot-Watt University	15% yes
Bath Spa University	16% yes
Royal Holloway	19% yes
University of Exeter ☆	20% yes
University College London ☆	25% yes
University of Plymouth	22% yes
Canterbury Christ Church University	26% yes
UK wide	26% yes
Oxford University	27% yes
University of Manchester	31% yes
Cambridge University	31% yes

A Barrier–free Path to Support

Proportion of disabled students who have been provided with enough information about different adjustments that could help them

2033 goal	75% yes
Bath Spa University	57% yes
Heriot-Watt University	53% yes
University of Leicester	51% yes
Cambridge University	49% yes
University of Manchester	48% yes
Royal Holloway	46% yes
UK wide	45% yes
University of Exeter ☆	44% yes
Canterbury Christ Church University	42% yes
Oxford University	41% yes
University of Plymouth	39% yes
University College London ☆	38% yes

Sufficient Adjustments

Proportion of disabled students who report that all of the adjustments that the university has agreed for them have been provided

2033 goal	80%
University of Leicester	57%
Royal Holloway	50%
University of Manchester	48%
University of Plymouth	45%
University of Exeter ☆	40%
Oxford University	38%
Cambridge University	36%
Canterbury Christ Church University	36%
Heriot-Watt University	36%
UK wide	36%
Bath Spa University	32%
University College London ☆	29%

Somewhere to Turn

Proportion of disabled students who feel that there is a person or system within the university that they could turn to who would be able to effectively address access barriers they may face

2033 goal	75% agree
University of Leicester	75% agree (11% disagree)
Cambridge University	66% agree (14% disagree)
Royal Holloway	64% agree (13% disagree)
Heriot-Watt University	61% agree (17% disagree)
Bath Spa University	61% agree (10% disagree)
UK wide	59% agree (17% disagree)
University of Plymouth	58% agree (17% disagree)
University of Exeter ☆	57% agree (18% disagree)
University of Manchester	57% agree (18% disagree)
University College London ☆	55% agree (20% disagree)
Oxford University	52% agree (23% disagree)
Canterbury Christ Church University	47% agree (24% disagree)

Equal Opportunities

Proportion of disabled students who feel part of a community at their university

2033 goal	65% agree
Cambridge University	58% agree (22% disagree)
Oxford University	57% agree (20% disagree)
Bath Spa University	45% agree (24% disagree)
University of Exeter ☆	43% agree (37% disagree)
Royal Holloway	43% agree (38% disagree)
University of Plymouth	42% agree (36% disagree)
UK wide	42% agree (34% disagree)
University of Leicester	41% agree (34% disagree)
Canterbury Christ Church University	40% agree (33% disagree)
University of Manchester	40% agree (40% disagree)
University College London ☆	39% agree (41% disagree)
Heriot-Watt University	39% agree (43% disagree)

Survey Demographics

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1372 respondents filled in the Annual Disabled Student Survey. See the demographic make up of the sample below.

Domicile
- EU students: 5%
- Non EU international students: 9%
- Home students: 86%

EU and international students are underrepresented in the disabled student population, making up only 8% of disabled student enrollments according to HESA. The relative overrepresentation in our sample could be due to disabled international students either declaring their disability informally or not declaring their disability.

Racial marginalisation
- Black: 5%
- Asian: 9%
- Arab: 1%
- Other racially marginalised group: 6%
- No racially marginalised group: 80%

Despite disabled people in society as a whole being more likely to be racially marginalised,, disabled university applicants are more likely to be white, making up 80% of the group according to UCAS, in keeping with our sample.

Gender
- Women: 66%
- Men: 17%
- Non–binary or other: 17%

Men are underrepresented in our sample compared to the disabled student population. This is likely partly due to an underrepresentation of men as survey respondents more generally. However it is noted that men are also underrepresented in the disabled student community specifically, despite male university applicants being slightly more likely to declare a disability (eg. UCAS).

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LGBTQIA+
- Trans: 18%
- Queer: 56%

The overrepresentation of queer people in the disabled community is well documented (eg. [Next Steps: What is the experience of LGBT+ students in education?](#)). Identifying as queer is especially common among autistic students and students with mental health conditions, explaining why our sample has a particularly high number of LGBT+ respondents.

Socioeconomic Vulnerabilities
- Low socioeconomic background: 30%
- Carers: 8%
- Home students who Immigrated before studies: 6%
- Children of immigrants: 8%

It is very difficult to compare the proportion of students from a low socioeconomic background to a population mean as we ask students to self identify. The large proportion of students with care responsibility may be due to the overrepresentation of mature students in the disabled student population, however carers are also more likely to be disabled according to the [ONS](#).

Level of study
- Undergraduate: 70%
- Taught postgraduate: 14%
- Research postgraduate: 16%

Research postgraduates are overrepresented in our sample compared to HESA's student enrollment figures. The relative overrepresentation in our sample could be due to disabled PhD students either declaring their disability informally or not declaring their disability.

Disability type
- Blind/partially sighted: 3%
- Deaf/hard of hearing: 5%
- Specific learning difference (SpLD such as Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, ADHD etc.): 51%
- Autism: 41%
- Other communication or language difference: 2%
- Long term mental health condition (eg. Depression, Eating Disorder, Schizophrenia): 57%
- Other long term chronic health condition (Eg. Chronic Fatigue Syndrome/ME, Autoimmune conditions, Heart disease, Cancer, Diabetes): 37%
- Mobility difficulty: 20%

- Neurological condition (eg. Epilepsy, Cerebral Palsy, Tourettes, Traumatic Brain Injury, Multiple Sclerosis, Stroke, Stammer): 11%
- Learning disability (eg. Down's Syndrome): 1%
- Other physical impairment or difference that it not a chronic illness, not neurological, and does not impact primarily on mobility (eg. Visible Difference, Dwarfism): 2%
- Other: 1%

As expected, when we allowed students to choose multiple disability groups rather than choosing between selecting a single disability or the category "more than one disability" the majority of disabled students do select multiple. It is notable that autistics are overrepresented in this sample, as they are in our disabled student community, however it may also be that the size of the autistic student population is hidden by the "more than one disability" option in other surveys.

Disability support
- Have at least one diagnosis: 95%
- Lack at least one diagnosis: 37%
- Are in receipt of DSA: 50%
- Have not applied for DSA: 38%
- Going through the DSA application process: 10%
- Were rejected for DSA: 3%

Half of the students are in receipt of DSA and a significant minority lack at least one diagnosis.

Universities
- Top 18 Universities (at least 20 respondents each): 73%
- Bottom 89 Universities (less than 20 respondents each): 27%

The sample includes students from 107 UK universities with three quarters of students coming from the 18 universities with the most respondents.

Other
- Part time students: 13%
- Remote student: 6%
- Mature students: 31%

Unfortunately we were unable to reach a representative number of part time students and distance learners. This is likely why the proportion of mature students is not as high as it should be considering that disabled students tend to be older when entering Higher education (UCAS).

How to get involved

If you are a disabled student you can [sign up to receive the Annual Disabled Student Survey](#) when it is time to fill it in or [engage more with DSUK](#).

If you are a university staff member you can encourage your university to join in the Access Insights Project by spreading the survey in 2024 and signing up to Access Insights membership.

Access Insights Membership

DSUK offers HE Providers and Student Unions Access Insights Membership[1]. Members make a financial contribution to the project to receive the following assets, which allow them to effectively tackle inaccessibility:

Gold (£2,500 + VAT):

- Monthly Brief with news from the sector and videos from lived experience experts
- Data dives from the Annual Disabled Student Survey
- 25% discount on DSUK event tickets
- Membership badge

Platinum Membership (£6,400 + VAT):

Everything in Gold plus:
- Annual report with university-specific statistics from the Annual Disabled Student Survey
- 50% discount on DSUK event tickets
- 20% discount on bespoke consulting, training and speaking

Diamond (£9,700 + VAT):

Everything in Platinum plus:

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[1] Membership has been recommended by the [Disabled Students Commission](#) as part of their disabled students' commitment.

- Annual premium report into the disabled student experience at the university, including student quotes and DSUK policy recommendations.
- 15h of bespoke consulting
- Free access to DSUK events
- Co-created video on university's work to support disabled students

* Memberships billed annually, institutions with less than 15,000 students are entitled to a 10% discount and institutions with under 8,000 students are entitled to a 20% discount.
**VAT not included

Advantages of membership

Improving accessibility benefits Higher Education Providers in many ways. It allows institutions to gain academic contributions from an underutilised population, avoid reputational and financial damages from complaints, and rise on university rankings as the experience and performance of nearly one in five students improve.

DSUK's 2022 report found that the second most common lesson disabled students want universities to learn from the pandemic was to consult them more. Students who had been proactively consulted about accessibility during the pandemic were 3 times less likely to consider leaving. The 2023 Annual Disabled Student Survey shows that students who feel that their institution values the disabled student voice are 3 times more likely to have the support they need.

DSUK embodies a new model of disabled students as experts and creators of change rather than recipients of charity. Disabled students have invaluable knowledge about what works when it comes to accessibility and we want the whole HE sector to benefit from this through the Access Insights Project.

Access Insight membership allows the HEP to address inaccessibility more effectively. The authentic advice and evidence-based recommendations we offer lead to more cost-effective interventions. This also improves staff morale and productivity, as staff members can be more confident and proactive in their accessibility measures rather than having to rectify issues in an ad-hoc manner.

Members can proudly display the Access Insights membership logo on their website, sending a clear message to current and prospective disabled students that they value their voices and are investing in their access.

To learn more and sign up, contact us at accessinsights@disabledstudents.co.uk.

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About Disabled Students UK

DSUK has quickly become the largest disabled student-led organisation in the UK and has been recognised thrice by Disability Power 100 as one of Britain's most influential disabled-led organisations, winning the Changemaking Organisation category in 2023. Made up of over 500 current and former disabled students from 70 different Higher Education Providers, the organisation empowers students to share their insight into accessibility to inform policy.

DSUK has built a reputation with its evidence-based approach. Their 2020 report, which warned the sector about the impact of the pandemic on disabled students, was mentioned in parliament. Their 2022 report Going Back is Not a Choice presents key accessibility lessons from the pandemic. The report was featured in The Independent, and hailed as "a potential game changer in its review of UK HE inclusive provision". The launch was attended by over 100 university staff members, with 92% reporting that they found the contents helpful for improving the situation for disabled students in HE.

DSUK has a collaborative approach to change and regularly provides consulting and training services to researchers, access consultants, decision makers and institutions such as University College London and the National Union of Students. Their mission is to achieve a truly accessible HE experience, ensuring disabled people equal access to education and the societal and self-development opportunities associated with this.

Read more about us and our work here: disabledstudents.co.uk

Find out more about Access Insights Membership: accessinsights.co.uk

Find us across the web: linktr.ee/DisabledStudentsUK