NUSU DISABILITY POLICY

This policy is not intended to undermine or interfere with the Code of Practice for Freedom of Speech. Where there are inconsistencies, particular regard will be given to the Code of Practice for Freedom of Speech.

Contents

Scope

This policy applies to everything NUSU does as a service provider, representative body and an employer. It covers conduct at our premises as well as related meetings, events and activity off site and at campuses other than in Newcastle.

Policy Statement

Newcastle University Students' Union (NUSU) believes that all students should be given equitable opportunities, feel safe, respected, and welcome in the Students' Union and any of its activities. This includes disabled students, and this policy has been written to inform students and staff alike about NUSU's commitment to tackle discrimination and to raise awareness of issues disabled students may face.

Disabled people are the largest minority group in the world[1] with 17.3% of home students in higher education having reported having a disability[2]. As a result, disability is incredibly diverse, and NUSU is aware that no two students have the same disability or access needs.

This policy sets good practice and guidelines surrounding disability and accessibility. NUSU commits to maintaining disabled students' dignity and protecting their right to engage in all

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[1] https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/resources/factsheet-on-persons-with-disabilities.html [2] https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-8716/

aspects of student life. Disability is incredibly diverse, and what is accessible for one person may be inaccessible to someone with the same diagnosis. When in doubt, it is best to ask the disabled student how to make things accessible for them.

This policy serves as a guidance document for good practice and is far from exhaustive. NUSU encourages its staff and members to educate themselves about disability and accessibility; disabled people form a diverse community with a wealth of language and culture. Thank you to all the disabled students who have helped contribute to this document.

What is Disability?

Under the Equality Act a person is disabled if they have a physical or mental impairment that has a long-term and substantial (more than minor or trivial) adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. Long-term means that it has lasted or is likely to last for at least 12 months or for the rest of a disabled person's life.

In practice, this includes a wide range of conditions, including but not limited to:

- physical disabilities and mobility issues.
- chronic illnesses and long-term health conditions.
- neurodivergencies and learning disabilities.
- mental illnesses.
- blindness and D/deafness.

Many disabled people do not identify as disabled and identify differently.

Appropriate Language and Etiquette

While terminology preferences vary between disabled people, appropriate language and good etiquette is an important part of inclusivity, and so NUSU aims to recognise the following good practice:

Etiquette

- Disability is not always visible.
- Disabled, and other words describing disability, such as D/deaf, blind, hard of hearing, visually impaired, and mentally ill, are not dirty words. Avoiding them associates disability with shame. It is best practice to avoid euphemistic phrases such as "special needs" or "differently abled" unless this is how a person self-identifies.
- When interacting with a disabled person, the disabled person should be addressed directly instead of a carer/interpreter accompanying them.
- It is **never** appropriate to touch a disability aid, including service animals and mobility aids, without explicit consent unless in the case of an emergency.
- Instead of assuming a disabled person needs help, ask.

- Never infantilise a disabled person. Shouting at a D/deaf person is not an acceptable form of communication.
- It is not appropriate to ask why somebody is disabled or why somebody uses a disability aid.

<u>Language</u>

- Disability is something to celebrate, not mourn. Outdated terminology such as "wheelchair bound" and functioning labels is to be avoided, and neutral language is to be prioritised over negative language (e.g. "someone with [health condition]" instead of "a [condition] sufferer").
- Person first (e.g. "person with a disability") and identity first (e.g. "disabled person") is a matter of personal preference. While identity first language is often preferred, it is best to use the language a person uses for themselves.
- Slurs and offensive/pejorative language should never be used to describe somebody with a disability or symptoms of disability (e.g. "they're spazzing" vs. "they're spasming", "they're a cripple" vs. "they're disabled"), but all disabled people have the right to self-describe with the language they choose, including reclaiming slurs, and this must be respected.
- Avoid diminishing or demonising disability, including mental illness and neurodiversity, in language by avoiding phrases such as:
    - "I'm so OCD/ADHD/bipolar" to describe normal human emotions and behaviours. o Using language rooted in ableism such as "psycho" or "sociopath".
    - Diminishing disabled experiences by using phrases such as "everyone's a little autistic".

The Social and Medical Models of Disability

There are two main models of disability – the medical model and the social model. The medical model believes that disability is a fault in a person's body (e.g. a wheelchair user cannot access the top floor because they can't walk up a flight of stairs) while the social model believes that people are disabled by their environment (e.g. a wheelchair user cannot access the top floor because there is no lift). NUSU believes that:

- There is nuance to both models.
- Disabled people may identify with either model to different extents.
- In discussions surrounding accessibility, the social model should be prioritised (i.e. if someone cannot access something, do not blame their disability – the problem is a lack of accessibility).

Reasonable Adjustments and Accessibility

The Equality Act states that reasonable adjustments must be made to accommodate disabled people. NUSU also believes that every student has the inherent right to equal access and commits to breaking down barriers to participation. NUSU aims to adhere to the following good practice, and encourages its members, clubs, and societies to do the same:

Providing captioning.
- All video and audio materials NUSU produces will have accurate and accessible captioning. This should be accessible to deafblind students by having clear fonts against a contrasting, single-colour background.
- Captioning should transcribe all speech as well as sound effects and other audio cues.
- NUSU should avoid sharing non-captioned content on social media to ensure equal access. Whenever possible NUSU should provide transcript of audio files and videos.

Making visually accessible content.
- All digital material must be screen reader friendly. There must be image descriptions on all posts and pictures.
- Hashtags should be in CamelCase (e.g. #NewcastleUniversityStudentsUnion instead of #newcastleuniversitystudentsunion).
- Visually accessible colour choices and text will be used, including but not limited to:
  o Large (12+) sans serif font
  o High contrast colour choices
  o Avoiding overly bright/neon colours
  o When print material is used, there must be either a large print or digital alternative as flyers, printed documents, etc. are often difficult to access for blind/visually impaired students.

Hosting accessible presentations and meetings.
- Sending out digital copies of all print materials, documents, presentations, etc. to participants in advance of presentations or making them available online and giving the link/QR code to participants.
- On online calls, having somebody monitor the chat and having automatic captioning turned on.
- Saving seats near the front of the room for D/deaf/hard of hearing and blind/visually impaired participants.
- Speak clearly and do not block your mouth to allow for lip reading.

Ensuring physical access to buildings.
- Step-free access should always be available, and when this is not, this must be clearly communicated to participants.
- If a society/club makes a booking for an inaccessible room, or rooms that do not have wheelchair access out of hours, and they have flagged that they need disabled

access, this must be communicated to them immediately, and an appropriate alternative room offered.
- A working accessible toilet must always be available.
- Where possible, prioritise using facilities that have hearing loops.
- Where possible, providing a quiet space for participants to take a break and self-regulate.

Providing content warnings.
- Content warnings should be attached to potentially sensitive material and provided in advance to participants, whether this is on social media, for a performance, a talk, or other.
- Content warnings should always be provided for the following:
o flashing images/lights
o loud noises
o sexual violence/assault and abuse.

Advertise accessibility for all events, even if there is no accessibility.
- It is much better for a disabled person to know in advance that an event is inaccessible – this saves them the labour of having to investigate whether they can attend.
- Provide carer's tickets for disabled students.
- Clearly advertise any allergens in food and drinks.
- Clearly advertise who should be contacted regarding any accessibility questions and have sections in booking forms for accessibility requirements.
- Accessibility information should be clear and detailed for all NUSU events, including Give it a Go activities (e.g. "this event is accessible" is unhelpful). Examples of things that should be included:
o Wheelchair access – step-free routes, any special instructions for lift access, presence of rough surfaces/steep inclines, etc.
o Sensory access – how loud the event will be, any flashing lights, any dark spaces, hearing loop availability, etc.
o Toilet access – are accessible toilets available, are changing places available, is a RADAR key required, are gender-neutral toilets available.

Resources and **Useful Contacts**

The University Disability Service provides advice, guidance and support to students with a range of impairments, disabilities, health conditions, neurodiverse conditions such as autism and specific learning differences/difficulties.
The team of specialist practitioners will ensure that they support your access to and participation in learning. They'll work with you to find the best adjustments and support along with your academic school.

Disability Support | Student Wellbeing | Newcastle University

Disabled students seeking support or advice are encouraged to reach out to NUSU and are reminded of the following contacts:

- the Wellbeing and Communities Officer
- the Disability Officer
- the Inclusive Opportunities Coordinator
- the Support and Advice Hub
- Student Wellbeing Services and Disability Support.

The Disability, Mental Health, and Neurodiversity Society is also a safe space for all disabled, mentally ill, and neurodivergent students regardless of diagnosis status.

Accessibility guides for venues:

- [AccessAble](https://www.accessable.co.uk/) (https://www.accessable.co.uk/)
- [Euan's Guide](https://www.euansguide.com/) (https://www.euansguide.com/)
- [Sociability](https://www.sociability.app/) (https://www.sociability.app/)

Accessible design:

- [Designing for visual impairment](https://webdesign.tutsplus.com/accessibilitybasics-designing-for-visual-impairment--cms-27634a) (https://webdesign.tutsplus.com/accessibilitybasics-designing-for-visual-impairment--cms-27634a)
- [Visually accessible colour palettes](https://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG20/) (https://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG20/)
- [Captioning videos](https://www.rev.com/blog/resources/how-to-add-closedcaptions-to-videos) (https://www.rev.com/blog/resources/how-to-add-closedcaptions-to-videos)
- [Making accessible presentations](https://support.microsoft.com/enus/office/make-your-powerpoint-presentations-accessible-to-people-withdisabilities-6f7772b2-2f33-4bd2-8ca7-dae3b2b3ef25) (https://support.microsoft.com/enus/office/make-your-powerpoint-presentations-accessible-to-people-withdisabilities-6f7772b2-2f33-4bd2-8ca7-dae3b2b3ef25) Other:

- [Crowdsourced content warnings](https://www.doesthedogdie.com/) (https://www.doesthedogdie.com/)
- [Making virtual meetings and events accessible](https://rootedinrights.org/howto-make-your-virtual-meetings-and-events-accessible-to-the-disabilitycommunity/) (https://rootedinrights.org/howto-make-your-virtual-meetings-and-events-accessible-to-the-disabilitycommunity/)

Discrimination and Harassment

NUSU will not tolerate bullying, harassment, or discrimination. All students should have equal access to opportunities at NUSU, and deserve to feel welcome at NUSU, its venues and activities, clubs, and societies. All NUSU staff, members, clubs, and societies **must** make reasonable adjustments to ensure disabled students can attend activities.
All members are strongly encouraged to report any instances of discrimination, harassment, or bullying so that appropriate action can be taken. To ensure discrimination does not happen, NUSU will do the following:

- monitor the policy and its impact regularly, with annual reviews by the Disability Officer or an appropriate Sabbatical Officer.

- have a clear procedure for investigating complaints.
- offer specific training on disability and accessibility.
- make all NUSU volunteers aware of our Disability Policy, including when we train club and society officers.
- engage in regular awareness-raising activities and campaigns.
- Promote awareness and understanding throughout the student body surrounding disability.
- NUSU undertakes to remove ableist material, in the form of written materials, graffiti, music or speeches, whenever it appears on Students' Union premises.

How to Raise a Complaint About Breaches of the Policy Report, Advice and Support

Support services on campus that will not trigger an investigation.

University Student Health and Wellbeing Service (SHWS).

Our Support | Student Wellbeing | Newcastle University

Students' Union Support and Advice Hub

The Support and Advice Hub can offer an informal and safe space for you to speak to one of the members of the team who can offer a 'listening ear' and help you to talk things through.

The Support and Advice Hub can also help support students by providing a confidential and independent place for you to book in to speak to a Student Adviser. The advisers can help with any practical support when your experiences can impact on aspects of your life such as housing and academic.
Students can book in here to speak to an Adviser.

We are located on the ground floor of the Students' Union so please pop in or if you prefer email mailto:supportandadvice.union@ncl.ac.uk

Students' Union Activities (Clubs and Societies)

We understand how important Societies and Clubs can be to your university experience but are also very passionate about eliminating any type of discrimination and hate. Our team can offer informal advice and support on the options available to yourself and support you with the process throughout.

We're located on the first floor of the Students' Union, so please feel free to pop in or if you prefer email activitesteam.union@ncl.ac.uk.

Welfare Officers in Clubs and Societies are passionate about the activities they are involved in and have had formal training on how to offer initial support to students. They can also signpost and support you through options available elsewhere.

Formal reporting routes that WILL trigger an investigation

Students' Union Complaints

Complaints and reports to the Students' Union should be submitted using the form here. This form is used to report incidents from any NUSU staff member, individual student or group including Clubs and Societies.

The Students' Union will not investigate reports of misconduct against another student i.e., a student-on-student issue not related to a Students' Union activity, this is the remit of the University Student Progress Service. However, we will investigate and conduct a disciplinary investigation if the allegation relates to a student in a position of standing within the Students' Union, for example a Society President or an elected officer. The Support and Advice Hub staff can talk this through with you if that is helpful.

Newcastle University Complaints Procedure

If you are thinking about making a complaint about another student at the University or a member of university staff, you can contact the Casework Team by emailing casework@ncl.ac.uk. The University Wellbeing Service or the Support and Advice Hub can help talk you through this process.

Relevant Policies

NUSU Disciplinary Policy Strategy and Guidance Annexe E and Appendix 1-8
NUSU Inclusivity Policy
NUSU Staff Disciplinary Process
NUSU Staff Grievance policy
NUSU Hate Crime Policy

Rev.	Date	OWNER	APPROVAL	DESCRIPTION OF CHANGE
KH	17.6.25	KH	GW	Format changes. Added contents list. Changed definition to reflect NU. Added reporting info.

				Updated links.