

Project: Improving Experiences of Disabled and Neurodivergent students in the Faculty of Engineering Sciences

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SUMMARY

Disability is a social construct of political, historical, social, emotional, and economic contexts regarding ability. The recommendations from our project report (including those highlighted below), are from the perspective of the social model of disability; the concept that (physical and cultural) barriers in society, disable people not their differences, and removing these barriers creates equity and offers disabled people agency.

The number of students in higher education with a known disability is rapidly rising, increasing 47% overall between 2014/15 and 2019/20, with mental health increasing by more than 180% since 2014/15.

The Office for Students (OfS) data shows disabled and neurodivergent (D/ND) students are underrepresented in higher education, they have worse outcomes; are more likely to drop-out and have lower degree results.

At UCL (and FES) information on D/ND experience and outcomes have so far been anecdotal, this project was undertaken to collect robust data to inform meaningful solutions.

Data and results

We collected and analysed quantitative and qualitative data; quantitative data from a robust dataset and qualitative data from a series of 1-2-1 interviews with D/ND students and key staff from across the faculty. Obtaining a reliable quantitative data set was a particularly challenging aspect of this project; we now have a robust and complete dataset of all FES students, enabling comparisons between D/ND vs abled students as well as between different types of D/ND with other protected characteristics.

From the quantitative data we identified flaws in data analysis related to UCL reporting of outcomes for D/ND students, gleaned information on the predominant disabilities, the proportion of D/ND students without a Summary of Reasonable Adjustment (SoRA), and potential cultural influences on sharing information about D/ND and using related support services. The most important finding is the existence of a significant awarding gap for D/ND students in FES, which is made worse when intersectional data is considered. For instance, there is a 34% disparity in first class awards between Black disabled students and their White abled peers. Whilst many of these findings are predictable, this information is no longer anecdotal. Far more information can be gleaned from this dataset, but we already exceeded the original scope of the project and we ran out of time.

Our qualitative data provided richness and context the quantitative data, highlighting challenges to D/ND students around belonging, accessing support, attitudes to D/ND and support structures that are fit for purpose. Approaches to supporting PGR D/ND students need urgent review. Staff data indicated challenges related to lack of guidance and support at UCL/faculty/dep level, inconsistencies in processes and approaches to supporting D/ND students and poor awareness of D/ND, all of which impact on workload and stress to staff. We found UCL processes and systems could also be problematic for both D/ND students and staff. During the project, the team submitted two papers to UCL working groups; suggesting adaptations to Portico to flag new/revised SoRAs, and an early intervention via the new online EC system by automating notification and flagging of multiple EC submissions to give an early warning of well-being issues. Whilst UCL processes/systems are not in our direct control and may take time to revise, there are various interventions that are within the control of Faculty/depts that can be addressed and are quick wins. Unanimous feedback from D/ND students and staff was the need for a faculty structure to lead and manage change around disability equity.

Recommendations- first steps

The priority is to move forward with measures that start reducing the awarding gap for D/ND students. Our recommendations cover eleven distinct areas, which will act in tandem to reduce the awarding gap, and support staff to improve D/ND students' experience.

Our project highlights numerous challenges to be addressed, no single recommendation or small selection of them achieve inclusion and equity. The priority recommendations outlined below will form the first phase of addressing disparities, 6-month reviews to plan and resource on-going work as described in our report action plan should drive this work forward longer term.

Recommendation 1: FES to urgently appoint a Faculty Inclusion Lead to take forward the actions in this report as there is no capacity to weave these in to existing faculty roles. The Inclusion lead will provide strategic support; develop and lead a FES disability equity network to provide guidance (including training) to staff and students (e.g. managing/implementing SoRAs and adjustments more widely), facilitate discussions with central services (EDI, SSW, etc) and lead/facilitate delivery of the full project recommendations. It is key the post holder has an overview of the UCL D/ND landscape, can act as a bridge between FES, other faculties, and central services, to share good practice and showcase FES' ground-breaking EDI work internally and externally. Note: No other faculty has made a similar commitment to disability equity, this is an opportunity for FES to lead the way. A framework for supporting disability equity could, in time to extended to one that supports inclusion more broadly.

Recommendation 2: D/ND inclusion training for leadership team linked to targets and action planning, as well as more widely to all staff/students (including PGTAs). All staff who interact with students and research groups with PGR students would benefit from this as mandatory training. We identified poor awareness of rights to access and resources within D/ND students so they would find training useful too.

UCL has no training that covers this need so we have started developing a blended learning package, a self-directed online element followed by live workshops to develop action plans, discuss case studies, etc, which could evolve into a faculty community of practice for inclusion. Note: Offering live workshops is resource dependent.

Recommendation 3: Improve uptake of SoRAs and local processes for managing them. Improving SoRA uptake could be very challenging because D/ND is so heavily stigmatised and complex. However, a visible Faculty Lead and support network could begin to create trust and safety to come forward to share information on disability. Improved communications and visible role models could also be game changers.

New local processes for managing SoRAs could be quick wins, for instance:

- Setup a local SORA review/feedback cycle where students are engaged about their adjustments. Termly reviews of adjustments are strongly recommended, to ensure adjustments continue to be useful. These reviews could be conducted by department SoRA leads or Student Advisors with guidance from Faculty Equity Lead.
- Create local processes to routinely inform students their adjustments are in place, will alleviate stress and anxiety. For instance, explicitly stating the deadline is X, unless you have an adjustment (SoRA) in place. Note: New/revised local processes to be established in partnership with Depts with input from D/ND students.

NOTE: Disability/Neurodivergence is not homogenous; needs and experiences differ across D/ND communities. Meaningful solutions will only be achieved by engaging with this diversity within D/ND and including intersecting marginalised identities. Improving access is key for D/ND students but to bring cultural change, it is important to celebrate what D/ND people (and all their subgroups) bring to the education community, the Faculty Lead must have insight and commitment to intersectional approaches.

BACKGROUND

There are many misconceptions about disability, so it is apt to start with a definition. The Equality Act 2010 defines disability as “*a physical or mental impairment that has a ‘substantial’ and ‘long-term’ negative effect on your ability to do normal daily activities*”. “*Substantial*” meaning longer than it would take to complete a routine task, like getting dressed, and “*long-term*”, 12 months or more. Disability includes asthma, HIV, cancer, menopause symptoms, and long Covid may be covered soon.

Disability is a social construct of political, historical, social, emotional, and economic contexts regarding ability. The social model of disability takes the view that (physical and cultural) barriers in society, disable people not their differences, and removing these barriers creates equity and offers disabled people more agency.

This project takes the social model approach to disability and neurodivergence.

Why was the project undertaken?

The number of students in higher education with a known disability is increasing. In 2019/20, 17.3% of all home students, an increase of 47% since 2014/15.

Mental health issues increased by more than 180% since 2014/15.

Disabled and neurodivergent students are underrepresented in higher education, they have worse outcomes; more likely to drop-out and have lower degree results

- figures from House of Commons research briefing Feb 2021

At UCL, the Disabled Students' Network (DSN) published a report in January 2020, which despite the small sample size, reflected the national data on outcomes. This was the first and to-date only such report on disabled/neurodivergent (D/ND) students' experience at UCL.

In accepting D/ND student we have committed to supporting diverse needs AND enabling success on an equitable basis. If we do not honour this commitment, we are setting these students up to fail, which brings reputational risk but also perpetuates huge injustice.

This project was undertaken to collect robust data on D/ND students' experience in FES, and provide strategies to improve outcomes.

Project scope: Recommendations to improve disabled/neurodivergent students' experience in FES

Project goals: Co-design a robust approach to supporting D/ND students, with a road map with short and long-term solutions, implementing quick fixes during the course of this project.

DATA COLLECTION

Evidence was collected from the three following areas:

1. Student data

a. Qualitative data

Students were asked about the following:

- Their experience as D/ND people at UCL
- Equity in terms of disability awareness and reasonable adjustments
- Belonging – was the environment inclusive, how they fitted in.
- Ableism/Discrimination – had they experienced discriminatory behaviour related to their D/ND and if so, how was it managed.
- Recommendations to improve outcomes for other D/ND students.

A significant proportion of sample were ND and/or had mental health challenges, there was a diverse mix of gender, race and different levels and programmes of study.

It is important to note, that it would be a lazy assumption that only disgruntled students participated, even those with very poor experiences were helpful and understanding of the challenges staff faced during the pandemic. Students generously shared (negative and positive) experiences to improve outcomes for other students.

b. Quantitative data

UCL's quantitative data on FES D/ND students at all levels of study to investigate the following:

- Whether there is an awarding gap
- The proportion of students who have not shared information about their disabilities.
- The distribution of SoRAs amongst particular groups (e.g. ethnicity/type of disability)
- Outcomes for D/ND students with intersecting characteristics.
- Patterns of experiences/outcomes across the faculty related to type(s) of disability /level of study

2. Staff: Skills and knowledge

We investigated awareness of D/ND for insights into supporting staff to enable them facilitate inclusive and safe environments for students.

3. Processes for Adjustments (Summary of Reasonable Adjustment-SoRA)

We looked at the processes around SoRAs in different parts of the faculty to understand the challenges to staff and students, including issues at different levels of study. Our recommendations will include local solutions and highlight issues for escalation by the Faculty.

FINDINGS

1. Qualitative Student data

Student Experience

a. Belonging

The importance of belonging is well-documented – a human need like food and water, it fosters self-worth and enables people to cope better with adversity. A sense of belonging to a community improves motivation, well-being and even longevity.

Comments from students:

"A male-dominated culture, reluctance to share openly what they don't understand - the environment can be quite rigid, feel unsafe and unwelcoming."

"The challenges of study and other things would not have been so bad and my mental health would not have spiralled if I had others like me to support, and this lack of community made my existence feel invisible."

"Diversity is great but there is no interaction (between groups) and there wasn't anyone like me, it was isolating. I spent a lot of time trying to study alone (unsuccessfully) and got very depressed when I couldn't."

Difficulties with group/collaborative working because of lack of awareness by peers, leads to concerns about sharing information about D/ND, and feelings of isolation. The absence/visibility of other D/ND staff/students results in lack of role models and peers with shared lived experience, resulting in a lack of sense of belonging.

b. Navigating UCL – PGR students in particular, struggle to navigate UCL – e.g., access to student societies, knowing about support services. There does not appear to be a consistent process within departments, induction appears very dependent on individual supervisors' approaches – for instance some have no induction or support from supervisor on completing research log or being left to own devices to find out/learn from peers, others have supervisors who actively engage about an individual's preferred adjustments*.

Whilst it could be argued that PhD students are expected to be more independent, this approach hugely disadvantages D/ND students, and could be categorised as discrimination on the grounds of D/ND

**The social model of disability advocates adjustments on the basis of what works for the individual instead of one-size approaches by type of D/ND. For example, two deaf students may have identical diagnoses of hearing loss however, use two different modes of communication – speech and captions vs. sign language and interpreters. To provide a common adjustment for both students would clearly disadvantage one.*

c. Accessing support

"I don't know what expectations I should have - what support should the department have been offering me?"

"There is an overall culture of do it by yourself, don't ask for help....This approach has negatively impacted me; not feeling comfortable to ask for support, feeling like a burden if I ask for help, made to feel I'm dumb and this course isn't for me."

"I've felt really quite isolated throughout the vast majority of my time and really like knocked my confidence at times because I felt nobody else could be struggling like me."

"I haven't actually had any interaction with lecturers that made me believe they were informed about my SoRA"

"It's been very confusing how and when I can use my SORA."

"Some lecturers don't seem aware I have a SORA and I've been issued late penalties. Very stressful to resolve these issues."

"Not sure if my lecturers were aware of my neurodivergence and that made me anxious"

"I went to the SSW to discuss some solutions. I came away thinking that wasn't as helpful because a lot of the solutions were geared to undergraduates - exams, essay writing, things like that. I can do all that fine, it's the daily interactions I struggle with the most. So my supervisor and I have figured out what works and what doesn't work."

"The SORA doesn't really fit in very nicely with group project work."

"I was made to sit by the podium in the lecture hall facing the entire group taking the exam and my cohort is huge - it was nerve wracking, I'd rather have not had the extra time."

"I got a call from SSW very much giving me control I was asked "So how do you want us to help you with your disability? That was the beginning of my PhD and the realization that I was in control of the situation, which is actually very beneficial to someone with disability; suddenly your education is handed to you -something I hadn't experienced before. That was scary, but kind of nice."

Nearly all students interviewed were unclear of support available either within their department or SSW, they did not know who to go to for support related to D/ND, and most personal tutors/supervisors were not able to assist, some expressed this was not within their remit.

d. Attitudes

- **Staff Comments:**

"We will raise you to the standard of those who are not neurodivergent instead of lowering the bar for you"

"They (supervisor) kept talking about it (ADHD) like it was sort of depression, a seasonal thing, that sort of just comes and goes".

"Go away and think about this on your own for at least 5 hours and then come back and ask."

"You know modern technology makes people have the kind of symptoms of ADHD."

'I am not telling my colleagues how to teach...'

- **Awareness**

"They assume dyslexia just means I can't read and write well, makes me feel I'm not good enough to be here"

"...how do I explain there is a legitimacy to the waffling (in writing and speech) that I'm struggling with."

"I've had really upsetting comments on my coursework - related to my X. I'm not stupid"

"I don't really mention the X or the Y because people have misconceptions – also because I don't want them to think that I'm just like using it as an excuse - that's kind of the vibe that I get from people sometimes."

"I function well enough to kind of camouflage myself and fit in. So the first kind of thing I get is you're not X enough - that kind of dismissal you are faced with."

"My project supervisor refused to meet with me during my SORA dissertation extension on the basis it wasn't fair on other students - that defeats the point of the extension."

"I've spent my whole life apologising for not being able to do stuff... It is important to celebrate neurodivergent and disabled students for what they're good at; really celebrating the skills we do have because we are not neurotypical."

- **Inclusion**

"... success is valued over individuals. It's competitive and less open to show vulnerability, everyone's showing off how well they're doing, so if you were a bit insecure, you sit there feeling like "Oh my God, I'm doing the worst out of everyone". "

"I don't tell fellow students I have X because they might feel it's unfair that I was getting an extension. Their opinion of me might be tainted by saying that I am these things."

"I feel I come across as unprofessional or not caring about someone's time because I misunderstand things.... I hate it, cos obviously I come out thinking I am stupid, others will think I'm stupid, think I'm incompetent, it brings my self-esteem down a lot"

"Group projects are tough. Working within a team of people is you don't want to be the one that's slowing the rest of the team moving ahead"

"I'm not from a privileged background. I worked really hard to get to UCL – my mental health declined from year 1. I wish I went to X University".

"Whilst there is a lot of diversity, it's very segregated- some groups don't integrate at all, it is a bit of a shame to be honest."

"...you're essentially being told that everyone else is coping so if you can't, it must mean that you're not good enough, that there is something lacking in you."

"I tend not to hide my disability, it's part of my identity, I don't see it as a taboo. If you are working with a team, it's helpful for others to know."

"I wasn't in a space where I had a voice because of how I looked because of who I was. There should be cultural sensitivity and awareness when providing support; understanding of the differences that lie between different demographics of people, this isn't present at UCL."

There was general reticence to share information about D/ND because of concerns about perceptions of by staff and peers. Some expressed concerns about fitting in to the department culture; difficulties with interactions with both staff and peers.

In addition...

- The lack of identifiable contacts within departments and at faculty level to provide informed guidance and support was unanimous.
- Inaccessible teaching and course materials – e.g. breakout room sessions without clear instructions to students, live group sessions left for significant periods without supervision/facilitation. Handwritten scanned handouts provided as one large document.
- Assumptions that all students understand instructions in the same way – poor awareness of requirement to offer alternative formats or needs of ND students. Note: *this feedback was from students with SoRAs.*
- Large cohort teaching creates barriers with access to teaching staff, with departments unable to resource adequate support for D/ND students.

- Lack of clear feedback on coursework –instances of inappropriate language, tone and providing only a coursework mark without any feedback.
- General communication – newsletters, PDF attachments are inaccessible; often requiring multiple clicks or logging in to SharePoint to access.
- Inaccessible processes – there are many processes that require students to complete complex forms, requiring multiple windows to be open at the same time to do so. Research logbooks can be a particular challenge.
- Covid-19 was unforeseen and everyone at UCL was on a learning curve. The changing situation with the pandemic and impact on staff was acknowledged, all the efforts that went in to support students were very much appreciated. Some changes to course structure (like coursework replacing exams) have benefitted many D/ND students. However, other changes, for instance squeezing 10 weeks of teaching in to 2 weeks, changing coursework deadlines multiple times, deadlines coinciding with bank holidays and multiple coinciding deadlines, had serious impact on D/ND students. **Note: in normal circumstances, equality impact assessments should be undertaken before significant changes are made.**

There are many issues to resolve but there were examples of good practice and thoughtful behaviours.

“One of my lecturers made sure that I knew that my SoRA arrangements were in place. e.g. if we had an online test, they would email me separately saying just to let you know all your arrangements are in place for this exam and which was great. Another lecturer set up separate Turnitin links for SoRAs and non-SoRA which stopped people from freaking out.”*

* does not automatically reflect SORA extensions so gives a late notification, which can be quite alarming/confusing for those with agreed extensions

Gaps in knowledge

The following gaps in knowledge amongst students were identified:

- Awareness of the Equality Act (2010) and the right to reasonable adjustments.
- SoRAs
 - adjustments can and should be revised with changing needs.
 - recipients of SoRAs are free to share their information with anyone they see fit (staff and peers).
- Support within their department (including remit of supervisor/personal tutor, key contacts like SoRA lead, Local EDI group, dignity advisor, etc.) and SSW services.
- Awareness of UCL D/ND staff and student networks

2. Quantitative Student data

Acquiring robust quantitative data was the most challenging aspect of this project. We knew UCL must have a robust dataset linked to student records which would be THE most reliable data but finding it was laborious. We were almost resigned to using various incomplete datasets from different sources captured at different times when we had a breakthrough.

We now have the most complete and robust dataset on all FES students; data that includes programme, level of study, type of disability, interruptions, SoRA status, race, gender ethnicity, nationality, and award. – this is possibly the most complete dataset on disability and neurodivergence across UCL.

Whilst the data set is robust, some of the data captured is unhelpful – For example, categories like “disability not listed”, “2 or more disabilities”, “Unseen disability”. These are standardised to fit in with reporting needs but do not provide information that enables us to draw meaningful conclusions.

In addition, selection can be subjective... e.g., deafness and mental health could be perceived as ‘unseen’; a sleep disorder as ‘an unlisted disability’ instead of ‘unseen’. Our qualitative data supports this theory- wider awareness of disability even amongst D/ND students is generally poor.

Demographics of disabilities and neurodivergence

Note: ‘Known’ disability indicates shared information has been shared at some stage, but NOT that reasonable adjustments are in place.

All Disability by Year

Disability	Academic Year		
	2018	2019	2020
No Disability	92%	91%	91%
	3,049	2,662	3,045
Information refused	2%	2%	2%
	59	45	64
Disability Not Listed	1%	1%	1%
	17	29	18
Unseen Disability	1%	1%	1%
	29	22	36
Learning Difficulty	2%	2%	2%
	61	73	83
Mental Health Disability	2%	2%	2%
	59	67	74
2 or more impairments/med ..	0%	0%	1%
	16	13	17
Autistic Spectrum Disorder	0%	0%	0%
	10	4	9
Mobility Difficulties	0%	0%	0%
	7	4	8
Hearing impairment	0%	0%	0%
	2	3	4
Visual Impairment	0%	0%	0%
	1	1	4
Grand Total	100%	100%	100%
	3,310	2,923	3,362

Figure 1a: Table shows percentages of different types of disability between 2018-2020

All Disability by Year

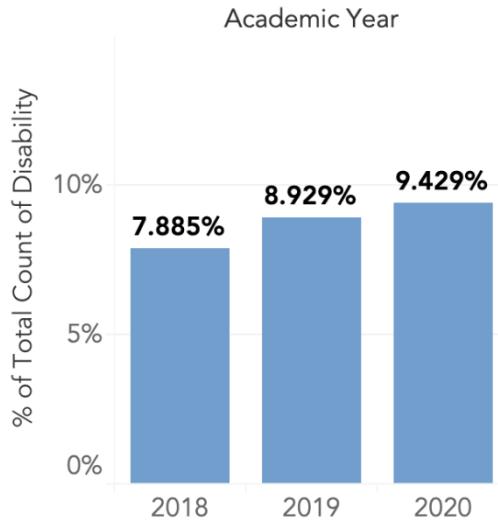


Figure 1b: Bar chart showing percentages of grouped disability between 2018-2020

2% refused to share info every year. If we hypothesise that this category is chosen by individuals with a D/ND who do not wish to share information, then the annual % with D/ND increases by 2%; 2018 increases to 8%, 2017 to 9% and 2020 to 10%.

National data indicates 20% of working age (18-65) are D/ND. In FES, on average only 9% are D/ND, low in comparison to the National data.

All Disability by Year

Disability	Academ.. 2020
Learning Difficulty	33%
Mental Health Disability	29%
Unseen Disability	14%
Disability Not Listed	7%
2 or more impairments/med conditions	7%
Autistic Spectrum Disorder	4%
Mobility Difficulties	3%
Visual Impairment	2%
Hearing impairment	2%

Figure 2. Different types of disability as percentages of 'known' disability.

Figure 2 shows the most predominant disabilities are Learning and Mental health.

'Unseen', 'Disability not listed' and 'two or more impairments' make up 28%, this is not meaningful data to inform solutions.

Disability by Ethnicity Row % grouped

		Disability grouped		
Grouped Ethnicity	Ethnicity	No Disability	Information refused	Disabled
Arab	Arab	87%	1%	12%
Asian	Asian or Asian British - Bangladeshi	89%	1%	11%
	Asian or Asian British - Indian	92%	1%	7%
	Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	84%	1%	15%
	Other Asian background	93%	1%	5%
	Mixed - White and Asian	83%	3%	14%
Black	Black or Black British - African	86%	2%	11%
	Black or Black British - Caribbean	63%	8%	29%
	Other Black background	86%	5%	9%
	Mixed - White and Black African	72%	3%	25%
	Mixed - White and Black Caribbean	79%	7%	14%
Chinese	Chinese	97%	1%	2%
Other & Other	Other ethnic background	84%		16%
Mixed	Other mixed background	88%	3%	9%
Prefer not to say	Prefer not to say	74%	17%	10%
White	White	88%	2%	10%
Grand Total		91%	2%	7%

Figure 3. Percentage grouped disability by ethnicity

Note: Chinese and White (by ethnicity) students form the bulk of FES' student body. In 2020, 39% 'Chinese' and 30% 'White' students. 17.5% Asian students and 4% Black students.

Despite being the largest group in FES, only 2% of all Chinese students have a 'known' disability. 10% of all White students have a 'known' disability.

Black and Asian students have lower representation in FES but show higher percentages of known disabilities.

Groups with highest 'known disability' are:

- Black/Black British – Caribbean = 29%
- Mixed White- Black African = 25%
- Asian/Asian British Pakistani =15%
- Mixed White- Asian =14%
- Asian/Asian British Bangladeshi =11%

Summary: Chinese students show a particularly low % of individuals with known disabilities.
Note: 18% disabled/neurodivergent students at De Montford University in 2020/21.

Disability by Ethnicity Row % Grouped 2

Grouped Ethnicity	Disability										2 or more impairments/me..
	Information refused	Disability Not Listed	Unseen Disability	Mental Health Disability	Learning Difficulty	Autistic Spectrum Disorder	Mobility Difficulties	Hearing impairment	Visual Impairment		
Arab	8%	11%	13%	39%	16%		3%	3%			8%
Asian	15%	8%	14%	35%	17%	3%	1%	2%			5%
Black	18%	7%	9%	22%	33%	1%	3%	1%			5%
Chinese	33%	12%	13%	23%	8%	2%	2%	1%	3%		1%
Other & Other Mixed	10%	8%	10%	32%	28%	4%		2%			6%
Prefer not to say	63%	3%	5%	5%	13%	5%		3%			3%
White	18%	7%	9%	18%	35%	3%	3%	0%	1%		7%
Grand Total	20%	8%	10%	24%	26%	3%	2%	1%	1%		5%

Figure 4. Ethnicity grouped by type of disability

From figure 4:

- Chinese students show high proportions ‘information refused’ (33%), DNL (12%) and ‘unseen’ (13%).
- White and Black students have similar figures for ‘information refused’ (18%), DNL (7%) and ‘unseen’ (9%).
- ‘Black other’ have low representation in FES but show 33% with ‘two or more disabilities’ (data from ungrouped ethnicity).
- *Note: ‘prefer not to say’ – did not share information about disability and/or ethnicity.*

If we use the hypothesis that those who select ‘Information refused’ tend to have a disability, the proportion of Chinese students (the largest ethnic group in FES), selecting this category is significant.

Mental health and learning disabilities are predominant in most groups.

Is the local support in place adequate to support such high proportions of D/ND students AND is the support nuanced enough to support diverse subgroup needs within D/ND?

Our qualitative data indicates more resource in this area is a priority.

SoRA Uptake

SoRA Status All

SoRA status	Course Group (group) / Academic Year												Gran..
	UGT			PGT			PGR			2018	2019	2020	
	2018	2019	2020	2018	2019	2020	2018	2019	2020				
None	77%	56%	50%	98%	71%	51%	94%	95%	88%	69%			
	94	53	61	120	108	85	17	19	30				587
Agreed	20%	43%	49%	2%	26%	46%	6%	5%	12%	29%			
	25	40	59	2	40	76	1	1	4				248
Student queried draft SoRA			1%										0%
			1										1
Draft SoRA - Requiring Student Approval		1%			1%	3%							1%
		1			2	5							8
Student agreed with draft SoRA	2%				1%	1%							1%
	2				2	1							5
Awaiting department approval (Exams/Acad..	1%												0%
	1												1

Figure 5a. Students with ‘known’ disability that have SoRAs

SoRA Status All

Course Group (gro..	2018	2019	2020
	SoRA	SoRA	SoRA
UGT	23%	44%	50%
PGT	2%	29%	49%
PGR	6%	5%	12%

Figure 5b. Students with ‘known’ disability with SoRAs by level of study

Those **without** SoRAs are not sharing information about their D/ND so unlikely to have adjustments in place. For example, in 2020, there were 3 deaf/hard of hearing students, none with SoRAs.

Whilst no organisation can or should force people to share personal information, there can be complacency when D/ND information is not shared – if an individual chooses not to share this information how can we offer adjustments?

Creating safe, inclusive spaces is a shared responsibility. FES must look more closely at how to bring about a culture change to one that makes D/ND students feel safe and supported to share information related to D/ND.

Figure 5b shows SoRA uptake year-on-year shows an increasing trend but although there is increase in uptake, there must be significant improvement, particularly for PGR students... aim for 99% for all levels of study.

Awarding Gap

UG Classification by Disability %

Disability	Classification code				
	1	2A	2B	3	Fail
No Disability	60% 1,305	34% 736	5% 106	0% 5	
Information refused	67% 32	23% 11	10% 5		
Disability Not Listed	43% 6	43% 6	7% 1		7% 1
Unseen Disability	59% 16	33% 9	4% 1	4% 1	
Mental Health Disability	55% 37	31% 21	10% 7	3% 2	
Autistic Spectrum Disorder	57% 4	43% 3			
Learning Difficulty	44% 21	50% 24	6% 3		
Mobility Difficulties	67% 6	33% 3			
Visual Impairment			100%		1
Hearing impairment	33% 1	33% 1	33% 1		
2 or more impairments	62% 8	15% 2	23% 3		
Grand Total	60% 1,436	34% 817	5% 127	0% 8	0% 1

Figure 6. Award by type of disability

Outcomes of **abled vs disability grouped**, show no significant differences in outcomes.

However, when outcomes by type of disability are considered (Figure 6), there are clear awarding gaps.

Notably, 1st class awards

Abled students (60%)

ASD (57%) **gap 3%**

Mental health (55%) **gap 5%**

Learning disabilities (44%) **gap=16%**

Hearing loss (33%) **gap= 27%**

Note: It is crucial that disability is not grouped when awarding gap data is analysed.

Impact of SoRA status on UG Awarding Gap

UG Classification by SoRA status

SoRA status	Classification code						Gra..
	1	2A	2B	3	Fail		
None	50%	40%	6%	3%	1%	100%	
	53	42	6	3	1		105
Agreed	54%	35%	11%			100%	
	44	28	9				81
Draft SoRA - Requiring Student Approval		100%				100%	
			1				1
Student queried draft SoRA	100%					100%	
	1						1
Awaiting department approval (Exams/Academic)	100%					100%	
	1						1
Grand Total	52%	37%	8%	2%	1%	100%	
	99	70	16	3	1		189

Figure 7. Percentages of disabled/neurodivergent students with SoRAs

Figure 7 shows D/ND Students with SoRAs have better outcomes than those without. This may be unsurprising, but it is no longer anecdotal.

Impact of D/ND and Ethnicity on UG Awarding Gap

Ethnicity distribution in FES: Chinese and White students form the bulk of FES' student body. In 2020, 39% 'Chinese' and 30% 'White' students. 17.5% Asian students and 4% Black students.

Grouped Ethnicity	Disability grouped	Classification code		
		1	2A	1 & 2A
Asian	Disabled	53%	22%	75%
	No Disability	60%	30%	90%
	Award Gap	7%	8%	15%
Black	Disabled	29%	53%	82%
	No Disability	42%	45%	87%
	Award Gap	13%	-8%	5%
Chinese	Disabled	38%	38%	76%
	No Disability	55%	38%	93%
	Award Gap	17%	0%	17%
White	Disabled	55%	37%	92%
	No Disability	63%	29%	92%
	Award Gap	8%	-8%	0%

Figure 8. UG Awards correlating D/ND and ethnicity

Figure 8 shows:

- % 1st class awards for D/ND students of all ethnicities are lower than their abled counterparts.
- Black D/ND students have the worst outcomes of any group; 29% vs Black abled students 42%.
- Chinese students: D/ND students=38% vs abled students =55%
- White students: D/ND students=55% vs abled students =63%

63% of White abled students receive 1st class awards compared to 29% of Black disabled students – an awarding gap of 34%.

Impact of D/ND, Ethnicity and Gender on UG Awarding Gap

UG Classification by Gender and Ethnicity Bars %

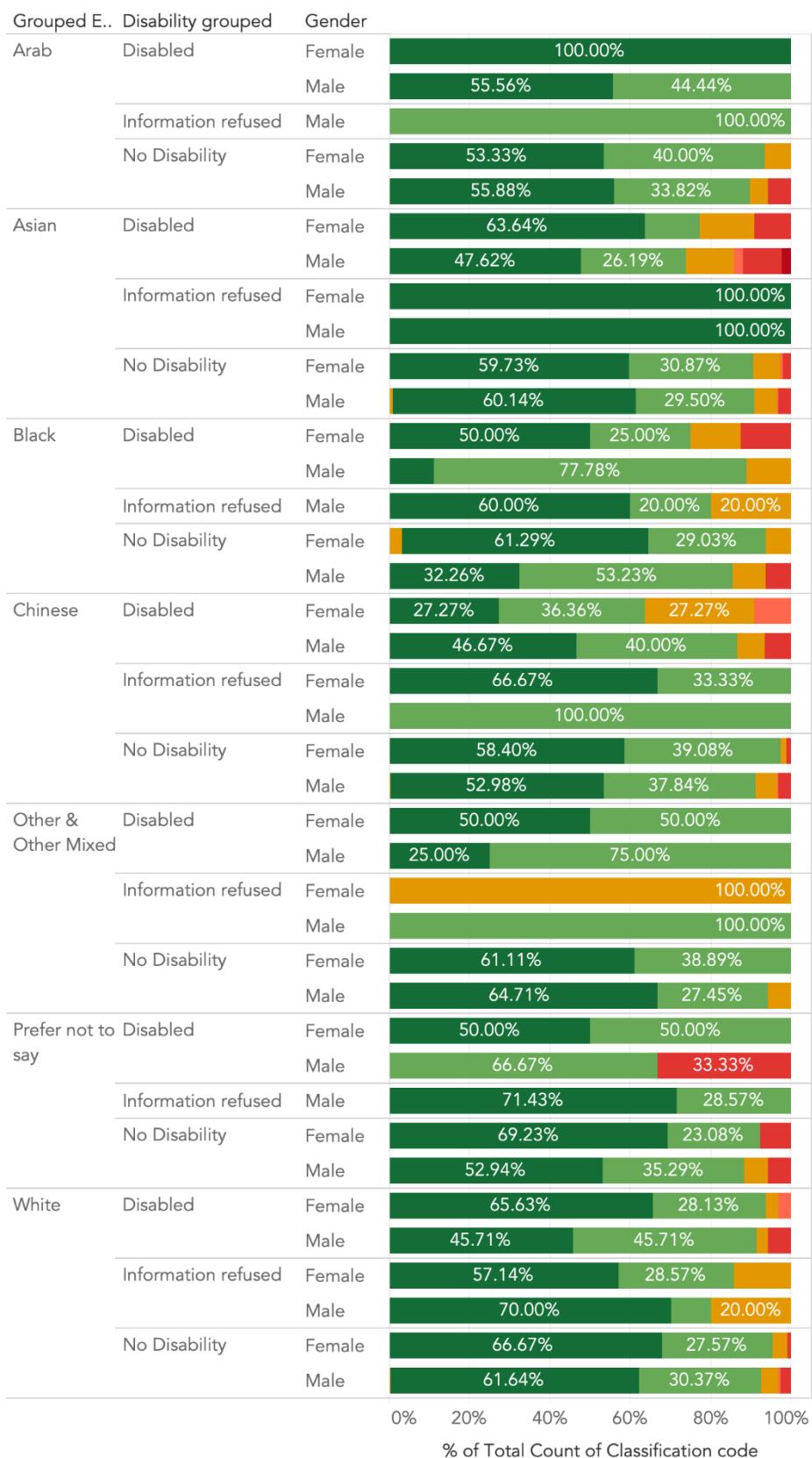


Figure 9. Impact of Gender and ethnicity on D/ND student awards

Figure 9 indicates the disparities in outcomes between abled men and women students of most ethnicities are less than for their D/ND counterparts.

Disabled women students have better outcomes compared to their male counterparts for all ethnicities apart from Chinese students (disabled women 27%, disabled men 47% 1st class degrees).

Next steps with quantitative data...

We have investigated the data using many variables beyond the original scope of the project, whilst we have now run out of time, there are many more possibilities to investigate this dataset to glean novel and relevant information related to equitable outcomes for D/ND students.

For example...

- **SoRA uptake by nationality vs ethnicity**

We briefly looked at ethnicity and nationality data because there may be nuanced differences that may provide insights around cultural barriers that require more targeted work with specific groups.

We looked at the two largest student groups in FES (White and Chinese), % with known disability that have with SoRAs by:

ethnicity:

- 32% White students
- 21% Chinese students

nationality

- 38% of UK nationals
- 19% Chinese nationals

The disparity in SoRA uptake widens between Chinese nationals and their UK counterparts (White or not)...if this is then related to outcomes for students with/without SoRAs, then Chinese disabled students appear to encounter various systemic disadvantages and further investigations ought to be undertaken.

- **Black disabled students by nationality and ethnicity** on the basis that Black students have the worst outcomes.
- **Outcomes by programme** linked to type of disability, SoRA uptake, gender, ethnicity, nationality for local solutions.

3. Staff: Skills and knowledge

FES like UCL more widely, lacks a clear consistent structure for supporting D/ND students, resulting in additional pressures on staff (academic and PS) who interact directly with students.

Staff and departments are currently not appropriately equipped to provide the educational experience for D/ND students that FES would wish to provide all its students. As evidenced by quotes from students about awareness, attitudes and inclusion, there is a lack of access to adequate resources and informed guidance for staff at department, FES and UCL level*. SoRA leads are present in every department however, this role appears undefined. Personal tutors, Supervisors and Programme Leads are key roles in supporting D/ND students but receive no training nor have access to informed guidance. This results in very unsatisfactory student experiences, and adds to the stress and workload of staff.

There are examples of individual good practice and support for D/ND students but this is solely due to a few members of staff going to great lengths to ensure a student is supported. A structure and resources that enable all staff to create an inclusive and safe environment for D/ND students is much needed.

**Whilst the Student Support and Wellbeing team have expertise regarding D/ND, they lack nuanced local knowledge of FES programmes, which is key to providing appropriate support. SSW are also hugely under-resourced so cannot provide targeted guidance for staff as well as students.*

4. Adjustments (including Summary of Reasonable Adjustments- SoRA)

Local Processes

- Managing SoRAs**

There is significant variation in local processes for managing SoRAs across FES; who accesses SoRAs locally, how SoRAs are disseminated locally, what happens with the SoRA once it reaches a member of staff, etc.

Variation in local processes are not surprising (or necessarily negative) in such a large faculty, but staff or students are not adequately informed.

We found no evidence of the following:

- checks made to ensure adjustments documented in SoRAs are in place,
- effective sign-posting/guidance when staff/D/ND students had queries
- periodic reviews of SoRAs/adjustments taking place either locally or by SSW.

There are *ad hoc* occurrences of staff and/or D/ND students engaging directly with each other about adjustments but this was largely due to individual staff or students taking the initiative to do so.

A list of SoRA leads for each department was obtained from SSW by the project team, however there was no awareness across FES that these roles existed or what the role entails.

Instances where students were undiagnosed did not work well; staff were not equipped to manage these situations, and students struggled badly, some interrupting as a result.

- Interruption**

Whilst there are robust processes and support related to interruptions, there is some evidence that students requesting interruptions on the grounds of challenges related to D/ND have been refused or been persuaded to delay without support, leading to more serious impact on health and wellbeing. We could not establish how widespread this is but felt it important to flag.

UCL processes

- **Accessing SoRAs**

SoRAs can be accessed directly on Portico by key staff however, the processes are convoluted, laborious and are dependent on staff constantly checking Portico. For example, automated notifications are not sent when a new SoRA is available or an existing one revised, potentially resulting in delays with implementing adjustments, and placing additional demands on staff time. SoRAs have to be individually downloaded from Portico i.e. accessing individual student records and downloading SoRAs one at a time – again laborious and error-prone.

An Early Intervention...

Many ND students have late diagnoses, often first reaching crises because coping strategies fail with the pressures of study* and impact of university life. Our qualitative data highlights that these students tend to submit increasing numbers of Extenuating Circumstance (EC) applications as crises deepen, finally leading to interruption before a diagnosis, and then a slow journey to return to study. Early intervention and support could prevent students reaching crises and interrupting study.

*Note: * 'pressures of study' related to accessibility and inclusion, not academic ability.*

- **Health and Safety**

Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans (PEEPs) are required for every D/ND student. There is lack of clarity about who is responsible for completing PEEP forms. A PEEP is required for each venue so added complications arise for students who have teaching across several buildings. *Note: For D/ND staff, the line manager completes the PEEP.*

Adjustments for PGR students

“...there are some specific problems with knowing what reasonable adjustments to make for PhD students... there is sort of an attitude of “there’s not much we can do”.”

SoRA's are reported as not useful for PhD study, adjustments offered are more relevant for taught programmes.

A one-size and perfunctory approach to adjustments will not enable D/ND PhD students to have equitable experiences or outcomes. There is a need for SoRAs that reflect adjustments appropriate to the level of study, subject area and even specific project.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

Closing the awarding gap for D/ND students is the priority. The recommendations below are all measures that will help FES begin to address this awarding gap AND improve student experience.

1. Resourcing

- **FES level**

FES must urgently appoint a **Faculty Disability Equity Lead** with a good grasp of D/ND to provide strategic support to FES, guidance to staff and students (e.g. managing/implementing SoRAs and adjustments more widely), and facilitate discussions with central services (EDI, SSW, etc). It is key the post holder also has an overview of the UCL D/ND landscape and can act as a bridge between the FES, other faculties and central services.

See Appendix 1 – proposed responsibilities for Faculty Disability Equity Lead.

- **Department level**

Large cohorts present challenges for D/ND students' access to support from teaching staff. FES must look carefully at the resourcing within departments and ensure there is adequate resource to support D/ND students to ensure cohort size is not disadvantageous.

- **FES D/ND Support Structure**

Our study found that FES has 'SoRA leads' in every department, however, most staff and students are unaware of this role and there appears no defined remit. It is possible this role currently simply has access to SoRAs on Portico(?)

FES must assign clearly defined responsibilities for SORA leads (see Appendix 1 – proposed responsibilities for SoRA Leads), improve their visibility, bring them together with Student Advisors, and use this combined resource to form a new FES support structure for D/ND led by the **Faculty Disability Equity Lead**. This new structure will be vital in establishing high quality support to D/ND students and guidance to staff, currently lacking and highlighted by staff and students as much needed in FES.

Note: Resources will be required to provide training for SoRA leads to undertake their new responsibilities, and departments may need to review workload of some PS staff to allow SoRA leads to undertake their new responsibilities.

2. Training

"To foster a greater sense of belonging for those with disabilities, there needs to be better awareness and understanding."

Staff

- Robust (mandatory) training on inclusion of D/ND people for all staff (including PGTAs) interacting with students should be mandatory. Research groups with PGR students, would also benefit from undertaking similar training.

Note: UCL has no training that covers this need. Opportunity for FES to develop blended training module.

- Personal tutors, Supervisors and Programme Leads should have training on supporting D/ND students as part of their induction to role, with a refresher every 2-3 years.

Note: It would be beneficial to broaden training to encompass inclusion more widely. Training would need to be developed by FES.

Students

- Equipping D/ND students with information about their rights to adjustments and confidence to self-advocate will help fulfil their potential at UCL, and enable them to prosper in the workplace too.
- Students require clear information about support available (department vs FES vs SSW), clarity about the remit of staff roles (e.g personal tutor/supervisor, module and programme leads, course administrators, etc). FES must ensure departments include this information as part of basic induction for all new students, and refreshers at the start of each academic year for existing students.

3. Teaching and learning structure

- Accessibility is a significant barrier for all D/ND students, to ensure equitable access staff will require training in creating accessible content. Teaching and learning design must be reviewed through an accessibility lens – e.g. do lectures have enough interactive elements, are handouts accessible and provided in advance. UCL Arena has resources to support staff, FES should make this a mandatory training requirement for all staff with teaching responsibilities (including PGTAs).

Note: Reviewing accessibility could take place during routine periodic reviews of course content and may only require simple changes like listing all course resources and links for support in one place, checking accessibility of materials, and offering alternative formats.

- Group activities are often situations of additional stress and anxiety for disabled/ND students; concerns about how they are perceived by staff and their peers. Fostering inclusive behaviours (like valuing all contributions) in peers and staff is key in enabling all students to participate equitably and achieve the best outcomes.
- Programme and module leads must be encouraged to actively seek opportunities to embed inclusive behaviours into areas of curricula. For instance, use opportunities where collaboration/team working skills are developed.

'Liberating the curriculum' largely focuses on race but there is scope and opportunity for FES to encompass D/ND as well as other marginalised identities. This would be a particularly meaningful way to mainstream D/ND and positively influence attitudes towards D/ND in both staff and students.

- To bring out the best in every student, can bolder steps be taken in terms of enabling different learning styles and flexible modes of assessment? A flipped learning-type approach that goes further by enabling choice of assessments for every student.

4. Learning from Covid-19 teaching contingencies

- Recorded lectures have been very beneficial, allowing students to learn in their own time and at their own pace. Departments should continue to record even in-person lectures as good practice to facilitate inclusion of D/ND students.

Note: this also benefits inclusion of other groups of students – e.g. non-native English speakers, those with caring responsibilities, etc.

Video content ought to be captioned, FES must investigate resourcing this.

- More coursework-based assessments instead of exams has been very useful for many students. Departments should consider if this practice is sustainable for all students or if it can at least be offered as an adjustment for D/ND students.

Note: The requirement to learn using new interfaces has been challenging for D/ND students, outside of a pandemic, Equality Impact Assessment is a must before any changes are made to course structures.

- Self-referrals (not requiring Doctors' notes) for Extenuating Circumstance applications have been very useful for D/ND students. It would be positive for FES to consider how this can continue in some circumstances.

5. PGR Students

- Some departments have first year PhD vivas, as a waypoint to identify problems early so appropriate support can be provided but this system is also perceived as “*a way of weeding out unsuitable PhD students*”.

An assessment so early might be harmful for D/ND students who may learn/progress in a different way and might take a bit longer to adjust to a new environment, get appropriate adjustments in place, etc. If this viva is meant to be a supportive process, removing the pass-fail element will be positive. A robust student induction and support for supervisors may mitigate these challenges. However departments that have this process must be mindful of the risk, and be proactive in supporting their D/ND PhD students.

- SoRAs for PhD students are currently largely irrelevant to their programme of study. Supervisors are best placed for insights to the environment a student will work, their key interactions, project milestones, etc. It should be part of a supervisor’s remit to engage with PGR students about adjustments during induction.

The aim is not for supervisors provide all support to a D/ND student but that they are equipped to have open conversations about adjustments and can sign-post appropriately. Guidance and access to a clear support structure should be available to supervisors to help them facilitate open conversations with all students about well-being and adjustments.

Adjustments agreed with supervisors need not be complicated, they are often arrangements like how to best communicate (email, in-person, etc.), providing information in an alternative format, strategies for completing research logs, arrangements for upgrades, etc., and are most beneficial when agreed early in to the programme of study. Creative strategies for alternative processes (like adjustments for submitting research logs or upgrade presentations) should be encouraged, and supported at Faculty level. Supervisors and students could seek guidance on adjustments from **Faculty Disability Equity Lead**, which could then be incorporated in a SoRA.

- PhD students would benefit from ‘buddy’ system in their first year at least. Year2 or 3 PhD students from the same department or FES more widely, could be partnered with new PhD students to help them settle in, and navigate UCL. D/ND students would certainly benefit from such an arrangement, as would most new PhD students.

6. Accessibility

General Accessibility

- FES must start to embed accessibility in all routine communication; emails, newsletters, webpages must be accessibility checked and offer alternative formats. e.g. avoid multiple clicks or logging into Sharepoint to access content, check fonts and layouts are screen-reader friendly, avoid PDF attachments, add alt text on images, etc.
- FES Covid-safe work arrangements available to all staff and students in one place e.g. a single FES webpage, with links to individual department arrangements with named contacts for queries.

Specific Adjustments/SoRAs

- FES must flag our evidence of interruptions to departments so requests related to D/ND are monitored carefully, and dealt with promptly and sensitively, with the **Faculty Disability Equity Lead** offering advice. *Information: An interruption request related to D/ND is equivalent to a reasonable adjustment, which has legislative protection under*

the Equality Act (2010). Refusal of interruption requests related to D/ND could be viewed as discrimination related to disability.

- SORA review/feedback cycle where students are engaged about their adjustments. Termly reviews of adjustments are strongly recommended, to ensure adjustments continue to be useful. These reviews should be conducted by department SoRA leads (see section ‘FES D/ND Support Structure’) with guidance from **Faculty Disability Equity Lead** as needed.
- Routinely inform students their adjustments are in place, this will alleviate stress and anxiety. For instance, explicitly stating the deadline is X, unless you have an adjustment (SoRA) in place.

7. Embedding Inclusion

- Departments must embed activities that enable all students to grasp the importance of inclusion and how to work with others who have different needs/perspectives, these life skills benefit all students. For example, simple ice-breaker activities during department inductions would be a good starting point for inclusive behaviours.
Note: Competition can be healthy but some competitive environments undermine confidence, foster a sense of imposter syndrome, and have more impact on D/ND students.
- Role models are as important for D/ND students as they are for other marginalised groups. There is anecdotal evidence that FES has significant numbers of ND staff. FES needs to become a safer environment for these staff to openly share information about their D/ND and so be visible role models. In order to progress this, a study on D/ND staff experience is needed.
- Provide all students with information on UCL networks like Enable@UCL, the Disabled Students’ Network, Racematters@UCL, Out@UCL, etc. This will enable students to locate networks of support, role models and engage with others with similar lived experience.

8. Specific Groups

- **Destigmatise dyslexia** Dyslexia is the commonest disability in the world, yet there are many stigmas related to it in HE, resulting in many students (and staff) remaining undiagnosed and struggling to cope. It would be positive for FES to take steps to normalise D/ND by publicising availability of assessments for dyslexia so improving awareness and facilitating early diagnosis. *Note: A discussion with SSW will be required to move this forward.*
- **Targeted work with particular groups.** Negative perceptions and attitudes towards D/ND can be influenced by cultural and belief systems. FES should do more targeted work with the groups of students highlighted (Chinese nationals and deaf/hard of hearing students) as well as equip staff with skills to support these students appropriately.

9. UCL Processes

We acknowledge that changes to UCL processes are not in the control of FES. However FES can and should take an active role in lobbying for change.

- Early intervention and support could prevent (diagnosed and undiagnosed) D/ND students reaching crises and interrupting study. FES was first (and for several years only) faculty to develop an innovative and comprehensive online EC records system, ‘FESSEC’, that is GDPR compliant and flexed to accommodate self-certification.

A UCL system that brings ECs fully online and is integrated with the student record system is being developed. A possible early intervention via the new online EC system is automated notification and flagging of multiple EC submissions to give an early indication of well-being issues that if addressed early could prevent interruption/withdrawal. See [Appendix 2 – proposal submitted to EC Online Working Group and Portico/SRS improvement team](#).

- Accessing SORAs via Portico is problematic for staff; it is reliant on PS staff checking periodically, the process is laborious, and prone to errors and oversights. See [Appendix 2 – proposal submitted to EC Online Working Group and Portico/SRS improvement team](#).
- Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans (PEEPs) should be supported by department SORA Lead working in partnership with FES Safety Officers. A repository of PEEPss should be created for teaching spaces across all FES buildings and central spaces, which are held in a shared folder and accessible to SORA Leads. Note: A repository of PEEPss will benefit ND/disabled staff too.

10. Intersectionality

"I never encountered a lecturer like me- female, Black, I wonder how would that have impacted my experience."

Multi-layered barriers are experienced by D/ND students with intersecting marginalised identities, in this instance, gender and race. Male-dominated and/or not racially diverse environments, have been highlighted. This results in (largely inadvertent) behaviours and attitudes that are not inclusive. When a student is also D/ND, the impact on belonging and isolation are amplified, and affects educational outcomes and experience.

Addressing intersectional disadvantage was not within the scope of this project, however we have looked at the impact of outcomes for those with intersecting identities. There is clear evidence that ethnicity and/or gender combined with disability/neurodivergence results in worse outcomes and experiences. The reality is no solutions for inclusion and equity are effective when a unitary identity approach is taken.

The recommendations made as part of this study must be actioned with a holistic approach instead of focussing only D/ND. For instance, is a group activity accessible in relation to D/ND as well as inclusive from cultural/belief perspectives. Are teaching and learning practices, support systems, etc. geared towards norms of a dominant group and/or delivered through the lens of a dominant group?

This is an opportunity for FES to take a lead on a holistic approach to solutions for students with multi-layered barriers.

11. Broader support

- The annual intake will continue to attract increasing numbers of D/ND students, whether or not FES undertakes active widening participation/outreach activities. The application process has not been considered as part of this study but it is vital the FES reviews these processes to ensure they are welcoming and accessible to D/ND students.
- D/ND students often encounter additional financial hardships because they may be unable to undertake part-time employment like their abled peers, and/or have to fund specialist equipment/services that the Disabled Student Allowance does not cover. FES should look to ring-fence annual funds to support D/ND students in need.
- D/ND graduates are under-presented and encounter many barriers with progression in the workplace. It would be progressive for FES to consider bespoke career guidance, opportunities like work placements and actively advocating for D/ND students/graduates where there are partnerships with employers.

Conclusion

Disability/Neurodivergence is not homogenous; needs and experiences differ across D/ND communities. Meaningful solutions will only be achieved by engaging with this diversity within D/ND and including intersecting marginalised identities.

Improving access is key for D/ND students but to bring cultural change, it is important to celebrate what D/ND people bring to the education community.

This project has highlighted numerous challenges to be addressed, no single recommendation will bring about inclusion and equity. FES will make significant progress by making equity and inclusion the thread that runs through all FES' business, from learning design to social activities, recruitment and more - when D/ND and other marginalised identities are mainstreamed, and instinctively at the core of what we all do. [Note: These recommendations are perfectly aligned with the FES EDI Strategy.](#)

In undertaking this project FES has acted more progressively than others at UCL, the staff and students that engaged with us have been open and keen to do better, a positive indicator towards the change that must happen.

V. ACTION PLAN – Appendix 1 (INTERNAL USE for Faculty of Engineering)

Action	Responsibility (suggestions to be agreed by Faculty)	Priority level	Outcome		Target date	Notes	Status
1. Resourcing							
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> FES level Appoint a Faculty Disability Equity Lead to provide FES with strategic support on D/ND, guidance to staff and students, and act as a bridge between FES, other faculties and central services. 	FES -Dean	Red	Visible leadership for disability equity and strategic support.		2021/22	<p>The Faculty Disability Equity Lead will be instrumental in delivering the actions recommended here.</p> <p>See Appendix 1 – proposed responsibilities for Faculty Disability Equity Lead.</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Department level Assess resourcing within departments to ensure there is adequate resource to support D/ND students so they are not disadvantaged by cohort size. 	Department FES to review resourcing	Yellow	D/ND students within large cohorts can be supported equitably by their dept		Late 2021/22		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> FES D/ND Support Structure FES must assign clearly defined responsibilities for SoRA leads, improve their visibility and use this resource alongside Student Advisers to form a new FES support structure for D/ND, led by the Faculty Disability Equity Lead. 	FES EDI lead and Dept Managers	Red	Clear support structure for D/ND students across FES		2021/22	<p>See Appendix 1 – proposed responsibilities for SoRA Leads)</p> <p>Resources required to provide training for SoRA leads, and departments may need to review workload of some PS staff to allow SoRA leads to undertake their new responsibilities.</p>	
2. Training “To foster a greater sense of belonging for those with disabilities, there needs to be better awareness and understanding.”							
Staff <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Robust (mandatory) training on inclusion of D/ND people for all staff (including PGTAs) interacting with students should be mandatory. Research groups with PGR students, would also benefit from undertaking similar training. <p><i>Note:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Training for Personal tutors, Supervisors and Programme Leads on supporting D/ND students as part of their induction to role, with a refresher every 2-3 years. 	FES EDI team to provide framework HoD -Dept to manage uptake of training	Red	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Improve awareness of D/ND across FES - beginning with, student-facing roles but to be rolled out to all staff. 2. Enable Personal tutors, Supervisors and Programme Leads to better support D/ND students 		2021/22	<p>UCL has no comprehensive training that covers inclusion of D/ND people. Opportunity for FES to develop blended training module.</p>	Development of generic training on inclusion of D/ND people, commencing Sept 2021 <i>Note: It would be beneficial to broaden training to encompass inclusion more widely - Training would need to be developed by FES.</i>

Action	Responsibility (suggestions to be agreed by Faculty)	Priority level	Outcome		Target date	Notes	Status
Students <ul style="list-style-type: none">Equipping D/ND students with information about their rights to adjustmentsProvide students with clear information about support available, the remit of staff as part of basic induction for all students.	FES EDI team to provide framework Dept – SoRA lead to add local information and manage training uptake.		Build confidence to in D/ND students to self-advocate so help fulfil their potential at UCL, and enable them to prosper in the workplace too.		Late 2021/22* *dependent on resourcing	FES to develop a generic information resource and dept to add local information.	
3. Teaching and learning structure – the D/ND AWARDING GAP <i>The actions recommended below will start to address the awarding gap but the recommendation is for a separate project which will allow a cohesive approach and will also address this promptly.</i>							
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Review teaching and learning content through accessibility lens.Staff require training in creating accessible teaching and learning content.	Dept – Programme leads Faculty Education leads to oversee		Equip staff to embed accessible design into routine course development and review.		2021/22... ongoing	UCL Arena has resources to support staff. FES should make this a mandatory training requirement for all staff with teaching responsibilities (including PGTAs). <i>Reviewing accessibility to take place during periodic reviews of course content. May only require small changes like listing all course resources and links for support in one place, checking accessibility of materials, and offering alternative formats.</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Review design of group activities to foster inclusive behaviours (like valuing all contributions) in peers and staff.	Dept - Programme and Module leads Faculty - Education leads to review		Enabling all students to participate equitably and achieve the best outcomes.		2021/22... ongoing		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Programme and module leads actively seek opportunities to embed inclusive behaviours into areas of curricula.	Dept - Programme and Module leads Faculty -Education leads to oversee		Mainstream D/ND and positively influence attitudes towards D/ND in both staff and students		2021/22... ongoing	There are particular opportunities where collaboration/team working skills are developed. 'Liberating the curriculum' - there is scope and opportunity for FES to encompass D/ND as well as other marginalised identities.	
4. Learning from Covid-19 remote teaching							

Action	Responsibility (suggestions to be agreed by Faculty)	Priority level	Outcome		Target date	Notes	Status
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recorded lectures have been very beneficial, allowing students to learn in their own time and at their own pace. Departments should continue to record even in-person lectures as good practice to facilitate inclusion of D/ND students. 	Dept - Programme and Module leads				2021/22... ongoing	<p><i>This also benefits inclusion of other groups of students – e.g. non-native English speakers, those with caring responsibilities, etc.</i></p> <p><u><i>Video content ought to be captioned, FES must investigate resourcing this.</i></u></p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More coursework based assessments instead of exams has been very useful for many students. Departments should consider if this practice is sustainable for all students or if it can at least be offered as an adjustment for D/ND students. 	Dept - Programme and Module leads Faculty- Education and EDI leads				2021/22... ongoing	<p><i>The requirement to learn using new interfaces has been challenging for D/ND students, outside of a pandemic, Equality Impact Assessment is a must before any changes are made to course structures.</i></p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue offering self-referrals (not requiring Doctors' notes) for Extenuating Circumstance applications in some circumstances. 	Faculty Education leads with SRS(?)				2021/22... ongoing		
5. PGR Students							
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review aims and adjustment provision for first year PhD vivas with a view to removing the pass-fail element. <i>Note: Not all depts have this viva.</i> 	Faculty -Education leads to investigate with Dept		Enable departments that have this process to be mindful of the pressures it adds for D/ND students, and be proactive in providing appropriate support.		2021/22	<p>A robust student induction and support for supervisors may mitigate these challenges. However.</p>	
Develop internal processes to ensure SoRAs for PhD students are relevant to their level of study, and specific project. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Equip supervisors to engage with PGR students about adjustments during induction. Creative strategies for alternative processes (like adjustments for submitting research logs or upgrade presentations) should be encouraged, and supported at Faculty level. 	Dept – PG tutors and SoRA leads		D/ND PhD students have adjustments that are useful. Supervisors are equipped with skills to support students with diverse needs,		2021/22	<p>The aim is to equip supervisors to have open conversations about adjustments and sign-post appropriately.</p> <p>Guidance via a clear FES D/ND support structure (see section 1 - Resourcing) will help supervisors facilitate open conversations with <u>all</u> students about well-being and adjustments.</p> <p>FES Disability Equity lead can advise supervisors and students on adjustments to be incorporated in a SoRA.</p>	

Action	Responsibility (suggestions to be agreed by Faculty)	Priority level	Outcome		Target date	Notes	Status
• Setup a faculty-wide 'buddy' system for new PhD students	FES – Education leads and Dept PG tutors	Yellow				Year 2 or 3 PhD students from the same department or FES more widely, partnered with new PhD students to help them settle in, and navigate UCL. D/ND students would certainly benefit from such an arrangement, as would most new PhD students.	
6. Accessibility							
General Accessibility - <ul style="list-style-type: none">Embed accessibility in all routine communication; emails, newsletters, webpages, events, etc.Invite access requests routinelyFES Covid-safe work arrangements available to all staff and students in one place.	FES – Comms Team Dept – DMs and comms teams	Red	Mainstream access provision across all activities		2021/22	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Routinely accessibility check content and offer alternative formats. e.g. Avoid multiple clicks or logging into SharePoint to access content, check fonts and layouts are screen-reader friendly, avoid PDF attachments, add alt text on images, etc.Include generic statement with all comms, with named contact for access requestsSign-post all comms to single FES webpage, with links to individual department arrangements with named contacts for queries.	
Specific Adjustments/SoRAs <ul style="list-style-type: none">FES to flag the evidence on interruptions to departments so they can monitor interruption requests related to D/ND and ensure they are managed appropriately.	FES – Education Leads Dept – EDI Leads	Red	Compliance with Equality Act (2010) D/ND are able to seek appropriate support early and return to complete their programme as quickly as possible.		2021/22	FES Disability Equity lead can advise on case-by-case basis. <i>Information: An interruption request related to D/ND is equivalent to a reasonable adjustment, which has legislative protection under the Equality Act (2010). Refusal of interruption requests related to D/ND could be viewed as discrimination related to disability.</i>	
• Implement a SORA review/feedback cycle where students are engaged about their adjustments.	Dept – SoRA leads FES- Faculty Disability Equity Lead to oversee	Red			2021/22... ongoing	Termly reviews of adjustments are strongly recommended, to ensure adjustments continue to be useful. These reviews should be conducted by department SoRA leads (see section 'FES D/ND Support Structure') with guidance from Faculty Disability Equity Lead as needed.	
• Routinely inform students their adjustments are in place	Dept – Programme and Module leads		Alleviate stress and anxiety to D/ND students		2021/22... ongoing	For instance, explicitly stating the deadline is X, unless you have an adjustment (SoRA) in place.	
7. Embedding Inclusion							
• Departments embed activities that enable all students to grasp the importance of inclusion	Dept – Programme and module leads FES – EDI Team to oversee/advise	Red	Embed a life skill that benefits all.		2021/22... ongoing	e.g. How to work effectively with others who have different needs/perspectives. Ice-breaker activities during department inductions would be a good starting point for inclusive behaviours.	
• Provide role models for D/ND students by creating safe environments for staff to openly	FES – Leadership team Dept- HoD and EDI lead		Improve sense of belonging for D/ND students		2021/22... ongoing	Role models are as important for D/ND students as they are for other marginalised groups.	

Action	Responsibility (suggestions to be agreed by Faculty)	Priority level	Outcome		Target date	Notes	Status
share information about D/ND and actively celebrate this diversity		Red				To progress this action, a project engaging D/ND staff about their experiences and recommendations on improving their inclusion is needed.	
• Provide all students with information on UCL networks like Enable@UCL, the Disabled Students' Network, Racematters@UCL, Out@UCL, etc.	Dept – Programme leads, SoRA lead, T&L team	Red	Improve sense of belonging for D/ND students		2021/22	This will enable students to locate networks of support, and engage with others with similar lived experience.	
8. Specific Groups							
• Destigmatise dyslexia FES to take steps to normalise D/ND by publicising availability of assessments for dyslexia	FES – EDI team, Education Leads, Leadership Team Dept- HoD, Programme Leads, EDI lead, SoRA lead, DM	Yellow	Improve awareness of dyslexia and facilitate early diagnosis.			A discussion with SSW will be required to move this forward.	
• Targeted work with particular groups. Address negative perceptions and attitudes towards D/ND influenced by cultural and belief systems. There is clear evidence that urgent interventions are needed for BAME students with D/ND.	FES – EDI team, Education Leads, Leadership Team	Red	Normalise D/ND so equip sub-groups of within D/ND with confidence to access services and self-advocate.			FES should do more targeted work with the sub-groups of students highlighted (e.g. Chinese nationals and deaf/hard of hearing students) as well as equip staff with skills to support these students appropriately.	
9. UCL Processes							
• FES to follow-up online ECs process to enable flagging multiple EC submissions to key staff as an early intervention	FES – Education Leads and SRS	Red	This early intervention and support could prevent (diagnosed and undiagnosed) D/ND students reaching crises and interrupting study.			Faculty of Brain Sciences is also lobbying for this.	Underway - See Appendix 2 – proposal submitted to EC Online Working Group and Portico/SRS improvement team.
• FES to follow up improving the access to online SoRAs	FES – Education Leads and SRS	Red	Enable more effective access to SoRAs; Time-saving for staff and more effective management of SoRAs.			Accessing SORAs via Portico is problematic for staff; it is reliant on PS staff checking periodically, the process is laborious, and prone to errors and oversights. Faculty of Brain Sciences is also lobbying for this.	Underway - See Appendix 2 – proposal submitted to EC Online Working Group and Portico/SRS improvement team.

Action	Responsibility (suggestions to be agreed by Faculty)	Priority level	Outcome		Target date	Notes	Status
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve management of Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan (PEEPs) 	FES – EDI and H&S leads to provide framework Dept – SoRA lead, H&S Officer		Meet H&S compliance and develop an effective process for managing PEEPs			A repository of PEEPs should be created for teaching spaces across all FES buildings and central spaces, which are held in a shared folder and accessible to SORA Leads. Note: A repository of PEEPs will benefit ND/disabled staff too.	
10. Intersectionality <i>"I never encountered a lecturer like me - female, Black, I wonder how would that have impacted my experience."</i>							
FES moves to a holistic approach to equity and inclusion, one that considers multiple marginalised identities, moving away from the silo-approach to of unitary identity. This is an opportunity for FES to take a lead on a holistic approach to solutions for those with multi-layered barriers.	FES – EDI Team, Leadership Team Dept – HoD and EDI Lead		An effective and fairer approach to equity and inclusion that addresses an individual's multi-layered barriers.			The recommendations made as part of this study must be actioned with a holistic approach instead of focussing only D/ND. For instance, is a group activity accessible in relation to D/ND as well as inclusive from cultural/belief perspectives. Are teaching and learning practices, support systems, etc. geared towards norms of a dominant group or delivered through the lens of a dominant group? Addressing intersectional disadvantage is not within the scope of this project, however the reality is no solutions for inclusion and equity are effective when an unitary identity approach is taken.	
11. Broader support							
Admissions: Review application process has not been considered as part of this study but it is vital the FES reviews these processes to	FES – Education Leads Dept – HoD and EDI Lead		Ensure FES is welcoming and accessible to prospective D/ND students.				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial hardship: FES ring-fence annual funds to support D/ND students in need. 	FES- Dean		Alleviate financial burden that will impact education outcomes for D/ND students			D/ND students often encounter additional financial hardships because they may be unable to undertake part-time employment like their abled peers, and/or have to fund specialist equipment/services the Disabled Student Allowance (DSA) does not cover.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FES to provide bespoke career guidance. 	FES – Education Team to provide framework. Dept – HoD		Improve employment opportunities			D/ND graduates are under-presented and encounter many barriers with progression in the workplace. E.g. Opportunities like work placements, actively advocating for D/ND students/graduates where there are partnerships with employers.	

APPENDIX 2:

FES Disability Equity Lead role

Main purpose: To work closely with the Vice-Dean EDI and other key stakeholders to foster an inclusive and supportive environment for disabled and neurodivergent staff and students in FES, which aligns with FES' own strategic goals and UCL's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy and associated action plans. To enthuse and inform colleagues about EDI and to give expert advice to staff on EDI issues and more particularly, disability and neurodivergence.

Duties and responsibilities

- To work collaboratively with individuals, groups, and departments within UCL Engineering to foster intersectional approaches to equity and inclusion.
- To support inclusive and equitable staff/student recruitment and better support students/staff so they feel they belong in our Faculty.
- To provide strategic advice and practical support on EDI initiatives linked to disability and neurodivergence, in particular.
- To develop and lead a FES Disabled and Neurodivergent Equity Group, that provides consistent and quality support to staff and students.
- To coordinate meetings with appropriate stakeholders to inform our strategy.
- To advise specific stakeholder on EDI initiatives, providing expert steering in the piloting of interventions in individual Departments as required
- To undertake desktop research and prepare reports, briefing etc as required for the support of FES' EDI strategy
- To prepare and analyse accurate quantitative and qualitative statistical information for evidence-based based interventions and presentations (including to senior staff) and monitoring.
- To write committee papers, including for senior decision-making committees
- To review EDI literature and web sites to keep abreast of new developments, legislative change and good practice.
- To develop and deliver EDI presentations, training and/or workshops to staff and students.
- To work with other members of the EDI Team and key stakeholders, such as UCL's equity networks, as required.
- To actively follow UCL policies, including EDI policies, and be expected to give consideration within their role as to how they can actively advance equality of opportunity and good relations between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not share it.

Responsibilities of Department SORA Lead

- To distribute SORAs and a guidance document to Module Leads, Personal tutors, supervisors, etc.
- To follow-up periodically with module leads, etc. to check adjustments are in place. If needed, offer guidance and/or refer to Faculty Disability Equity Lead.
- To act as first point of contact for D/ND students providing guidance when appropriate and sign-posting to other sources of support in FES and UCL.
- To conduct termly SORAs reviews with D/ND students to establish if adjustments working/would they benefit from revisions to SORA, etc.
- To collate Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans (PEEPs) for D/ND students in partnership with FES/local Safety Officers.
- Membership of FES D/ND Equity group; liaise with Faculty Disability Equity Lead and participate in faculty initiatives that fall within the remit of the group.

APPENDIX 3: Proposals for Monitoring Extenuating Circumstances (EC) Applications and improving access to Statements of Reasonable Adjustments (SoRA)

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Disability Equity Lead, FBS*

Vanessa Diaz

Vice-Dean EDI FES

Introduction:

Qualitative data from disabled and neurodivergent students in the Faculty of Engineering Science indicates that those who are undiagnosed or have not shared information about their disability/neurodivergence are likely to reach crisis before they access support, and are more likely to interrupt as a result. These students will not have SoRAs but will often submit multiple ECs, which may or may not be for similar reasons, but likely to be health and wellbeing related.

The means to monitor and flag multiple EC applications to key staff will be a useful early intervention tool to provide disabled and neurodivergent students (and others experiencing difficulties) with support that will make a difference to their wellbeing and success.

The suggestions below will aid early intervention and enable improved access to SoRAs.

SoRAs: The current process for accessing SoRAs on Portico is laborious and dependent on staff making periodic checks for new/revised SoRA. This leaves the process vulnerable to human error and risks SoRAs being missed altogether or picked up late. To address this:

- **Automatic Notification** to nominated contact (SoRA Lead?) when a new SoRA is available or an existing one revised
- SoRA report – functionality for SoRA lead/other nominated dept contact(s) to download report with all SoRA content. Note: currently, a list of SoRAs can be produced but each SoRA has to be downloaded individually

ECs - SoRA link: Students with SoRAs are largely unaware that SoRA's can be revised to accommodate changing needs. If students can be made more aware of this by flagging within Portico/online EC system, this will reduce the number of ECs in future.

Is your request related to a SoRA? Y/N

If Yes, consider if it would be useful to revise your SoRA. Contact Student Support and Wellbeing for guidance. Note: This EC application will still be processed.

Question to be included:

Follow-on from grounds for EC: The process below will ensure multiple ECs applications from a student are flagged to the Personal Tutor AND signpost the student to various sources of support.

Information to be included:

Note: The following information is to enable us to offer additional support, your application will not be affected by your responses.

If your response is related to your health and well-being please complete the following:

- have you previously submitted an EC for similar circumstances? Y/N
- if Yes, how many times within **Y** months? (set upper limit (**X**) – **automatic notification** to personal tutor when limit is reached)

Notification to student: As you have submitted more than **X** ECs related to health and well-being within **Y** months, please do one or more of the following:

1. speak to your personal tutor (they have been notified) or departmental tutor (*Link to list of dept tutors*)
2. contact your dept SoRA lead about support available - *Link to list of SoRA leads*
3. contact Student Support and Wellbeing for guidance and support

If the critical number of EC applications within a set period is exceeded this notification will provide the student with information on next steps. Note: Personal tutors will require appropriate guidance.