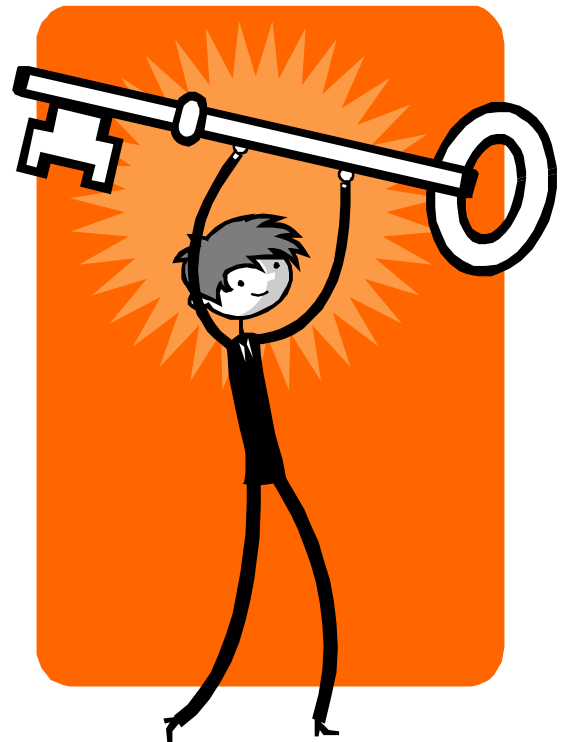


# IMPROVING DIVERSITY AND ACCESS FOR DISABLED STUDENTS

Birmingham is one of the biggest multi-cultural cities in the UK. Therefore it is important that your student group operates in a way that does not prevent certain types of students joining.

Read on for more information on diversity and engaging disabled students.



## FURTHER INFORMATION

### Student Development

Tel. 0121 251 2424

[www.guildofstudents.com/studentgroupsandvolunteering](http://www.guildofstudents.com/studentgroupsandvolunteering)  
[studentgroups@guild.bham.ac.uk](mailto:studentgroups@guild.bham.ac.uk)

Counter opening times  
Monday — Thursday 11—5.30  
Friday 11—4.30

## What is inclusiveness?

Birmingham has a wonderfully diverse student population, but some groups can, inadvertently, appear cliquey and exclusive to people wanting to get involved with student activities. It is the responsibility of **ALL** student groups to aim for the range of activities on offer to be relevant and appropriate for the diverse university community.

Sometimes exclusivity is unintentional, but nevertheless institutional. Every student group faces challenges to inclusiveness and it is likely that some groups may be under represented in yours. From a gay student who may feel undermined in a specific group, to a student with a disability who may have trouble accessing an activity, there are factors you need to think about to prevent such exclusion.

## An inclusive environment will enable students from all backgrounds to:

- Have fair access to the opportunities your student group offers.
- Fully participate in your activities.
- Share mutual respect and dignity for one another.
- Be valued for the role they can play, not only as direct participants, but perhaps also as coaches, administrators and officials.

## The Importance of Being Inclusive

- We all have a duty not to discriminate against anyone both under the law and Guild policy. You should avoid making assumptions about a person because this may lead to unintentional discrimination.
- Everyone has the right to enjoy their time at university, and joining a student group can form the most enjoyable, beneficial and memorable experiences you will have. It is therefore vital that there should be equality of opportunity for all students to get involved with student activities, to make new friends, to embrace challenges and



to develop their skills.

- It is important to remember that what you may consider banter or jokes can be offensive to others. A complaint could lead to the punishment of the individuals involved and/or your student group including, but not limited to: withdrawal of Guild support for your activities; a ban from University buildings and services; and in the case of sports clubs, the withdrawal of your right to compete in BUSA or other competitions. Please be sensitive to others' interpretations of your words and actions.

### What else can you do?

If you want some help in addressing some of the barriers within your club, then simply pop into the Student Development department, where a member of staff can offer some assistance. If, on the other hand you feel that the words or actions of a Guild society, elected officer or staff member are offensive, discriminatory and/or contravene the Guild's Equal Opportunities policy, please contact a relevant member of staff or the Guild's Welfare Officer.

### How to be inclusive

- Clearly define your aims and objectives. One of the reasons you may struggle to sustain interest or encourage new members is because your membership, and sometimes your committee, is not sure what they are trying to achieve. Clear aims and objectives help you to stay on track, measure your success and inform your members what they are signing up for.

**Once you are clear about your aims and objectives, ask yourself the following questions to help you get a picture of your approach to inclusiveness:**

- Do you meet in a place that is accessible to all students? Meeting in the bar may appear social, but may exclude people who don't drink. Do you **ALWAYS** meet in the evening? This may exclude people who work or have parental responsibilities.

- What is the perceived image of your student group? Is there a stereotype? Could this discourage students from feeling welcome to join in?
- To what extent does your group recognise the barriers to participation for particular groups of people?
- Does your group favour only certain types of events, for example bar crawls?
- How does your group communicate to the rest of the student population? Word of mouth, email, posters, radio, notice boards? Is it geared towards certain types of students?

Taking a small amount of time to consider simple ways to broaden access to your club or society will be rewarded by increased membership, enthusiasm and awareness of your group.

If you are interested in finding out ways your student group could be more inclusive, or if you want help in putting on inclusive events or increasing accessibility, your first port of call should be the Student Development department.

### Work with other groups

The Student Development department can provide you with information on other groups whose activities may be similar or complementary to your own. It may be as simple as joining forces to buy something that can be shared or collaborating to put on cross-curricular events such as the Diversity Festival or an open Sports Day. Either way your efforts may be more rewarding when you can share the work and the success.



## Work with the community

- Establishing links with the local community such as community groups, schools, Leisure Centres and clubs can provide a number of new opportunities. These may be able to help you with valuable resources and links in improving your group and widening its scope.
- Most local authorities employ community development officers and equality officers who support local groups in diversifying their members. Get in touch with the local offices where at the very least they will be able to identify the vast range of community groups and enterprise that may be able to assist you. They should be able to provide information on educational courses, financial support, local forums and development networks and local community groups.

## National Governing Bodies (NGBs)

Most NGBs of sport have developed equality policies and can offer advice and support. Get in touch to find out how they could help you. Alternatively you can get in touch with the University's Sports Development Officer, based at the Munrow Centre, who can give you advice and help you with accessing additional resources and training.

## Access for disabled students

### What is disability?

The legal definition of disability is having a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on an individual's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

Disability, whether it is obvious such as visual impairment or wheelchair use, or non-visible such as dyslexia or mental health, can be challenging to deal with. This guidance sheet will hopefully suggest some ways in which you can deal with some of these issues within your society and anticipate some which may arise. As with all our Pick & Mix leaflets, not all the answers are in this leaflet, but hopefully there are some useful suggestions and ideas.

It is important that as senior members of your group, you are aware of potential Mental Health issues amongst your members. Clearly while it is not your responsibility to deal with such matters it is important that you are aware of such issues and know the appropriate channels to use.

## What can we do?

It is a natural reaction with someone who has a disability to think '*what can't this person do.*' Instead of thinking what can't they do, think what can they do and what should I be doing to facilitate that. The chances are they will be able to do most of the things that everyone else can, after all, we all have things we can't do whether we are disabled or not. It would be impractical to write a list of all the different things which may or may not be appropriate in the case of your particular society however, here are a few basic starting points:

- **Write an Equal Opportunities policy.**

Commit your student group to creating and maintaining an equal opportunity environment. You must abide by the Guild's Equal Opportunity policy but as a voluntary group you should also have your own. You can use the Guild's as an initial template.

- **Think how accessible printed information and publicity is.**

Using size 14 font in a typescript such as Times New Roman is much better for people with even mild visual impairments and some people find it easier to read information printed on colour rather than standard white paper.

- **Provide information and publicity in different sorts of accessible formats**

For example, large print, Braille, cassette, computer disc, website, email. A way of improving the accessibility of information produced by your society in advance is to make it available on computer disc using a standard word file as this should make it accessible to students who use specialist computer equipment to access data.

Some students may find it difficult to access information about your society which is provided in a purely written format. If it's information which you are handing out ask the person if they are happy to take it or whether they would like you to talk them through it. This way you won't be directly asking them about any problems they may have in accessing the written information.

- **Is your location accessible?**

Think about the barriers certain rooms can have for some people and make sure meetings held by your society are held in rooms which are accessible.

- **Put Equality and Diversity on the agenda.**

Discuss any implications on equality at the end of any meeting, particularly when planning activities. Consider the way you recruit members, the day-to-day running of the society and even one off events. This is a great way to prevent issues being overlooked. If a disabled student wants to become more involved and sit on your committee it is important that you pay attention to making sure that the way you run the group is accessible.

## **Do What You Can**

It takes time to change - if you wait until disabled people join your student group before thinking about accessibility, the chances are disabled people will either not join in the first place, or they will leave your society before you can make the changes.

## **Ask the Students**

Disabled students will always be the first and most useful expert on what works best for them. If a disabled student has expressed an interest in taking part in one of your activities, don't assume what they will or will not be able to do. Talk to them about what is involved and if you have worries or concerns they may well be able to reassure you about them, or they may agree with you. The worst thing to do is to keep your fears to

yourself because you are too embarrassed or nervous to ask. It is easy to tell when someone is feeling uncomfortable about something and it's much better to have it out in the open provided one asks politely and tactfully. It is highly unlikely you will be asking them something they have not been asked many times before.

### **Think outside the box**

Whilst there are basic guidelines which are given concerning accessibility you should also be looking to take a creative approach to using your group's resources. For example, in the case of Deaf students who use sign language it can be quite difficult because no group can necessarily afford to hire sign language interpreters for all of its activities. Perhaps one of the members of your society knows sign language and can act as an interpreter or perhaps the deaf student has a friend who might be interested in coming too and can act as an interpreter. Solutions are there to be found so think positively and be proactive.

### **Health & Safety**

Many restrictions still apply whether one is disabled or not. If you are worried about a Health and Safety issue talk to the Student Development department. What is not acceptable is telling a student they shouldn't come and participate in an activity especially if you haven't consulted them or anyone else about what would be an appropriate way of dealing with the issue.



**Pick & Mix leaflets are available on a variety of topics, designed to assist you as thoroughly as possible with running your group or understanding the Guild of Students generally**

To find out more information, visit the Guild online:  
**[www.guildofstudents.com/studentgroupsandvolunteering](http://www.guildofstudents.com/studentgroupsandvolunteering)**

The Student Development department is located on the ground floor of the Guild of Students, and supports student groups, volunteering and training.

### **Student Development Counter:**

The first port of call for any queries and for any administration regarding your group, volunteering or training. During holidays, we're open 12-3pm Mon-Fri, and our general Term-time opening hours are:

**11am-5.30pm Monday - Thursday**  
**11am-4.30pm - Fridays.**

The general student group area for committees is open 9am-9pm on weekdays and 10am-8pm at weekends, which you can use for committee meetings, checking emails and organising your group. You have access to computers, a printer and photocopier, workspace and your pigeonholes.

Disclaimer: The information in this leaflet only provides general guidance. The leaflet should not be regarded or relied upon as a complete or authoritative statement. University of Birmingham Guild of Students will not accept any liability for any claims or inconvenience as a result of information in this leaflet.