

DISABILITY ACTIVISM AND ACCESSIBILITY AT CAMBRIDGE

JESSICA WING

DISABLED STUDENTS' OFFICER

AIMS

- **To understand definitions of disability both in terms of activism and the law, and to understand the importance of self-definition**
- **To understand how the Equality Act 2010 affects your College and the University, including the public sector equality duty**
- **To go away with concrete, achievable actions, including:**
- **To introduce a DSO onto the JCR where it does not previously have one;**
- **To provide information on physical access in your college.**

**DEFINING DISABILITY
AND
UNDERSTANDING
DISCRIMINATION**

DEFINING DISABILITY

- **Defined by the Equality Act 2010**
- **Physical or mental impairment that has a ‘substantial’ and ‘long-term’ negative effect on your ability to do normal daily activities.**
- **‘Substantial’ means it has a significant impact on your ability to undertake daily activities such as feed yourself, wash, etc.**
- **‘Long-term’ usually means you have had the condition for 12 months or more.**

DISABILITY DISCRIMINATION

- **Direct discrimination: being treated less favourably because of your disability than someone without a disability would be treated in the same circumstances.**
- **Indirect discrimination: A rule, policy or practice that applies to everyone but particularly disadvantages disabled people. E.g. Exams as a condition for returning from intermission.**
- **It is legal to positively discriminate against disabled people**
- **This is super important: if you have a situation where college staff won't put adjustments in place for a student, or make changes to the college to benefit disabled students, and argue that it would be "favouring disabled students" and isn't fair on others – it is completely legal, and actually encouraged in govt guidance, to over-favour disabled people to make sure that their adjustments are put in place.**

DISABILITY LAW IN PERSPECTIVE

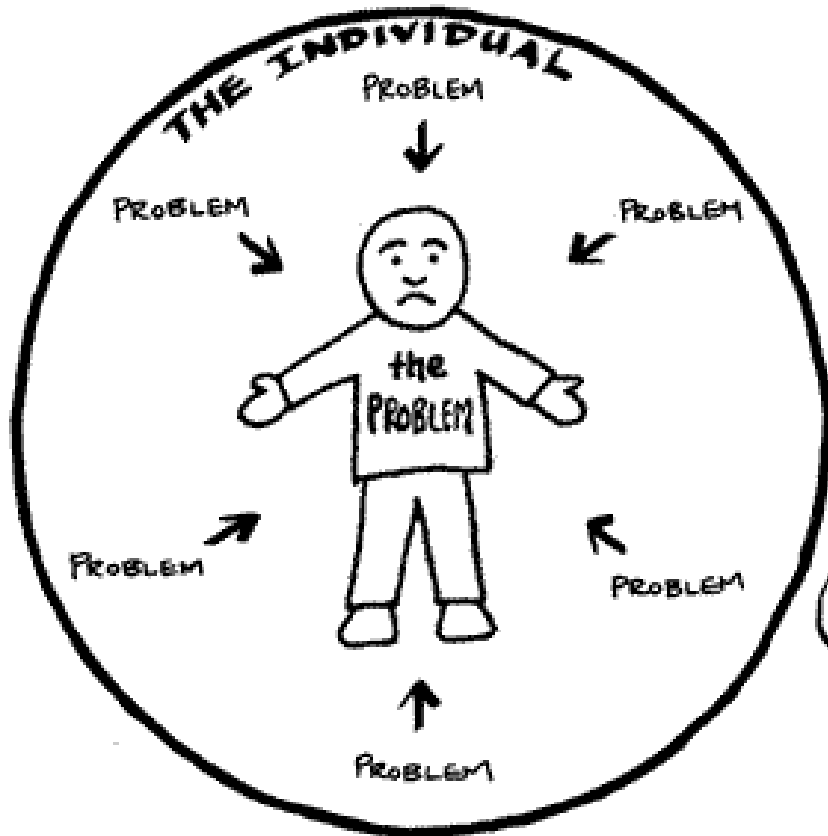
- **Disability Discrimination Acts 1995, 2005**
- **Since 2 December 1994 – It has been unlawful for service providers to treat disabled people less favourably for a reason related to their disability;**
- **Since 1 October 2002 – Service providers have had to make 'reasonable adjustments' for disabled people, such as providing extra help or making changes to the way they provide their services.**
- **Since 1 October 2004 – Service providers may have to make other 'reasonable adjustments' in relation to the physical features of their premises to overcome physical barriers to access.**

DISABILITY LAW IN PERSPECTIVE

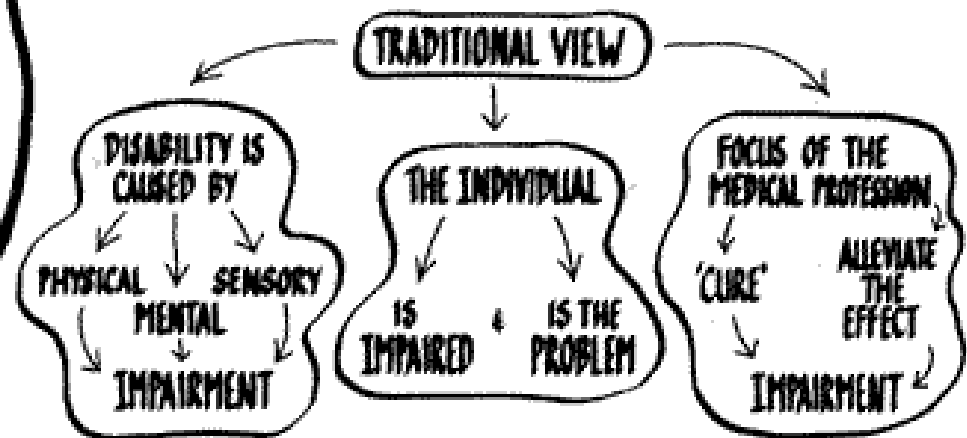
- **Then the Equality Act 2010 replaced the DDAs**
- **Extended certain protections**
- **Unlike the DDA, the EA 2010 protects disabled people against direct discrimination in areas beyond the employment field.**
- **The EA 2010 introduced the principle of indirect discrimination for disability.**
- **The EA 2010 contains a provision which limits the type of enquiries that a recruiting employer can make about disability and health when recruiting new staff.**
- **Public sector equality duty**

MODELS OF DISABILITY AND THEIR IMPORTANCE TO ACTIVISM

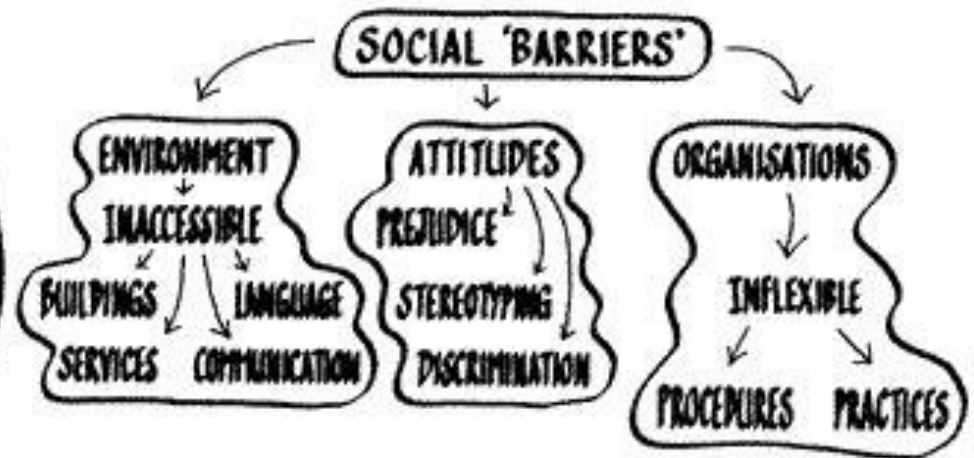
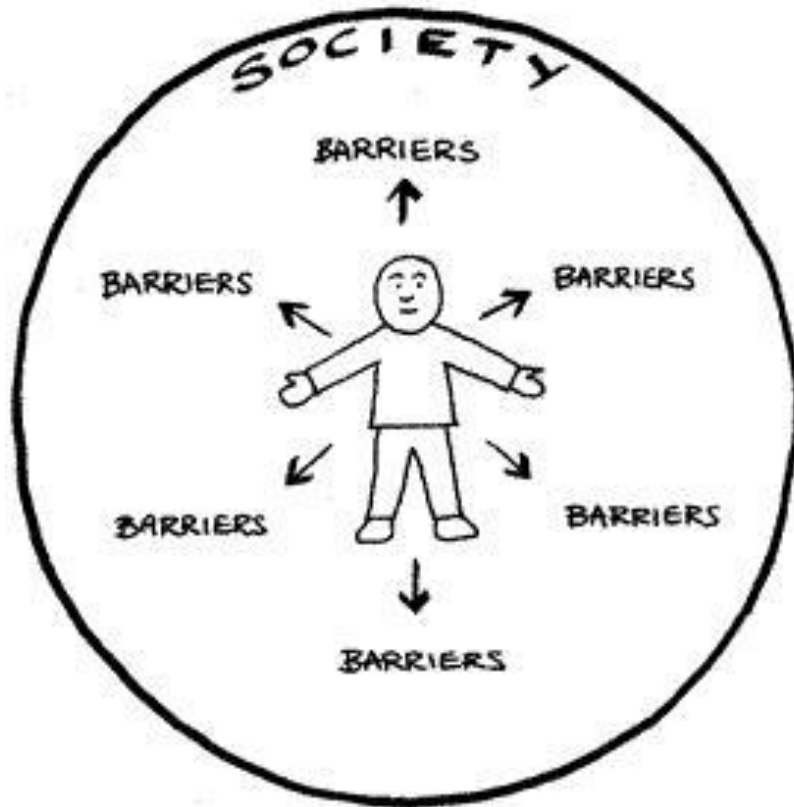
THE MEDICAL MODEL OF DISABILITY



IMPAIRMENTS AND CHRONIC ILLNESS OFTEN POSE REAL DIFFICULTIES BUT - THEY ARE NOT THE MAIN PROBLEMS



THE SOCIAL MODEL OF DISABILITY



THE IMPORTANCE OF SELF-DEFINITION

Traditionally, the term 'disabled' is associated in people's minds with limitations.

So why is self-defining so important?

If a person's impairment limits their ability to walk, the only reason it becomes a problem is if they can't get funding for a walking aid, or if buildings don't have step free access.

Positive self-definition means rejecting the idea that you are lesser because of your impairments.

It means rejecting the idea that your access needs are your responsibility or your fault.

An impairment only becomes a disability when you are excluded or disadvantaged because of it.

Acknowledging that you are disabled makes it easier to name the discrimination you may be facing, and access appropriate support.

DISABILITY IN A CAMBRIDGE CONTEXT

DISABILITY AT CAMBRIDGE

- **Roughly 2100 disabled students are registered with the Disability Resource Centre, of which around 750 are graduate students – the rest undergraduate.**
- **11% of the student body fall under the legal definition of disabled. This is above the national average for Universities (10.4%).**
- **14% average annual increase in disabled students at the DRC**
- **More than 70% of the students seen by the DRC do not positively identify as disabled**
- **35% of students registered at the DRC did not disclose upon application.**
- **The largest groups of disabled students by HESA category are: specific learning difficulty, long-standing illness, and mental health conditions.**
- **54% of JCRs have a DSO or mental health officer**

DISABILITY AT CAMBRIDGE

From the 2015 Big Cambridge Survey:

- **74% of disabled respondents felt that Cambridge was a fair and equal place to be (cf. 39% of all respondents)**

From the 2016 Big Cambridge Survey:

- **Only 47.3% of self-defining disabled students felt that their access needs had been satisfactorily met.**
- **Just 24% of students with a mental health condition feel that Cambridge is a healthy and positive place to study**
- **28% of disabled undergraduate respondents felt their workload was manageable and healthy**
- **54% of undergraduates reported that Cambridge has a negative affect on their mental health.**

ACTIONS & AREAS OF WORK

INTERMISSION

IMPROVING COLLEGE-BASED SUPPORT

- **The DSO and W&R are currently working on a model for improving college-based support, which they will take to committees this Lent/Easter**
- **This will include suggestions such as encouraging tutors to pass on information to intermitting students via email at various points during time out, including:**
 - CUSU DSC Intermission FB group
 - Dates for application to return (!)
 - Student Advice Service
 - Disability Resource Centre
 - Room ballot information (whether it affects you, etc.)
- **Data collection for this involves a [survey](#) on college-based support during intermission. Please help publicise this!**

EXAMS AS A CONDITION TO RETURN FROM INTERMISSION

- **Given that the overwhelming majority of students who will be subject to these conditions are disabled by law, this practice seems tantamount to indirect discrimination**
- **Currently finalising a separate survey for students who have in the past been set exams as a condition to return. This will be out soon – stay tuned.**
- **We took this concern to University committees and colleges have been very reluctant to provide information on this issue, always stating that it exams are set on a case-by-case basis.**
- **The Disabled Students' Campaign believes that this response is utterly inadequate, given the standing issue of potential indirect discrimination.**

**CREATING A
DISABLED
STUDENTS' OFFICER
IN YOUR COLLEGE**

WHAT COLLEGE DSOS CAN FOCUS ON

- **Physical access of college rooms (including things like access to cleaners and being able to not have them come in whenever)**
- **College counselling provision vs. the University Counselling Service**
- **Other college-provided psychiatric services – some colleges may fund these for particular students**
- **Knowledge of academic and financial support available to disabled students (DRC, College & University funds, changes to Disabled Students' Allowances)**
- **Constantly ask yourself: do disabled students have parity of access to their studies when compared with non-disabled students? What changes need to be made?**

JUSTIFYING HAVING BOTH A W/O AND DSO

- **Being frank – the remits are different. Welfare officers focus on the welfare of all students in college, DSOs focus on issues that disproportionately affect disabled students, and campaign with those students' interests in mind (potentially against what would benefit the whole student body of college).**
- **But this is mostly just useful: present the issue you're campaigning about to the college in terms of a general welfare issue, but also having a particular effect on disabled students. Having that dual focus can make your case a bit stronger.**
- **Self-definition of the DSO important – not all welfare officers are disabled, and disabled students in your college may wish to talk to someone who has had the same concerns and experiences.**

GIRTON DSO TESTIMONY

As the first ever DSO for Girton College, I issued regular email bulletins to the entire JCR which often highlighted national or international disability-related events (for instance, World Mental Health Day), and highlighted support networks and events aimed at disabled students at Girton and Cambridge as a whole. As Girton's DSO, I worked as a member of Girton JCR's Equalities Team alongside the Women's, BME, LGBTQ+ and Access Officers, covering liberation-group issues that are specifically not targeted by Welfare Officers. We ran a discussion group in both an online format and informal meetings. Further, I created an online support space on facebook (Girton Disabled Students' Support Group) which is now used by self-defining disabled students at Girton as a safe space where queries and problems can be answered and supported. Self-definition as a disabled student is tantamount to the role of DSO, given that issues regarding equality and the benefits of positive identification will be experienced first-hand and thus dealt with sensitively and fairly. It is also important, for fairly obvious reasons, that the representative of a minority group also belongs to that group.

PHYSICAL ACCESS AT CAMBRIDGE COLLEGES

COLLEGE PHYSICAL ACCESS GUIDE

- **Focusing on communal areas in college**
- **College has a legal duty to anticipate the adjustments it can make that would be reasonable. This includes having accessible communal areas and being able to provide appropriate accommodation for its students**
- **Is there level access to all your college communal areas?**
- **Bar, buttry, JCR, MCR**

Outcomes:

- **Prospective disabled students will be able to make an informed decision. This *should* be a resource available to them. But colleges don't like being compared.**
- **Current disabled students can quickly find out if they can visit a college.**
- **Campaigning tool: compare colleges, find statistics.**

STUFF YOU CAN DO

- **Access the Disabled Students' Campaign webpage**
 - CUSU Conference-specific [resources](http://www.disabled.cusu.cam.ac.uk/cusuconference/):
<http://www.disabled.cusu.cam.ac.uk/cusuconference/>
 - General disability [resources](http://www.disabled.cusu.cam.ac.uk/resources/):
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- **Make a DSO in your college – contact CUSU & college DSOs for advice (e.g. Emmanuel recently instated a DSO)**
- **Publicise the [survey](#) on college-based intermission support**
- **Work with other JCR members to fill in [college physical access survey](#) – decide who'll take lead**
- **CUSU Elections soon: consider running for my position to expand on the work I've done this year!**