

## STAART Principles of Disability (SPOD)

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### Moving Towards Adopting STAART Principles of Disability (SPoD)

#### Rationale

The University of Greenwich is proposing we adopt disability specific principles, as agreed with our self-selected disabled students, disabled graduates, and disabled staff. The STAART Principles of Disability (SPoD) have the potential to create a more disability-friendly environment for our students, staff and visitors. Working towards these principles has the possibility of having a positive impact on undergraduate and postgraduate home, transnational and international students and current and prospective disabled staff. Adopting clear and concise principles also adheres to the three values of the University of Greenwich 2030 Strategy – collaborative, inclusive and impactful.

#### Background information

If we believe the current charities and various media outlets, approximately one in four people will encounter mental health difficulties[1] at some point in their life[2]. When you add up the people who come under the physical disabilities, long term health conditions, and the autistic and dyslexic spectra, we are talking about one in three people would come under the disability umbrella. The World Health Organisation (WHO) have estimated that 15% of the world's population has a disability[3]. The proposed STAART principles has the capacity to remind/raise awareness of this statistic.

The STAART Principles of Disability (SPoD) focusses on attitudes and behaviour. We are not replacing the Disabled Students' Allowances (DSA), nor Access to Work (AtW) as some disabled students and staff will still require specialist equipment, and possible adjustments. In 2020, the AtW scheme was broadened to accommodate disabled staff working from home[4] and disabled students who receive DSA can also use their equipment and receive support from wellbeing professionals when studying from home. Working/studying from home has benefited a number of disabled students and staff[5]. Spoon Theory[6], how many units of energy required for day-to-day life, affects many disabled students and staff. Not having to commute, wear a uniform/suit, sitting in inappropriate learning spaces, working in unsuitable offices and/or engaging with numerous people enables many disabled people to be more productive at home.

However, working and studying from home is not a panacea for all disabled staff and students. Individuals are still experiencing digital exclusion, inadequate housing, domestic violence, crowded accommodation and/or living with people who do not agree/acknowledge LGBTQ+ individuals. If it is safe to do so, disabled students and staff should be allowed on campus if they choose.

Unfortunately, it continues to be the case that many of our disabled students decide, for a variety of reasons, not to share[7] their disability when they apply to university, through UCAS or the online application form (OLAF)[8]. Consequently, they are often not supported in the most useful manner. This is also reflected in the very low numbers of staff who are known to HR[9] for having a disability. Debunking the idea that disability is a negative state may encourage more sharing. Universal Design

for Learning (UDL) principles have been easier to achieve with students and staff at home rather than on campus. Lectures are recorded, a variety of assessment formats are available, subtitling in MS Teams and Panopto are elements which may encourage more disabled students and staff to engage with their peers and colleagues.

Increasing the number of disabled students and staff could increase our research output within *Disability Studies*. As you may be aware, Professor Mike Oliver was the first professor of disability studies in the UK when he was at Greenwich. Several HEPs are known for their contribution to the field of disability – Leeds, LSBU, Sheffield Hallam, etc. The University of Greenwich has the potential to join these ranks with the implementation of the SPoD. STAART itself already has a positive reputation internally and externally, and we are currently unique in the UK, and probably worldwide. A combination of STAART and the SPoD will ensure the University of Greenwich becomes a university known to acknowledge, support and embrace our disabled students and staff.

For many of our international students and staff, their disability is not recognised in their home countries. Knowing the UoG works to the SPoD it may make sense for them to study where their disability is acknowledged and supported. Also, our transnational students can benefit from our knowledge. As all our transnational students are taught in English, the free learning technology that STAART promote (MyStudyBar) can be used abroad. I personally promoted this software at the first International Conference for Inclusive Education, held at our partner university, MSA, in Cairo in 2019. According to the manufacturers, the software is popular with students in the US and Australia[10].

Does STAART have the expertise, knowledge, and reputation to lead on this proposal?

In a word, yes. Below is a synopsis of our achievements in the last 3 years[11]:

- STAART remains the only initiative of its kind in the UK as we supported disabled student from outreach through to employment and/or postgraduate studies.
- STAART was cited in The Guardian in February 2019 as a model of good practice in supporting disabled students.
- STAART was invited to the MSA conference (as mentioned previously) and to provide staff training.
- The STAART Ambassadors and Graduates overwhelmingly achieve high classifications in their degrees.
- STAART was disseminated (at their request) at the UCAS Admissions conference and the Open University Student Success conference in 2020.
- Melanie Thorley (MT) was invited to write a blog about our STAART Ambassadors for the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) which was published on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2021 as part of their celebrations for the UN International Day for Disabled Persons.
- MT received the individual support award from the student-lead teaching awards in 2020 and 2021, both during a pandemic.
- MT was awarded the Student Good Health and Wellbeing award in the Levelling-Up Universities Awards in 2021.

- The introduction of the Buddy Benches has been received very well. MTs LinkedIn post has been received over 1400 views for the Medway bench and 1300 views for the Greenwich bench.
- As far as I am aware, STAART is the only Disabled People Organisation (DPO) situated within a UK university. STAART also appears on the DPO map of the UK.[\[12\]](#)
- MT was elected the Co-Lead for SE England – National Association of Disabled Staff Networks (NASDN) in 2022 after just 18 months of being a member. MT is also the NASDN Liaison for the Disabled Staff Community (UoG).
- MT, STAART and the UoG were profiled in the University Best Practice White paper published in July 2022.[\[13\]](#)

Some of the STAART Ambassadors, Graduates and members have created ten draft principles. The goal of the consultation is to consult as many eligible people as possible to ensure as many authentic voices are heard, and the resulting SPoD reflects the opinions of our disabled students, graduates, and staff. The motto of the social model of disability (the forerunner to the affirmative model of disability) is *nothing about us without us*[\[1\]](#) and this consultation is an example of this stance.

The consultation phase will continue until 15<sup>th</sup> October and the STAART Principles of Disability will officially be launched on Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2022[\[1\]](#). The launch is in partnership with the National Association of Disabled Staff Networks (NASDN) and will be celebrated with an in-person event on the Greenwich campus and streamed live. The in-person event will be limited to UoG disabled students, graduates & staff and NASDN members due to the capacity of the venue. The booking for the event will be available from mid-October. The venue is accessible, and we have live captioners booked for the presentations.

### STAART Principles of Disability (Draft):

These principles have been created by self-selected University of Greenwich disabled students, disabled graduates and graduates and disabled staff:

- Disability includes physical impairments; specific learning difficulties; mental health conditions; long-term health conditions; and/or potentially life-shortening illnesses.
- We are not embarrassed and/or ashamed of our disabilities.
- Some days are better than others.
- Sometimes it may take us longer to work or study than our non-disabled peers, although sometimes we are quicker than our non-disabled peers to achieve the same results.
- We are capable of great achievements.
- We do not have hidden talent – we have unknown talents. Just ask us[\[2\]](#)
- Most of us do not look disabled.
- Disabled peers can be our greatest allies and successful supporters.
- We are disabled people, not people with disabilities. We are (mostly) disabled by the environment and attitudes rather than our bodies and brains.

- We come in different shapes, sizes, colours, faiths and genders.
- If you are a University of Greenwich disabled student, disabled graduate and/or a disabled member of staff, please consider completing out short survey which can be found here: <https://greenwich.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/staart-principles-of-disability-spod>. The survey should not take more than 10 minutes, unless you have much to contribute.
- The resulting SPoD will have the full STAART logo (which include UoG) and will have a Creative Commons Licence attached to ensure everyone is aware the SPoD was created within the University of Greenwich but will enable other organisations to adopt the Principles if they choose.

If you have any comments/suggestions/queries, please email:

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*Footnote:*

1. STAART does not use the term 'problems' in anything disability related.
2. [How common are mental health problems? | Mind, the mental health charity - help for mental health problems](#)
3. [Disability and health \(who.int\)](#)
4. [Access to Work scheme broadened to help disabled staff work from home - Personnel Today](#)
5. [Access to Work scheme broadened to help disabled staff work from home - Personnel Today](#)
6. [STAART Updates | Support | University of Greenwich](#)
7. STAART uses the term share rather than the conventional, outdated 'disclose or declare'.
8. [Disabled students - Office for Students](#)
9. Approx. 6%.
10. [MyStudyBar – Eduapps](#)
11. I have focussed on the last three as we have been in place since September 1997, and the list would be huge
12. [UK Disabled Peoples' Organisations – Google My Maps](#)
13. [White Paper — Levelling Up Universities Coalition](#)
14. Nothing about us, without us - supporting disabled people into employment - CAE

15. Ordinarily, we would have launched the SPoD on the 3rd December to coincide with the UN International Day of Disabled Persons.

16. What are the talents of people with disabilities? - Quora

[Talented Disabled People – evenbreak](#)

[neurodivergent people and hidden talents - Bing images](#)

[Hidden Talent: The Case For Hiring Neurodiverse Candidates \(forbes.com\)](#)