

Student Disability Policy

Policy Ref	Head of Student Services
Approving Body:	Academic Board
Date Approved:	February 2024
Review Date:	Annually; with updates to version if required

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Policy Statement

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that members of the university student community who are disabled or neurodiverse can access both facilities and a learning environment that is comparable for all people.

The Royal Agricultural University is committed to providing a welcoming campus where staff and students work closely together within a supportive environment, enabling them to participate fully in their studies and life at the University. The broad policy aims to meet or surpass the requirements of the [Equality Act 2010](#).

The university promotes diversity and equality of opportunity as set out in our [Equality and Diversity Policy & Procedures](#), which outlines our commitment to creating a culture and environment in which students are treated fairly and not disadvantaged because of a disability. The University actively works to anticipate the needs of students and strives to establish inclusive practices, policies and procedures which align with our duties/commitments.

Scope

The university will –

- Work to ensure its environmental, social and institutional practices and attitudes are inclusive of disabled & neurodiverse students.
- Work to support the impact of an individual's disability or neurodiversity, rather than focus on the disability/condition itself.
- Constantly strive to be anticipatory in making reasonable adjustments and in taking proportionate steps to overcome barriers which disadvantage disabled and neurodiverse students.
- Encourage students to share their disability or neurodiversity knowing that they do so in a safe environment and that their disclosure will help improve support for disabled and neurodiverse students.

- Support disabled and neurodiverse students to apply for external funding to help provide support, such as the [Disabled Students Allowance](#).
- Ensure that, wherever possible, the university will work with disabled and neurodiverse students when they are studying at the RAU, whilst on campus, or when they are on fieldtrips, placements or other formal study activities.
- Raise awareness of disability and neurodiversity across the university community, to promote inclusive practices and behaviours.

Relevant legislation / guidance

For the purpose of this policy the following definition of a disability will apply as set out in the Equality Act 2010:

“A person has a disability if they have a physical or mental impairment, and the impairment has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.”

The effect of the impairment is long term if it has lasted for 12 months; it is likely to last for at least 12 months; or is likely to last for the rest of the person's life. Physical or mental impairments include hidden impairments such as depression, dyslexia and epilepsy. A person with cancer, HIV or multiple sclerosis is covered by the Act from point of diagnosis.

It is unlawful to discriminate against disabled students in relation to:

- admission
- employment
- the provision of education
- access to any benefit, facility or service
- exclusions
- any other detriment

Policy details

The Equality Act places the University under a duty to make reasonable adjustments to support individual disabled & neurodiverse students in realising their full potential and to ensure that they are not disadvantaged in comparison with atypical students. **This duty is also anticipatory for disabled & neurodiverse students**, meaning that the university is required to consider and take action in relation to barriers that impede disabled & neurodiverse people generally prior to an individual disabled person seeking to become a student. Failure to make a reasonable adjustment can never be justified.

The duty comprises three requirements:

1. Where a provision, criterion or practice puts disabled students at a substantial disadvantage compared with those who are not disabled, to take reasonable steps to avoid that disadvantage.
2. Where a physical feature puts disabled students at a substantial disadvantage compared with people who are not disabled, to take reasonable steps to avoid that disadvantage or adopt a reasonable alternative method of providing the service or exercising the function.
3. Where not providing an auxiliary aid or service puts disabled students at a substantial disadvantage compared with students who are not disabled, to take reasonable steps to provide that auxiliary aid/service.

The term provision, criterion or practice covers all aspects of the student experience, access to education, other benefits, facilities and services, as well as all university policies, procedures and regulations. In determining what is reasonable, the university will not compromise academic/competence standards * and the expectation is that disabled students will achieve the same learning outcomes as non-disabled or atypical students. Consideration will be given to adjusting the way in which a competence standard is assessed unless the passing of the assessment is conditional upon having a practical skill or ability which must be demonstrated by completing a practical component or demonstrating fitness to practice.

In determining what is reasonable in each individual case, the university may consider factors including but not limited to:

- whether taking any particular steps would be effective in overcoming the substantial disadvantage that disabled people face in accessing the education or other benefit, facility or service in question
- the extent to which it is practicable to take such steps
- the type of education or other benefit, facility or service being provided
- the effect of the disability on the individual
- the financial and other costs of making the adjustment
- the availability of grants, loans and other assistance to disabled students
- the extent to which aids and services will otherwise be provided to disabled people or students
- the resources of the education provider and the availability of financial or other assistance
- health and safety requirements (the Act does not override health and safety requirements)
- the relevant interests of other people, including other students

** A competence standard is defined as ‘an academic, medical, or other standard applied by or on behalf of an education provider for the purpose of determining whether or not a person has a particular level of competence or ability.’ ‘HEIs are not required to make reasonable adjustments to competence standards themselves. However, they are required to make adjustments to the ways that competence standards are assessed so that disabled students are not disadvantaged in demonstrating their competence by the assessment method.’ (Competence standards and reasonable adjustments | Advance HE, 2022)*

Admissions

The university welcomes applications from disabled & neurodiverse students. The university is committed to ensuring that students are recruited and selected on the basis of their academic merit and ability, as outlined in the [Admissions Policy](#).

All applicants to the university are considered equally. Admission to a course is based on the academic judgement that the student can be reasonably expected to fulfil the competence standards and, where applicable, the professional body requirements of the course. A competence standard is defined above.

Inclusive practice

The university has a duty under the Equality Act 2010 to make *anticipatory* reasonable adjustments for all students, taking a proactive, strategic approach to removing barriers that could potentially prevent an individual from participating in all aspects of university life. This is referred to as inclusive practice, and covers teaching and learning, service provision and access to information.

Disabled & neurodiverse students should expect their needs to be met through inclusive practice, rather than alternatives, wherever reasonably possible. In the teaching and learning environment, this means that programmes will be developed to recognise the diversity of students and delivered in such a way as to ensure that all students are able to fully participate in all learning activities, access course materials and demonstrate their learning through inclusive assessment opportunities. The university takes an inclusive approach to adjustments, which means that students can access their programmes irrespective of whether they choose to share their disability or neurodiversity.

Disabled & neurodiverse students are consulted in regard to identification and implementation of anticipatory adjustments and are directly involved in decision making regarding their own individual reasonable adjustments.

Individual reasonable adjustments

Where a student's needs cannot be met through inclusive practice alone, individual reasonable adjustments may be recommended by professional staff in the Student Services Team to support students to best demonstrate their academic ability. Student Services will work with disabled & neurodiverse students and academic staff around reasonable adjustments in the context of the information provided by the student regarding their disability or neurodiversity, the context of their studies, and the need to ensure parity of experience for all students at the university.

Wherever possible, the student will be consulted regarding their adjustments, and what is deemed to be reasonable may vary depending on the circumstances of each individual case. Recommended reasonable adjustments are shared with colleagues across the University, with the student's consent, by way of a Reasonable Adjustment Plan (RAP).

Disclosure, confidentiality, data protection

The university will create and maintain an environment and culture where students feel able to share their disability. Students will be encouraged to discuss disability related needs with Student Services as early as possible, at the point of application if possible. Students can share a disability at any point during the course of their studies. The reasonable adjustment duty applies to the individual student from this point of disclosure - regardless of whether the student has a RAP in place. In some cases (particularly where disclosure relates to an unseen disability) Student Services will work with students to help them obtain evidence of their disability. Supporting evidence may be required to help understand the support needs of the individual student. Some students do not wish to share any information with their department. Where this is the case, they will be advised that it may not be possible to make individual adjustments for them.

The university will ensure confidentiality of disclosed information, and fulfil its obligation under the university's [Data Protection Policy](#), which complies with the Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR). This means protecting personal sensitive information whilst ensuring that students are not disadvantaged due to a disability or neurodiversity. The university will inform applicants and students about the purposes for which personal sensitive information will be used in the form of a privacy notice.

The University has a number of specially adapted rooms on campus for disabled students.

Extra consideration will be given if the student has a disability or medical condition that requires them to live on campus.

Students who may require a room that is not a standard room type (shared kitchen and bathroom); can contact Student Services to enquire about partial funding that may be available due to a disability or neurodiversity related need. The university will consider the application and then, if agreed, pay the cost difference between a standard room and the alternative room type, which a disabled student requires to support their disability.

Responsibilities

The university's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee is responsible for ensuring the university meets its obligations under equality and diversity legislation, monitoring the implementation and effectiveness of this policy and its related procedures, and recommending changes where appropriate.

All staff members are responsible for ensuring awareness of this policy and are supported to develop and maintain good practice.

All staff should be aware of their shared responsibility in supporting disabled & neurodiverse students and the university's statutory responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010. Advice, support and training will be provided by Student Services to ensure that these responsibilities are met.

All students at the university have a duty to act in accordance with this policy and treat others with dignity and respect at all times (see [Student Code of Conduct Policy](#)).

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

This policy promotes EDI on campus and across RAU partnerships by celebrating and valuing the diversity of our university community.

This Policy will support the university to create a positive culture where all members of its community are treated with dignity and respect. Discriminatory behaviour or treatment will not be tolerated. The university is constantly working to proactively provide an environment which is free from discrimination, harassment, and victimisation.

The university will not discriminate on the basis of a student's disability or neurodiversity. The University aims to promote equality and foster good relations between individuals who identify with protected characteristics under the Act.

The university will apply this policy to its relationship with students including:

- Access and admission to courses
- Accommodation
- Assessment
- Delivery of Student Advice and Support services
- Disciplinary procedures
- Inclusive teaching practices

Other related policies / procedures

Relationship to other relevant RAU policies, codes of practice etc. are listed below:

- [Data Protection](#)
- [Admissions Policy](#)
- [Academic Policies & Procedures](#)
- [Student Code of Conduct Policy](#)
- [Equality and Diversity Policy & Procedures](#)

Consequences

Disability is a protected characteristic under the Equality Act, granting individuals legal protection against discrimination, and placing a duty on Royal Agricultural University to promote equality of opportunity and prevent a student being treated unfairly because of something connected with their disability. Failure to uphold this duty and make reasonable adjustments would constitute unlawful discrimination.

Review

The policy will be reviewed annually, to consider any updates or changes required for the following academic year. If no changes are required, the existing version will remain in effect.

Version control

Version number	Change	Name and job title	Date
1		John Conway, Disability Officer	April 2015
2	Major rewrite, to ensure compliance with current legislation and update structures, offices and duties.	Karen Hocking, Head of Student Services	February 2024