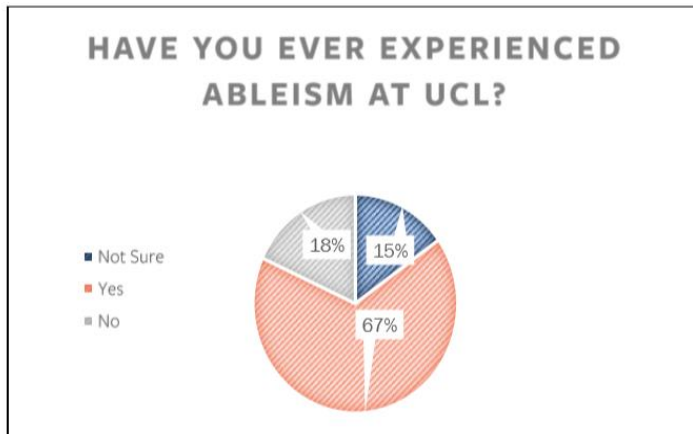


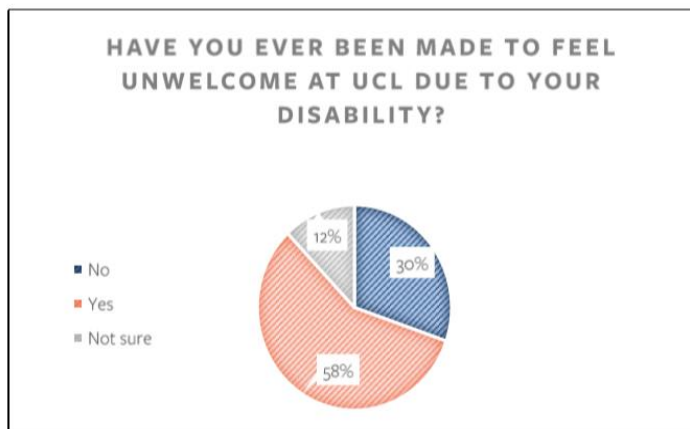
Summary: Disability Discrimination Faced by UCL Students & Recommended Measures

Testimonies



“Throughout my whole university experience I’ve felt unwelcome and unheard. Whenever I would bring up my situation to my examinations officer he would advise me to either drop out or simply get on with it.”

“the amount of explaining yourself and how much you have to prove how you are being affected by things can make you feel like you are being treated as though you don’t have a disability.”



“I can’t emphasise enough how awful the student support team made me feel when joining the university and I felt very strongly about not wanting to be there in my first weeks as a result.”

“I was told by my first supervisor that I was too disabled to do my project and he then forced me to move projects. I was told it couldn’t be changed at all to meet my needs, and that I had to move projects, otherwise he would make sure I never graduated and never got a job in that industry.”

“I am not functioning on par with my peers and am left more ill, in pain and missing more lessons in order to recover as a result. This is directly negatively impacting my ability to keep up with assignments, homework, studying, as I am deteriorating rather than thriving with the physical support I require to manage my academics.”

“Because I feel so unwelcome here compared to my last institution I’ve thought about dropping out many times. Since the lack of support caused my illness to flare up I might not have a choice.”



Why a report?

The Disabled Students Network is a collective which aims to represent students at UCL who are disabled. As our committee grew in 2018/19, more and more students started coming to us with worrying reports about their treatment at UCL. After realizing that the last 5 years of trying to create change through conversations with UCL had produced limited results, we decided to conduct a survey of Disabled Students' experience at UCL.

We hoped that if students and staff could hear the testimonies that we hear, and see the statistics, that they may understand that the situation needs to change. After 5 years of not being heard, we were still hoping that #UCLcares about its disabled students.

Our survey was conducted in November and December of 2019. 33 students responded, reporting their positive and unsatisfactory experiences in four areas: their academic departments, the Student Support & Wellbeing Service (SSW), the Student Psychological & Counselling Services (SPCS) and the facilities at the Bloomsbury and UCL East campuses.

Our findings

Ten years after the passing of the Equality Act 2010, the testimonies from the survey reveal systematic ways in which UCL is not providing equal access to education. 67% of students surveyed stated that they had experienced ableism at UCL and 58% of students stated that they had been made to feel unwelcome at UCL due to their disability.

In our report, we explain in clear language what the responsibilities of UCL are and the context of the report. Through presenting the testimonies we received, we show in what ways students are not being given equal access, who is responsible in each instance, and how to create change.

The report found that four main drivers of these problems are:

- » The lack of **preventative** work - for instance not reassessing discriminatory blanket policies, not having well-structured bodies in charge of disability support and not informing students of the accommodations available to them.
- » The lack of **accountability**, such that feedback from disabled students is not sought, reporting problems is difficult and when a problem is reported it is not adequately addressed
- » The lack of **collaboration** between different bodies responsible for disability support, between UCL and accessibility experts and between UCL and disabled students.
- » The lack of **transparency**, such that students and staff are unaware of what disabled students' rights are, what support is available and who is responsible.



Moving forward

These are institutional failings and therefore need to be tackled with university-wide changes, the details of which are explored in the recommendations of our report. For instance, we found that the academic departments need to educate their staff about disability, Student Support and Wellbeing needs to become better organized, UCL Estates needs to create more and better accessible toilets, Student Psychological and Counselling Service needs to reduce their waiting times and UCL East needs to provide access to disability support.

More fundamentally, we believe that UCL needs to create a Disability Inclusion Oversight Team which monitors all of disability services provided by UCL, creates a plan for how to resolve the systemic problems raised in our report and makes sure that UCL's approach to disability allows it to obey laws and regulations.

In the final section of our report we provide UCL with examples of positive steps to take and explain what UCL has to win by doing so:

- » Higher student performance through not excluding and limiting high-performing disabled students
- » Avoiding loss of disability funding
- » Better student retention and performance on the National Student Survey
- » The possibility of attaining the Disability Gold Standard which they have not yet attained

It is possible to change. In the second to last part of our report we share a number of tools that can be used, such as building on UCL's own resources and looking to other universities as positive examples.

Perhaps the most convincing argument for change however, is the moral one. Our survey results show there are many dedicated and empathic members working at UCL, who believe in equal access and want to do everything they can to provide disabled students with the best opportunities to succeed. But they do not have the institutional backing to do so right now.

UCL prides itself on being a progressive institution, the first to admit students regardless of religion, the first to make higher education accessible to a broad section of society, and the first to welcome women on equal terms with men. Using hashtags like #UCLcares the university repeatedly makes its commitment toward student wellbeing clear. For these reasons we believe that UCL will not stand for this unequal access but rather take significant steps to create change.

We still hope that #UCLcares.



What we ask

We end our report by extending a hand to UCL and asking them to make a commitment towards their disabled students this year, the 10-year anniversary of the Equality Act. We ask them to create a PACT, to make their disability services:

Preventative

Accountable

Collaborative

Transparent

With this PACT comes a set of interim measures which we ask UCL to take in order to move towards providing truly equal opportunities for their disabled students. We ask that the first list be completed within 6 weeks - by March 2nd - and the second list be completed a month before the start of the next academic year - by September 1st.

If you work at UCL we encourage you to read the report in full. We sent the report to experts in education and accessibility before its release. They described it as “illuminating”, “powerful” and “well researched”. One UCL employee remarked:

“it paints a bleak picture of UCL’s approach to disability issues which, in my view, is unacceptable. [...] I urge you to disseminate this report widely. Again, in my view, all employees of UCL require a wake-up call when it comes to disability issues (I include myself in this).”