

# Enhancing Disability Inclusion for All: Learning from the Lived Experiences of Higher Education Staff with Disabilities

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# Context of Disability Inclusion in UK HE

- Approximately 21% of UK students in HE declare a disability compared to 7% of staff. By 2033 disabled students could make up a 1/3 of home student enrolments.
- For staff, assessments for Access to Work (AtW) are in excess of 30 weeks. Anticipated changes to AtW will make it harder for disabled staff to work in HE.
- There are significant structural barriers to disability support for students (delays of 5 months + for DSA assessment).



# Overview

- How do disabled staff experience higher education in the UK?
- Importance of valuing diversity and supporting integrated models of disability inclusion to improve the lived experiences of staff if we are to enhance provision for students.



# Levels of Dissatisfaction with DI in UK HE

“There is an integrated approach to managing DI that considers the entirety of the lived experience of those with disabilities (e.g., travel adjustments, equipment needs, wider support services).”

- 120 out of 127 institutions (94%) were given a rating of 1 or 2 (strongly disagree) by respondents.

# Rethinking how DI is Viewed & Enacted

Disability Inclusion Institutional Framework highlights 12 interrelated dimensions

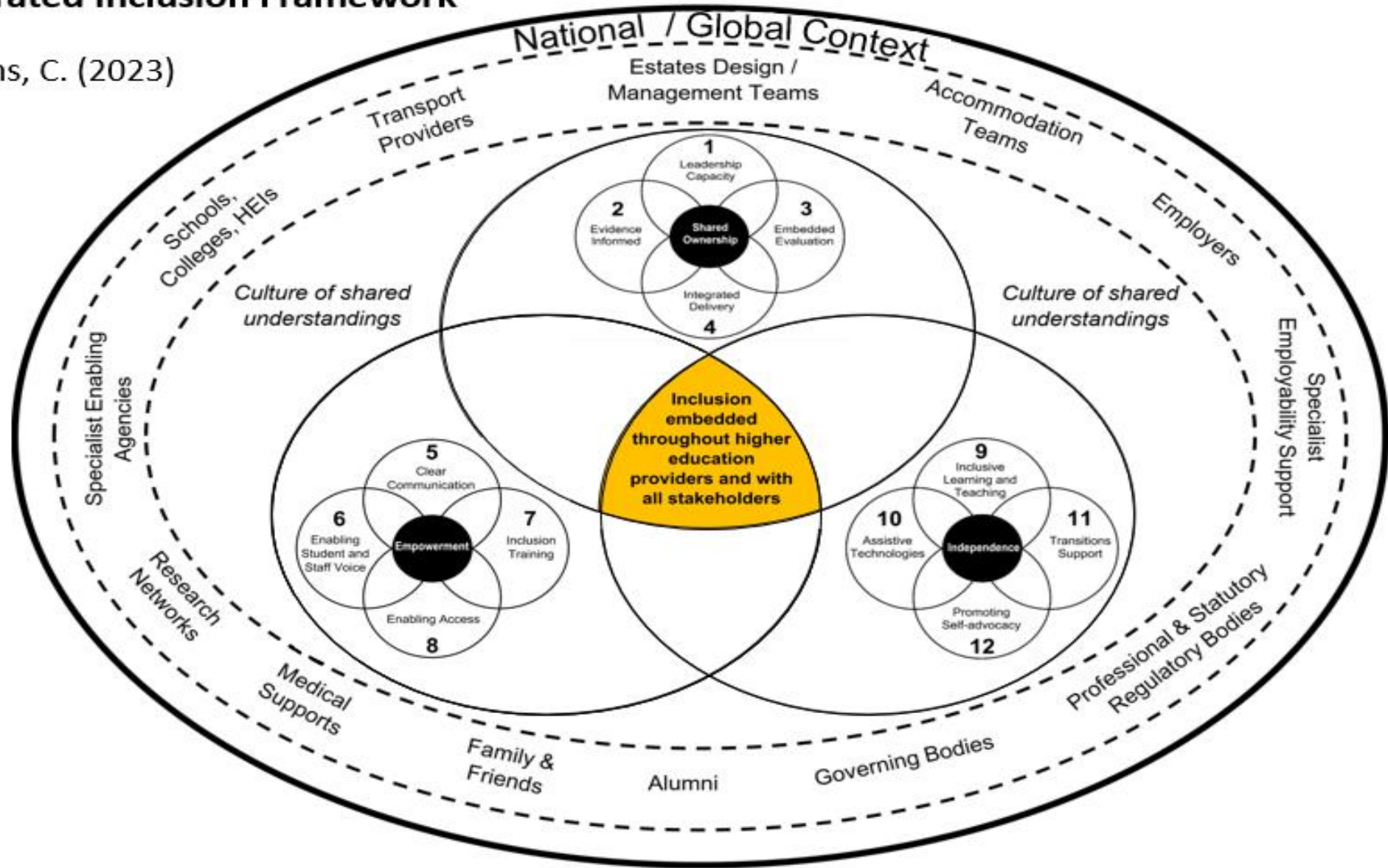
Shared Ownership	Empowerment	Independence
1. Effective leadership at <b>all levels</b>	5. Shared culture and language of DI and <b>clear communication</b> on this	9. Being <b>clear</b> about what an inclusive pedagogy is and the research behind this
2. Investment in <b>high quality research</b>	6. <b>Central engagement</b> of disabled students/staff from the <b>outset</b>	10. <b>Training</b> in the use of assistive technologies
3. <b>Ongoing</b> monitoring and evaluation of DI	7. High <b>quality</b> training	11. Maximising the effectiveness of <b>transitions support</b>
4. <b>Integrated approach</b>	8. Access to supports – <b>transparency</b> about the process	12. Supporting self-advocacy skills and a <b>shared advocacy approach</b>



# The Integrated Inclusion Framework (IFF, Evans, 2023)

## Integrated Inclusion Framework

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# Systems, Processes, and Quality of Training

Scale item	Mostly agree %	Mostly disagree %
Training for staff and students on DI is evaluated for quality and impact. (n = 607)	6	61
There is an integrated approach to managing DI that considers the entirety of the lived experience of those with disabilities (e.g., travel adjustments, equipment needs, wider support services) (n = 788)	7	63
Disability inclusion work is recognised and rewarded (e.g., workload allocation, promotion criteria). (n = 731)	7	57
The quality of training provided to staff in the use of assistive technologies is good. (n= 673)	7	54
The quality of training staff receive in DI is good. (n= 783)	7	54

# Disparities in Perceived Levels of Support

Scale item	Very inclusive (ranking 6 and 7) %	Not very inclusive (ranking 1 and 2) %
To what extent do you feel your university is disability inclusive for <b>students</b> ?	31	11
To what extent do you feel your university is disability inclusive for <b>staff</b> ?	7	41

- How inclusive are universities for staff and students?
- **How do we know?** 21% of respondents were unsure as to how to objectively assess quality or not able to rate (n = 640).



# The Way we Record Disability Matters

Nature of disability	Proportion of disabled staff NDSS (%)	Proportion of disabled staff HESA(%)
Two or more impairments	<b>31.7%</b>	7.1
A long-standing illness or health condition	17.3-22.4	21.9
Mental health condition	19.4	17.3
Specific learning difference - such as dyslexia, dyspraxia, or AD(H)D	<b>18.4</b>	23.7
Physical impairment or mobility issues	<b>14.9</b>	6.7
Social/communication impairment/autistic spectrum disorder	<b>13.4</b>	2.9
Other: An impairment, health condition or learning difficulty not listed above	<b>6.2</b>	13.4
Deaf or serious hearing impairment	3.8	5.1
Development condition that you have had since childhood which affects motor, cognitive, social & emotional skills, speech & language	2.4	0.4
Blind or serious visual impairment uncorrected by glasses.	2.1	1.6



# Complexities of Language

- 53% of staff most aligned with the interactionist model of disability' 34% with the social model.
- 27% did not define themselves in terms of their disability.
- 24% defined themselves as neurodivergent but large variations in how neurodiversity is defined.
- 20% described themselves as persons with disabilities and 19% as disabled persons.

# Supporting Self-Advocacy: Balance of Load & Associated Costs



‘The ability to assertively state wants, needs and rights, determine and pursue needed supports and to obtain and evaluate the needed support with the ultimate goal of conducting affairs independently.’ (Pfeifer et al., 2021, 20)

- Links with work on self-regulation: Effective deployment of the right strategies and in the right amounts to realise goals.
- Agentic engagement (Evans, 2022 ): Ability to utilise and impact the environment to realise goals.



# Self-Advocacy Scale (SAS) (Evans, 2024)

- A robust self-advocacy scale – measuring perceptions of confidence in knowing oneself and managing one's needs in specific contexts.
- The model demonstrates strong reliability, is research-informed, has a strong theoretical base.
- Structurally it has 2 main factors. Easy to administer – 13 items.
  - **Staff less confident on items related to managing their contexts.**
  - **15% unclear about what supports were available and how to advocate for them. (n = 826)**
  - **7% had received self-advocacy skills training.**
  - **74% would like self-advocacy skills training.**



# Morale of Staff

- 32% felt highly valued and 37% felt a strong sense of belonging.
- 18% did not feel valued at all and 21% did not feel a strong sense of belonging.
- 44% of staff had thought about leaving their university because of a lack of disability inclusion; 46% of these had thought about this frequently.
- Approximately a 1/3 of staff felt the way their disability had been viewed had negatively impacted their career progression.



# Most Valued Supports

Nature of Support (n = 764)	Most valued % scoring 6 and 7	Least valued % scoring 1 and 2
Specialist Equipment	31	36
Access to Work	28	39
Disabled Students' Allowance	28	53
Individual Support Worker	23	62
Occupational Health	23	38
Counselling Support	22	43
Assistive Technologies	21	32
Employee Assistance Schemes	10	67
Specialist Learning Support	8	76
Disability Confident Scheme	8	70



# Emergent Themes

- **Continuum of HEIs at different stages of integrating DI** from excellent to extremely limited with 'pockets of very good practice'; experiences often described as 'pot-luck' dependent on having a good line manager.
- **Evidence of efforts to progress DI** albeit that many state that their universities are at an early stage in development; for some respondents DI is not on the agenda at their institutions.
- **Polar opposites evident:** wide variations in experiences: excellent to poor senior/middle leadership management of DI; and variations across experiences for individual staff as well as between.
- **Considerable variations in DI experiences within and across HEIs and for individuals:** central versus local team management; type(s) of disability; over time; role etc.
- **Commonalities:** Some patterns consistent across the sector and others much more variable.



## Key Question:

What are the key challenges facing your institution in supporting disability inclusion for staff and students?



# Thank you

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