



SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

Anti-ableism and anti-disablism Code of Conduct for staff, students, PGRs and placement providers

Purpose of this document

As set out in the [student](#) and [staff](#) policies on preventing and addressing bullying, harassment and sexual misconduct, the University will not tolerate unacceptable behaviours such as bullying, harassment and sexual misconduct. This Code of Conduct gives supplementary guidance to these Policies, outlining the School's stance on anti-ableism and anti-disablism specifically, it sets the School's expectations of behaviour and conduct of staff, students, and postgraduate researchers. This Code of Conduct is also intended to clarify to placement providers the expectations that we have for their staff who interact with our students, and the standards to which they should hold our students.

Definition of ableism and disablism

Ableism is to unfairly favour and prioritise the needs of non-disabled people. In an ableist society, it's assumed that the "normal" way to live is as a non-disabled person. It is ableist to believe that non-disabled people are more valuable to society than disabled people.¹

Disablism is negative opinions, behaviour, or abuse against disabled people. You are being disablist if you treat someone differently, or choose to offend or hurt someone, because of their disability.

Our commitment to anti-ableism and anti-disablism

We strive for the University to be a welcoming and inclusive environment where everyone's behaviour is professional and respectful. We acknowledge however that inequality exists within higher education and within our University for disabled people. We promote equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI), and strictly prohibit discrimination and harassment based on disability, including disablist and ableist behaviour and speech. It is not enough to simply condemn disablist and ableist behaviour/speech. Only through being inclusive of the disabled people and actively challenging inequality, can we make meaningful and sustainable change. We are committed to actively opposing any form of disablism and ableism and promoting an environment inclusive of disabled people to ensure all individuals are treated with fairness and respect. Your experiences matter. We encourage inclusive language. You can find the University's Inclusive Language guidance here: [Inclusive Language Guidance](#).

Our journey to anti-disablism and anti-ableism

Being anti-ableist and anti-disablist requires ongoing action. This Code of Conduct is a step towards embedding support for our disabled students and staff so they can study and work in environments free of hate, discrimination, and harassment. Our anti-disablist and anti-ableist work are part of our broader strategy to become a more inclusive and accessible organisation to

¹ This definition is amended from [sense.org.uk](https://www.sense.org.uk), to read more on ableism and disablism please visit: <https://www.sense.org.uk/information-and-advice/ableism-and-disablism/>

ensure equality and equity for students and staff. Details of our anti-disablist and anti-ableist work are available on our [Let's Be Clear about Disability Sway](#).

Understanding discrimination against disabled people

Under the [UK Equality Act 2010](#), discrimination on the basis of a range of protected characteristics, including disability, is unlawful. You are disabled under the Equality Act 2010 if you have a physical or mental impairment that has a 'substantial' and 'long-term' negative effect on your ability to do normal daily activities. Disability discrimination arises when someone is unfairly disadvantaged for reasons related to their disability.

Disability discrimination may be direct, for example, withdrawing an offer of a job after someone discloses they are disabled. It can be implicit, for example, not making reasonable adjustments to allow a person with diabetes the flexibility to eat outside of specified breaks so they can manage their condition.

The Act defines [harassment](#) as unwanted conduct related to a relevant protected characteristic that has the purpose or effect of violating someone's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for them. This might include what someone does (physical touch, gesture and/or violence), what they say (threats, insults), as well as other ways that they communicate (writing, images, music).

Understanding microaggressions

Microaggressions are brief, everyday interactions that express a prejudiced attitude toward a member of a marginalised group (such as those with a disability). They are subtle and can be unintentional. Microaggressions are based on automatic assumptions or stereotypes, prejudices and biases. If left unchecked, they can cumulatively have an adverse impact on people's physical and mental health, sense of belonging, career, and overall well-being. Microaggressions contribute to feelings of invalidation, stress and unease. Microaggressions can make those who experience them feel devalued or 'othered'. If the behaviour persists or increases, it can amount to harassment.

The School of Medicine is committed to respecting freedom of expression in line with the values and policies of the University of Leeds, including the [Freedom of Expression Policy and Code of Practice](#).

The School promotes an environment where ignorance is not an excuse for microaggressive behaviour. Therefore, this Code of Conduct includes intentional or unintentional ableist and disablist microaggressive actions and behaviours.

Ableist and Disablist microaggressions

Some examples of microaggressions towards disabled people to avoid include:

Asking intrusive questions out of curiosity, for example, asking a person using a wheelchair “What happened to you?”

Assuming lesser ability, for example, telling someone, “You’re doing so well despite your disability”

Assuming a disabled person needs your help without checking, for example saying “Let me do that for you”, or speaking for them

Making pitying remarks, such as saying “I’m really sorry you are disabled, it must be sad”

Characterising disabled people as brave, heroic or inspirational, for example, telling someone “You’re so inspiring for overcoming your disability”.

Dismissing someone’s experiences or struggles related to their disability, for example being told: “We’ve all got some disability” or “you don’t look disabled”

Making jokey comments that belittle or undermine for example saying

“Hey, you got a license for that thing?!” or “I could do with one of those!” to a person using an electric wheelchair or scooter.

The anti-ableist and anti-disablist Code of Conduct:

Students, staff, PGRs and placement staff **will not** engage in:

- Verbal abuse, both spoken and written (including threats, insults, jokes, offensive name-calling or other ableist and disablist remarks and comments)
- Ableist and disablist physical acts (from insulting gestures to intimidation, unwanted touch, or violence)
- Denial of opportunities or exclusion from conversations or activities
- Production or display of disablist material (whether written, drawn, or performed)
- Encouragement of others to engage in acts of harassment of disabled people.
Any form of micro-aggressive behaviour or comments

Students, staff, PGRs and placement staff who work with our students **are** encouraged to:

- Challenge ableist and disablist, comments, or remarks
- Report experiences of ableism and disablism and other incidences of harassment of disabled people (whether against themselves or another person)
- Provide support to those who have experienced disablism or ableism (whether from another student, a member of staff, or patients) and to encourage them to report incidents to the School.
- Engage with the School processes to address harassment and discrimination of disabled staff and students.
- Examine their own behaviour and reflect on their biases and assumptions.

Working together against ableism and disablism: SPEAK OUT

If you witness or experience something that goes against our School being a welcoming and inclusive environment, we **strongly encourage** you to **speak out** by reporting experiences or observed incidents of ableist and disablist behaviour. Incidents between or among students, staff, PGRs and placement staff, and incidents in person, online, via social media, emails or WhatsApp should all be reported. Even if you believe an incident is a microaggression and/or you do not want to take any further action, please report it. The School will provide support to you and tackle ableist and disablist harassment that is reported. Incidents can be reported via:

- The [Faculty of Medicine and Health Freedom to Speak Up Guardians](#) (for students) or [NHS Freedom to Speak Up Guardians](#) (for students and placement provider staff) – they will discuss your experiences in a confidential, safe, and impartial space. They will help you explore options and make an informed decision about the best next steps for you. You can decide to take no further action or to escalate your concerns with complete confidentiality unless there are concerns about your or others' safety.
- The [Report & Support](#) website (for students and staff) – this will enable you to report incidents anonymously, or by speaking with an advisor, who will provide support, information and advice, in a safe and confidential space. Anonymous reporting may not result in action being taken, but it is important because it allows us to better understand what is happening in the School and to use this information to inform our anti-disablist and anti-ableist work.
- The Clinical Placement Reporting Tool (for [students on placement](#) and [placement provider staff](#)) – this offers a formal route to reporting any unprofessional behaviour experienced while on placement. All reports will be treated confidentially, and after speaking to a member of the team you will have the option of escalating your concern to an investigation or asking for no further action.
- Your line manager, head of service or [Human Resources](#) (for staff).

All reported incidents will be taken seriously, investigated and actions taken.

Intersectionality

Harassment of disabled people can be linked to other identities, for example, gender, social class, religion, race, sexual orientation, and/or gender identity. We acknowledge these interactions and encourage you to **speak out** even if you are unsure about the type of harassment experienced.

Consequences of breaching this Code of Conduct

Consequences of breaching the Code of Conduct will vary depending on (a) whether the individual is a member of staff, a student, or employed by a placement provider, and (b) the severity of the incident and its impact. Disability discrimination or harassment could constitute gross misconduct. Serious breaches could result in suspension and removal from the course for students or dismissal for staff.

Review: This document will be reviewed six months following initial publication, and annually thereafter.

Doing nothing promotes inequality. Speak out and make a difference.