

Disablism at Cambridge

What is Disablism?

Disability is a 'protected characteristic' under the Equality Act (2010). This means it is illegal to discriminate against a person on the basis of their disability, and the University is required by law to protect disabled people from discrimination and ensure that reasonable adjustments are put into place to enable you to live and study here. This discrimination is called disablism and can occur in many different ways, such as direct or indirect discrimination, harassment or victimisation.

The Disabled Students' Campaign has produced this document to illustrate how disablism might affect students at Cambridge, but the list is not exhaustive and students may find they experience disablism in other ways.

If you are concerned that you might be experiencing disablism but you're unsure what counts, please contact us as we may be able to help – if you feel like something is problematic, it probably is and you may not be the only student experiencing it.

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Direct Discrimination

Direct discrimination is when you are treated less favourably than others because of your disability. For example:

- A wheelchair user is prevented from entering their faculty because the department have not made reasonable adjustments and there is no ramp.
- A student is experiencing problems with their mental health and is told by their college that they will be expelled unless they agree to intermit.
- A student needs a deadline to be extended or to hand in a piece of work in a different format for disability-related reasons. Their supervisor sends an aggressive email in response to the request and writes a CamCORS report suggesting that the student is not trying hard enough.
- A Deaf student needs lectures, supervisions or classes to be held in a room with a hearing loop, but this is not provided.

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Indirect Discrimination

Indirect discrimination is when a policy or rule is created that applies to all students, but puts disabled students at a disadvantage. For example:

- A supervisor states that all work must be handed in as a hard copy to their pigeonhole. Disabled students may find it harder than their peers to hand in work in this way and will need to submit work via email.
- Students are told they are not allowed to use laptops in lectures and supervisions because it will disturb the lecturer/supervisor. This will be problematic for students who rely on typing or assistive technology to take notes.
- A tripos exam is three hours long, but a disabled student may need longer than this, for example if they have a condition which affects their processing or writing speed. If the University refuses to allow them extra time, this would be disablism.

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Harassment

Harassment is when a person is mocked, degraded or humiliated by another person because of their disability. For example:

- Having unwanted jokes or comments made because of a disability, or being given an offensive nickname based on disability.
- People playing pranks on a student in their accommodation block because they know they are autistic and will find this distressing.

Victimisation

Victimisation is when a person who makes a complaint about disablism is unfairly treated as a result. For example:

- A student tells their DoS about disablism they have experienced from a supervisor and asks to change supervisors. The student receives an aggressive email from their original supervisor about their request.
- A student makes a complaint about disablism in their faculty and overhears the librarians making derogatory comments about them as a result.