

New group to boost support for disabled students

The Universities Minister announced that a new group will be created to improve support for students with disabilities in higher education.



A new group will examine the barriers faced by disabled students in higher education and improve support for them to succeed, the Universities Minister has announced today (27 June).

Speaking at the Festival of Higher Education, Chris Skidmore praised the work that is set to be undertaken by the new Disabled Students' Commission, which is being developed by the Office for Students and will help the group thrive in higher education.

The Minister's announcement follows the package of measures launched by the Prime Minister on Tuesday to tackle barriers faced by disabled people, including in employment and housing, so they can fully participate in society.

Mr Skidmore wants to highlight the barriers disabled students face in higher education, and has instructed the Commission to identify and promote good practice which helps those with disabilities have a positive experience at university. The Commission, formerly Disabled Students' Sector Leadership Group (DSSLG), will use the DSSLG's existing guidance for providers on supporting disabled students inclusively and look at what more needs to be done.

The Minister is also encouraging institutions to make sure their access and participation plans, being submitted to the OfS this summer to implement in 2020-21, include ambitious actions that set out how they will improve equality of opportunity for students from all backgrounds – ensuring disabled students are carefully considered within their plans.

Universities Minister Chris Skidmore said:

Living with a disability should never be a barrier to entering higher education and as Universities Minister, I am determined to ensure disabled students get the support they need to have a positive, life-changing university experience.

There are a record number of students with a disability going to university, but we must do more to level the playing field and improve the experience and outcomes for disabled students.

It's my personal priority that those living with a disability have an equal chance to succeed in higher education. I want to see all universities face up to their responsibilities and place inclusion at the heart of their access and participation agenda.

The Commission will look at approaches which work well to improve support for disabled students, such as more inclusive curricula, restructuring support for students and enhancing learning and teaching environments.

The group of expert commissioners will include appointments from the sector, students and employers, and will offer independent advice to the Government and the OfS on issues affecting disabled students.

Last month, Minister Skidmore attended a round table event at Birmingham University to discuss what more can be done to improve the student experience of visually impaired students. The Minister highlighted the need for universities to face up to their responsibilities to be truly inclusive and ensure every student has equal chance to succeed.

Higher education providers have legal responsibilities to support disabled students under the Equality Act 2010.

Eligible students can apply for support through the Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) for equipment and resources. Research published earlier this year showed that disabled students receiving the allowance had a higher continuation rate (91 per cent) than students without a disability (90 per cent).

Minister for Disabled People Justin Tomlinson said:

It's unacceptable that disabled students still have to overcome barriers to access an education which many others take for granted. While Britain has a world-leading university system, we must do more to ensure it's truly inclusive.

The new Disabled Students Commission will help to level the playing field for disabled students so that everyone can enjoy the benefits a university education can bring.