

Beds SU Policy Ideal: Campus Inclusivity and Equity Framework

Beds SU believes... *that all University of Bedfordshire campuses should be well-resourced with suitable facilities for teaching and learning, including:*

- Accessible study spaces on every campus
- Adequately sized classrooms on every campus
- An appropriate ratio of toilet facilities to students on every campus
- A laptop loan system that is available to students based at any campus
- Affordable catering facilities on every campus
- Common room facilities on every campus
- Extended library opening hours on every campus
- Microphones made available to UoB educational staff to ensure that students with impaired hearing are not disadvantaged

What are the facts?

Attending university requires a significant financial investment, leaving many students with debt they will be paying off well into old age. Given the massive financial investment involved in attending university, the SU believes that the University has a responsibility to provide an appropriate standard of resources and facilities to ensure that UoB students, no matter their background, can get the most out of their journey in higher education.

Please find below a list of facts and information evidencing the need for campus facilities and resources improvement:

- Data published by the Office for Students (OfS, 2021)¹ and the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA, 2019)² respectively suggest that disabled students and students from low socio-economic backgrounds report higher non-continuation rates than their counterparts. Arguably, they are the students that are most severely affected by inadequate university facilities. Thus, improvement of campus facilities and resources should be at the forefront of the UoB's EDI (Equality, Diversity and Inclusion) agenda.

¹ OfS data: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/beyond-the-bare-minimum-are-universities-and-colleges-doing-enough-for-disabled-students>

² HESA data: <https://universitybusiness.co.uk/students/hesa-releases-latest-non-continuation-figures/>)

- There are several ways that inadequate campus resources and facilities can have a negative impact on disadvantaged students. With regards to disabled students, the OfS (2021) claims that many institutions are relying on individuals to disclose their disability and to request adjustments, rather than providing all the equipment they need in the first instance. However, many students with disabilities do not want to publicise or to draw further attention to their disability, thereby institutions should take responsibility in ensuring that their facilities and resources are accessible to all. For instance, the University of Edinburgh has recently mandated that all teaching staff wear microphones during lectures, regardless of the perceived need to wear them, as part of the universities Accessible and Inclusive Learning Policy³.
- Likewise recognizing the need for access requirements for disabled students, many UK universities have taken steps to ensure building accessibility for all campus libraries, including Kingston University⁴ and the University of West London⁵.
- Research indicates that inadequate campus facilities can also increase barriers to attainment faced by economically disadvantaged students, as well as students with caring responsibilities. For example, the recent switch to remote learning brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic has drawn attention to the students that do not have access to a quiet study space at home. In a recent national poll of 1,416 students run by the OfS (2020)⁶, 71% of respondents reported a lack of access to a quiet study space, with 22% stating they were 'severely' impacted by this.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has also highlighted 'digital poverty' as a barrier to attainment for socio-economically disadvantaged students, as a survey by the OfS (2020)⁷ reported that 18% of students claimed that their studies were disrupted by the lack of access to a computer, tablet, or laptop. Staffordshire University – which has a student body

³ The University of Edinburgh Accessible & Inclusive Learning Policy: <https://www.ed.ac.uk/institute-academic-development/learning-teaching/staff/inclusive/mainstreaming/microphones>

⁴ Kingston University library accessibility: <https://www.kingston.ac.uk/library-and-learning-services/accessibility/>

⁵ University of West London library accessibility: <https://www.uwl.ac.uk/current-students/library/about-library-and-archive/library-services-disabled-students>

⁶ OfS data: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/news-blog-and-events/press-and-media/digital-poverty-risks-leaving-students-behind/>

⁷ *ibid*

comprised of 47% low-income students, and over 50% mature learners – has recently taken steps to address the digital poverty that many students are subject to, by extending its university laptop loan scheme to include provisions to the children and/or family members of students⁸.

- Further still, Jim Dickinson – associate editor at WonkHE – recently penned an article on how the dramatic rise in inflation is likely to preface a student hardship crisis, particularly for students from low-income families⁹. As such, universities can help to offset economic hardship faced by students by providing affordable catering facilities on all campuses.
- Many public universities have also recognized the need to provide a quiet reflective space for students from a diverse range of backgrounds. For example, the University of the Arts London has equipped every campus site with a space for students, staff and visitors to undertake prayer or personal reflection, or to use for health requirements (i.e. taking medication) or rest.¹⁰. Such facilities are especially important for students of faith, as well as students with health conditions such as anxiety disorders.
- Finally, several UoB students have recently approached Beds SU to report inadequately sized classrooms. For example, a first-year course rep for Mental Health Nursing based at the Aylesbury campus reported that in some modules, over 60 nursing students were crammed into small classrooms. Similar concerns were raised by the London Bridge campus rep to the SU, which is a cause for concern in terms of health and safety requirements. Additionally, some concerns have been raised over the ratio of toilet facilities to students on the LSC Birmingham Study Hub. Hence, in order to look out for the health & safety of the student body, universities should commit to providing facilities in line with Health & Safety Executive requirements (i.e. 5 toilets to every 76-

⁸ Staffordshire University Laptop Loan Scheme: <https://news.cision.com/staffordshireuniversity/r/university-offers-support-to-help-bridge-digital-divide,c3269684>

⁹ WonkHE economic hardship forecast: <https://wonkhe.com/blogs/a-student-hardship-crisis-could-be-coming-heres-how-to-avert-it/>

¹⁰ UAL quiet space provisions: <https://www.arts.ac.uk/students/student-diversity/quiet-spaces>

100 students; enough room and space; suitable workstations and seating)¹¹.

How does this impact students?

As per the Life at Beds survey conducted by Beds SU in 2020, over 4 in 10 UoB students reported that they have difficulty covering the cost of basic necessities. Currently, the University of Bedfordshire's laptop loan system is only available to full time and part time UG and PG students studying at Luton, Bedford, Aylesbury, and Milton Keynes. However, it does not encompass around 2,500 UoB students based at the LSC study hubs in London and Birmingham. By extending the existing laptop loan system to students at the LSC study hubs, the university could help eradicate the possibility of 'digital poverty' faced by its student body.

Moreover, some campuses – such as the LSC London Bridge study hub and the Milton Keynes campus – have limited or no catering facilities. Thus, based on the number of UoB students that claim to struggle with finances, the SU believes that the university should provide affordable catering facilities on every campus in an attempt to help ameliorate economic hardship.

Several students have also approached Beds SU with concerns over library opening hours. As it stands, there are different opening hours published for all campuses, with the Luton and Bedford campuses having later opening hours than Aylesbury, Milton Keynes and the LSC study hubs. As access to a quiet study space is a pressing concern for many students, the SU feels that all other campus library opening hours should be extended in line with Luton and Bedford.

¹¹ HSE toilet and washing facilities requirements: https://www.hse.gov.uk/simple-health-safety/workplace-facilities/health-safety.htm#_How_many_toilets

The recent Life at Beds survey also indicates that disabled students enrolled at the University of Bedfordshire are amongst the most dissatisfied with the University. For instance, disabled students had one of the lowest Net Promoter scores – which measures how likely the student would be to recommend the university to others – amongst all groups. Yet as nearly 1 in 10 UoB students identifies as disabled, the University must do more to ensure retention.

Students have reported several concerns regarding the state of campus facilities and disability accessibility. For a start, the Campus Rep for the London Bridge campus has highlighted frustrations over the library being inaccessible to disabled students. Hence, the SU feels that the University must take physical accessibility of key academic spaces – such as libraries – into account for any further extension plans. What's more, a disability accessible study room should be made available to disabled students on the London Bridge campus.

Likewise, some UoB students have highlighted the lack of a quiet reflective space on their campus. Indeed, the provision of these facilities is paramount not least owing to the student body at the UoB, insofar that the university attracts a large proportion of students of faith. Additionally, as per the Life at Beds 2020 survey, nearly 3 in 10 Hindu students reported experiencing prejudice at the university on the basis of faith. Hence, the provision of quiet room facilities could enable such students to feel more included.

Further still, based on student reports of cramped classrooms at Aylesbury and London Bridge, and concerns over sparse toilet facilities at Birmingham, Beds SU thereby asks that more stringent auditing of premises is carried out by the university to ensure that class sizes and toilet facilities are sufficient for the number of students attending the premises.

Finally, several students – based at Aylesbury, Bedford and London Bridge – have approached the SU with concerns over being unable to hear lecturers during class times. Hence, the SU proposes that University staff should adopt a policy of wearing microphones to ensure that those with audio impairments are not further disadvantaged.

What is the Beds SU ideal?

- *Amend key campus facilities that are not accessible to students with disabilities, such as by developing disability accessible study rooms on the London Bridge campus where the main library is not currently disability accessible*
- *Extend library opening hours on Aylesbury, Milton Keynes and the LSC Study Hubs in line with Luton and Bedford, to ensure that all UoB students have regular access to a quiet study space*
- *Microphones should be made available to teaching staff due to reports of students being unable to hear lecturers during class*
- *The existing laptop loan scheme to be extended to include LSC students, and proactively advertised to all so as to alleviate the prospect of 'digital poverty' amongst students*
- *Equip all campuses with basic affordable catering facilities*
- *Equip all campuses with a quiet reflective space, particularly for use for students of faith and students with health conditions*
- *Classroom sizes to student number ratios reviewed due to health and safety concerns reported by students at Aylesbury and London Bridge*
- *Student to toilet facilities ratio reviewed in line with HSE guidance*
- *The university should seek to increase satisfaction amongst disabled students in line with Widening Access ideals*
- *The university should seek to help alleviate financial difficulties faced by students, where possible, such as by making resources (i.e. extra laptops) available to all students and proactively advertising in order to de-stigmatise the seeking of support*
- *All proposed new sites/partnerships to be thoroughly audited by the University prior to agreements being signed to ensure facilities include, as a minimum:*
 - Accessible study spaces on every campus
 - Adequately sized classrooms on every campus
 - An appropriate ratio of toilet facilities to students on every campus
 - A laptop loan system that is available to students based at any campus
 - Affordable catering facilities on every campus
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