# Moving Towards Adopting STAART Principles of Disability (SPoD)

# Rationale

As far as I know, there are no references to which model of disability the University of Greenwich adheres to, although there is a brief line in the wellbeing strategy which states the UoG works to the affirmative model of disability principles[[1]](#footnote-2). If we adopt specific principles, as agreed with our disabled students and staff, we have the potential to create a more disability-friendly environment for our students, staff and visitors. Working towards these principles has the possibility of having a positive impact on undergraduate and postgraduate home, transnational and international students and current and prospective disabled staff. Adopting clear and concise principles also adheres to the three values of the University of Greenwich 2030 Strategy – collaborative, inclusive and impactful.

Background information:

This document is the very first draft of a proposal to adopt the STAART Principles of Disability (SPoD) at the University of Greenwich. If we believe the current charities and various media outlets, approximately one in four people will encounter mental health difficulties[[2]](#footnote-3) at some point in their life[[3]](#footnote-4). When you add up the people who come under the physical disabilities, long term health conditions, and the autistic and dyslexic spectra, we are talking about one in three people would come under the disability umbrella. The World Health Organisation (WHO) have estimated that 15% of the world’s population has a disability[[4]](#footnote-5). The proposed STAART principles has the capacity to remind/raise awareness of this statistic.

The UoG will not need to invest funds in radical structural changes[[5]](#footnote-6), the SPoD focusses on attitudes and behaviour. I am not suggesting we replace the Disabled Students’ Allowances (DSA), nor Access to Work (AtW) as a number of disabled students and staff will still require specialist equipment, and possible adjustments. In 2020, the AtW scheme was broadened to accommodate disabled staff working from home[[6]](#footnote-7) and disabled students who receive DSA can also use their equipment and receive support from wellbeing professionals when studying from home. Working/studying from home has benefited a number of disabled students and staff[[7]](#footnote-8). Spoon Theory, how many units of energy required for day-to-day life[[8]](#footnote-9), affects many disabled students and staff. Not having to commute, wear a uniform/suit, sitting in inappropriate learning spaces, working in unsuitable offices and/or engaging with numerous people enables many disabled people to be more productive at home.

However, working and studying from home is not a panacea for all disabled staff and students. Individuals are still experiencing digital exclusion , inadequate housing, domestic violence, crowded accommodation and/or living with people who not agree on LGBTQ+ individuals. If it is safe to do so, disabled students and staff should be allowed on campus if they choose.

Unfortunately, it continues to be the case that many of our disabled students decide, for a variety of reasons, not to share[[9]](#footnote-10) their disability when they apply to university, through UCAS or the online application form (OLAF)[[10]](#footnote-11). Consequently, they are often not supported in the most useful manner. This is also reflected in the very low numbers of staff who are known to HR[[11]](#footnote-12) for having a disability. Debunking the idea that disability is a negative state may encourage more sharing. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles have been easier to achieve with students and staff at home rather than on campus. Lectures are recorded, a variety of assessment formats are available, subtitling in MS Teams and Panopto are elements which encourage more disabled students and staff.

Increasing the number of disabled students and staff could increase our research output within *Disability Studies.*  As you are aware, Professor Mike Oliver was the first professor of disability studies in the UK when he was at Greenwich. A number of HEPs are known for their contribution to the field of disability – Leeds, LSBU, Sheffield Hallam, etc. The University of Greenwich has the potential to join these ranks with the implementation of the SPoD. STAART itself already has a positive reputation internally and externally, and we are currently unique in the UK, and probably worldwide. A combination of STAART and the SPoD will ensure the University of Greenwich becomes a university known to acknowledge, support and embrace our disabled students and staff.

For many of our international students, their disability is not recognised in their home countries. Knowing the UoG works to the SPoD it would make sense for them to study where their disability is acknowledged and supported. Also, our transnational students can benefit from our knowledge. As all of our TNE students are taught in English, the free assistive technology that STAART promote (MyStudyBar) can be used abroad. I personally promoted this software at the first International Conference for Inclusive Education, held at our partner university, MSA, in Cairo in 2019. According to the manufacturers, the software is popular with students in the US and Australia[[12]](#footnote-13). This software will be enhanced in the very near future as their plan is to have the software cloud-based rather than on a USB stick.

# Does STAART have the expertise, knowledge and reputation to lead on this proposal?

In a word, yes. Below is a synopsis of our achievements in the last 3 years[[13]](#footnote-14):

* STAART remains the only initiative of its kind in the UK as we supported disabled student from outreach through to employment and/or postgraduate studies.
* STAART was cited in The Guardian in February 2019 as a model of good practice in supporting disabled students.
* STAART was invited to the MSA conference (as mentioned previously) and to provide staff training.
* The STAART Ambassadors and Graduates overwhelmingly achieve high classifications in their degrees.
* STAART was disseminated (at their request) at the UCAS Admissions conference and the Open University Student Success conference in 2020.
* MT was invited to write a blog on our STAART Ambassadors for the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) which was published on 3rd December 2021 as part of their celebrations for the UN International Day for Disabled Persons.
* MT received the individual support award from the student-lead teaching awards in 2020 and 2021, both during a pandemic.
* MT was awarded the Student Good Health and Wellbeing award in the Levelling-Up Universities Awards in 2021.
* The introduction of the Buddy Benches has been received very well. MTs LinkedIn post has been received over 1400 views for the Medway bench and 1300 views for the Greenwich bench.
* STAART is a sub-brand of the UoG, similar to Carbon8 at Medway (commercial) and The Innocence Project at Greenwich (charity).
* As far as MT is aware, STAART is the only Disabled People Organisation (DPO) situated within a UK university. STAART also appears on the DPO map of the UK:
* MT was elected the Co-Lead for SE England – National Association of Disabled Staff Networks (NASDN) in 2022 after just 18 months of being a member. MT is also the NASDN Liaison for the Disabled Staff Community (UoG).

Potential benefits:

1. Potentially increasing the number of disabled applicants to the University of Greenwich.
2. Potentially increasing the number of new and existing students to share a disability with the University of Disability.
3. Potentially reducing the stigma and/or embarrassment of disability in general.
4. Potentially increasing the number of disabled current and prospective staff.

Potential resource implications:

1. Potentially increasing the workload of the wellbeing team/HR equivalent colleagues.
2. Potentially financial implication supporting increased numbers of disabled students who cannot apply for Disabled Students’ Allowances (DSAs).
3. How will we monitor that the SPoD are being adhered to?
4. How, or if, these principles can be adopted in our transnational partners

This proposal will need to be approved by the senior management team (SMT) within Student and Academic Services (SAS) before being presented and approved by the Vice Chancellor’s Group (VCG)[[14]](#footnote-15). Once the proposal has been approved by these two entities, we can start to consult our disabled students and staff. Here is a suggested timeline:

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| Timeline | Task | Outcome | Personnel | Notes |
| 01/09/2022 | Launch an anonymous survey for staff and students on their thoughts about the suggested principles (listed below) | This will be a self-selected activity which will provide us with:   1. Thoughts on the suggested principles. 2. Principles we have not yet addressed. | Disabled UoG staff, graduates and students  Comms. Teams.  ILS | This date is the 21st Anniversary of the SENDA Act. |
| 01/09/2022 | In-person launch on all three campuses | Explain the purpose of the proposal and direct them to the survey link | STAART Ambassadors & Graduates  Possibly members of the Disabled Staff Network. | Info can be shared on the portal and via the big screens on campus |
| 02/09/2022 to 31/10/2022 | Consultation continues online. | As above |  |  |
| 01/11/2022 to 15/11/2022 | Analysis of the survey results |  | MT |  |
| 03/12/2022 | The principles will be announced.  The launch will be a grand affair on the Greenwich campus. Including a welcome from the VC, a keynote and some STAART Ambassadors/Graduates presentations. | NASDN have requested that this launch be a joint endeavour between STAART and NASDN. The chair of NASDN was already pencilled in for the keynote. The VC is pencilled in for the welcome and the council room is pencilled in for the physical launch. | STAART team  Disabled Staff Network  Communications. | This is to coincide with the UN International Day of Persons with Disability – the most significant date in the disability calendar |

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# STAART Principles of Disability:

These principles have been created by University of Greenwich disabled students, graduates and staff

* Disability includes physical impairments; neurodivergent (dyslexic and autistic spectra) ; mental health conditions; long-term health conditions; and/or potentially life-shortening illnesses.
* We are not embarrassed and/or ashamed of our disabilities.
* Some days are better than others.
* Sometimes it may take us longer to work or study than our non-disabled peers, although sometimes we are quicker than our non-disabled peers to achieve the same results.
* We are capable of great achievements.
* We do not have hidden talent – we have unknown talents. Just ask us[[15]](#footnote-16)
* Most of us do not look disabled.
* Disabled peers can be our greatest allies and successful supporters.
* We are disabled people, not people with disabilities. We are (mostly) disabled by the environment and attitudes rather than our bodies and brains.
* We come in different shapes, sizes, colours, faiths and genders.

Dr Melanie Thorley

STAART manager

Student Wellbeing Service

[M.Thorley@gre.ac.uk](mailto:M.Thorley@gre.ac.uk)

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1. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. STAART does not use the term ‘problems’ in anything disability related. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. [How common are mental health problems? | Mind, the mental health charity - help for mental health problems](https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/statistics-and-facts-about-mental-health/how-common-are-mental-health-problems/) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. [Disability and health (who.int)](https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/disability-and-health) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Physical and personnel. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. [Access to Work scheme broadened to help disabled staff work from home - Personnel Today](https://www.personneltoday.com/hr/access-to-work-work-from-home/) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. [Access to Work scheme broadened to help disabled staff work from home - Personnel Today](https://www.personneltoday.com/hr/access-to-work-work-from-home/) [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. [What's spoon theory? The metaphor helping people with chronic illnesses and disabilities plan their days - The Brain Charity](https://www.thebraincharity.org.uk/whats-spoon-theory/)s [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. STAART uses the term share rather than the conventional, outdated ‘disclose or declare’. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. [Disabled students - Office for Students](https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/effective-practice/disabled-students/) [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. Approx. 6%. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. [MyStudyBar – Eduapps](https://www.eduapps.org/mystudybar/) [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. I have focussed on the last three as we have been in place since September 1997, and the list would be huge [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. Jane Harrington was in favour for the UoG to adopt the affirmative model of disability which is very similar to the SPoD although the SPoD is more comprehensive. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. [What are the talents of people with disabilities? - Quora](https://www.quora.com/What-are-the-talents-of-people-with-disabilities)

    [Talented Disabled People – evenbreak](https://blog.evenbreak.co.uk/category/talented-disabled-people/)

    [neurodivergent people and hidden talents - Bing images](https://www.bing.com/images/search?q=neurodivergent+people+and+hidden+talents&qpvt=neurodivergent++people+and+hidden+talents&tsc=ImageHoverTitle&form=IGRE&first=1)

    [Hidden Talent: The Case For Hiring Neurodiverse Candidates (forbes.com)](https://www.forbes.com/sites/robertamatuson/2019/10/30/hidden-talent-the-case-for-hiring-neurodiverse-candidates/?sh=420f22a0768a) [↑](#footnote-ref-16)