

What is Disability?

Train the Trainer
Core Modules



What is Disability?

This **core module** can be used with **any audience** to explore the different attitudes to disability and different ways in which disability is defined, including the definition of what it means to be a disabled person for the purposes of the Equality Act 2010.

The module could **stand alone**, for example as an **element of induction** or as a **refresher**, or form **part of a longer disability training programme**.

Where used alone or at the start of a programme, this module should come after a brief introduction to the session agenda, which introduces the trainer and the ground rules.

Suggested timings are given below. Depending on delivery and delegate numbers, the session could be delivered in 80–105 minutes.

Learning Objectives

- 1 Exploring delegates' personal understanding of what 'disability' means
.....
- 2 How to apply a social model or barriers approach to planning services and talking about disability
.....
- 3 Understanding how common particular impairments and health conditions are
.....
- 4 Understanding the legal definition of disability
.....
- 5 Placing disability within broader considerations about inclusive services for everyone

Guidance to Accompany Slides

What do you think ‘disability’ is?

Who do you first think of when
you hear ‘disabled person’?

Suggested timings: 20 minutes

Purpose: Warm-up/ice-breaker: explore delegates’
**perceptions, knowledge and professional and lived
experience** of disability.

Ask delegates to divide into groups of two or three people.
.....

Encourage small-group discussion around initial thoughts
on these questions, exploring similarities and differences.
.....

Facilitate larger group discussion, exploring common
perceptions — e.g. that ‘disability’ implies a lack of
function or that many people instinctively think of
a wheelchair user or other visible indicator of an
impairment, such as a long cane or hearing aid.

Emphasise how most people know that in terms of
organisations’ policies and the law, the terms cover a
wider range of people.
.....

Introduce the need to respect people’s lived experience of
disability and/or health conditions — how they choose to
define themselves and their experiences — but encourage
a focus on disability as the interaction between an
individual’s challenges or differences and barriers
imposed by the design and delivery of services.

Thinking about disabling barriers

Suggested timings: 10 minutes

Purpose: Shape the discussion to focus on **diversity of lived experience, developing inclusive services** and **offering support to individuals**.

Facilitate whole-group discussion of the three questions in this section, seeking input by invitation from delegates and summarising key messages at the end.

Equality Act 2010

Definition of disability

Suggested timings: 5 minutes

Purpose: Draw discussion back to the **legal definition of disability in the Equality Act 2010 as a** relevant and useful organising principle.

Read out text on slides, explaining that the Equality Act 2010 describes what disability means in the legal context in Great Britain and that statutory guidance and case law clarify what that means in practice.

.....

Take any questions of general principle on the law, explaining that detailed questions will need to be referred to an expert (where relevant) and / or signposted to the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) for detailed explanation of the law.

What kinds of experiences might be covered by the Equality Act 2010 definition?

Suggested timings: 10 minutes

Purpose: Explore the **breadth and diversity of impairments and health conditions** that mean that someone may have rights under the Equality Act 2010.

First slide:

Ask delegates to list experiences and conditions that might mean that someone is likely to meet the definition of disability within the Equality Act 2010.

Further slides:

Run through each condition, ask for input (yes / no) where timing allows and explain any implications. Take questions at the end.

Sensory impairments, such as those affecting sight or hearing

Impairments with **fluctuating or recurring effects**, such as rheumatoid arthritis, chronic fatigue syndrome, fibromyalgia, depression and epilepsy

Progressive conditions, such as motor neurone disease, muscular dystrophy and forms of dementia

Auto-immune conditions, such as lupus

Organ-specific conditions, including respiratory conditions such as asthma, and cardiovascular diseases, including thrombosis, stroke and heart disease

Neurodiverse characteristics, such as autism-spectrum conditions, dyslexia and dyspraxia

Learning disabilities or intellectual impairment

Mental health conditions with symptoms such as anxiety, low mood, panic attacks or phobias and diagnosed conditions, such as depression, bipolar affective disorders, schizophrenia, obsessive compulsive disorders, personality disorders and post-traumatic stress disorder

Q and A

Suggested timings: 20–30 minutes

Purpose: Generate interaction and continue to explore the breadth and diversity of ‘disability’ to aid understanding of the importance of the issue from a legal, business and ethical perspective.

Ask delegates to consider the questions in their small groups. Give answers and discuss (using the notes in the previous section as relevant).

Answers:

1. Almost 14 million — just over 1 in 5.
.....
2. There are around 1.2 million wheelchair users in the UK according to NHS England. Two-thirds of them regularly use a wheelchair. Others may need to for travelling outside the home or their immediate environment.
.....
3. 40% and 70%.
.....
4. 10 million, NHS figure. Symptoms include joint pain, tenderness and stiffness, inflammation in and around the joints, restricted movement of the joints, weakness and muscle wasting.
.....
5. 2 million live with sight loss. Of these, around 360,000 are registered as blind or partially sighted.
.....
6. 7.4 million people. Long-term effects of cardiac arrest can include personality changes, problems with memory, fatigue, dizziness or balance issues, aphasia or dysphasia (problems with speech and language), involuntary movements and permanent brain injury.

7. 1.5 million.

8. 700,000.

9. 850,000.

10. Responding to a regular Department of Health survey (England only), 1 in 6 had experienced one of these symptoms. If asked about the last year, it is 1 in 4, and if asked if they have 'ever' experienced these symptoms, it is 1 in 3. Note these are long-term average figures — anxiety and other mental health challenges have increased since the pandemic.

- Explore whether the scale, number and variety of experiences are what people expected.
- Encourage reflection on what challenges are created* by the diversity, and sometimes the invisibility, of these experiences, particularly in terms of how operators respond and how individual staff support passengers.

*Discussion could cover not spotting passengers who could benefit from assistance; not knowing how to ask questions; feeling awkward and doubting that someone is 'really' disabled.

Key messages about disability

Suggested timings: 5–10 minutes

Purpose: Summarise **discussion** to date.

Read the text on each slide, responding to any questions or comments as needed.

Disability and inclusion for groups and individuals

Suggested timings: 5–10 minutes

Purpose: Emphasise the **social model** or **barriers approach** to thinking about disability, while acknowledging that everyone has the right to define themselves and their own experiences.

Read through the messages on the slides and invite any reflections.

REAL

Suggested timings: 5–10 minutes

Purpose: Emphasise the **overall messages** of the session and link to the concept of **REAL**, encouraging delegates to remember this to guide their thinking and actions.

The section on the concept of REAL gives further information on this. You can expand this section and use it to facilitate further debate or draw on that material in your summary of the session as appropriate.



REAL

Respect

REAL

Empathise

REAL

Ask

REAL

Listen

REAL Passenger **REAL** Person



Department
for Transport