



**activity
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**disability
inclusion
sport**

Inclusive Learning Principles

A guide to creating
better learning
for everyone



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Introduction

About the guide

This guide is for anyone involved in creating, developing or reviewing learning. It's especially helpful if you are new to inclusive learning, don't work in learning and development every day, or want to build your confidence in applying inclusive approaches. It offers simple, practical prompts to help you use the Inclusive Learning Principles in real situations.

It isn't a checklist. It's a supportive resource designed to help you make learning fairer, more welcoming and more accessible for everyone, particularly disabled people.

Use it when you begin planning new learning, when improving something you already deliver, or thinking about how learners experience your content.

Activity Alliance created the Inclusive Learning Principles with support from Sporting People and in close collaboration with expert partners including Active Partnerships National Organisation, CIMSPA, Sport England, UK Coaching and UK Sport.



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Why is inclusive learning important?

There are 16.8 million disabled people in the UK – one in four (25%) of the population. That means disabled people are very likely to engage with your organisation and the learning you design or deliver. Yet our research shows a significant gap in opportunity: disabled people want to be part of the sport and physical activity workforce however only 9% have the opportunity to become a coach or take on a delivery role, compared with 24% of non-disabled people. Disabled people are also more than half as likely as non-disabled people to ‘see people like me’ participating, working, and volunteering in sport and physical activity.

I see people like me taking part in sport and physical activity

Disabled people: **29%**
Non-disabled people: **67%**



I see people like me working in sport and physical activity

Disabled people: **17%**
Non-disabled people: **43%**



I see people like me volunteering in sport and physical activity

Disabled people: **15%**
Non-disabled people: **42%**



Activity Alliance Annual Disability and Activity Survey 2023-2024

We have a responsibility to change this because we all belong in sports and activities. By making learning more inclusive, we can create fairer, more accessible pathways for disabled people to take part, progress and lead.

The Equality Act 2010 protects disabled people and other protected groups in Great Britain from discrimination in employment and in the provision of goods and services. This includes any learning you provide to employees, customers or stakeholders. If that learning excludes or disadvantages disabled people, your organisation could be held legally responsible.

It also mandates that service providers and employers make reasonable adjustments to ensure disabled people do not face a substantial disadvantage. This might mean adapting materials, offering different formats or changing how things are delivered.

Designing learning to be inclusive from the start is the best way to meet these responsibilities and avoid legal issues. This guide supports you to create learning that is fair, accessible and welcoming for everyone.



Putting the principles into practice

This section provides short prompts to help you turn each principle into simple practical actions that your organisation can embed into its work.

This is your starting point. Our self-assessment tool can support you further by helping you review existing learning and benchmark where you are, as well as identify areas to improve when developing something new.

How to use the guide



Bring it to planning meetings.



Use it as a sense-check before developing or delivering learning.



Share it with colleagues who don't work in learning and development.



Use it to build confidence and reduce uncertainty.



10 Inclusive Learning Principles



**Inclusion isn't optional.
It is part of everyone's role.**

Embed inclusion from the start, not as an afterthought.

At the start of a project consider who could be disadvantaged or face barriers to accessing your learning and what you can do about it. Ask yourself: "If someone has a different need, would this still work for them?". Remember, there is a legal requirement to make proactive changes to assist disabled people.

Practical tips

Identify potential barriers and list alternative solutions:

- Online learning: Offer screen reader-compatible content, captions on all videos, multiple formats (e.g. PDF, HTML, audio).
- Hybrid learning: Provide pre-session orientation materials and allow flexible attendance options (live/recorded).
- Face-to-face learning: Ensure physical accessibility of venues and have printed and digital materials available in multiple formats.

Build inclusion into the plan from the first conversation:

- Test your ideas and design process with people with lived experience. Try to involve people with varied experiences and be as representative as you can. Work with them to help inform your learning design.
- Check that everyone involved, not just learning and development colleagues, understands their role in making learning inclusive.
- More information on demographics, community and underrepresented groups can be found on the [Moving to Inclusion website](#).
- Share this guide and resources with colleagues to support their understanding of inclusion. [Activity Alliance's website](#) and [Learning Hub](#) is a good place to start. Have a look at our Introduction to engaging disabled people webinar.



Led by lived experience.

Listen to disabled people and learners. Their voices must shape how learning is designed, delivered and reviewed.

Identify existing groups and networks that you could ask for support. A great example of this is the **Include to Improve programme's Lived Experience Network.**

Practical tips

Ask learners what they need before you design anything:

- Ask learners about their needs or share an accessible survey with them.
- Hold focus groups or create a lived experience advisory group to test your ideas and designs.
- For existing learning, add a question during the sign-up process to check what additional support or access needs learners may have.
- Make sure learning administrators and tutors are equipped with the knowledge so they can be flexible to learners needs and make adjustments as required.

Research your audiences' needs before building the learning:

- Do desk-based research on existing training. You may discover something similar to your plans, or an opportunity to collaborate with another organisation rather than create something brand new.
- Ask yourself – who are our learners and what do they care about? What do we want them to think, feel and do as a result of the training.

Involve disabled people in your decision making, not just in feedback at the end:

- During each stage, review your design with stakeholders and people with lived experience. Provide multiple ways for them to share their views and ideas e.g. written, verbal, video, phone call.
- Make changes based on what people tell you, not on your own or your organisation's assumptions.
- For impairment specific support, the National Disability Sports Organisations are a good starting point for advice and guidance.





Keep it real.

Design learning that connects to real-world roles, environments and the change we want to see.

Think about how the learning or training relates to someone's day-to-day role. Using real examples and real settings and avoid abstract theory unless it clearly links to practical actions.

Practical tips

- Online learning: Include personalised goal-setting tasks and use job-specific case studies.
- Hybrid learning: Combine online reflection with in-person coaching or context specific tasks.
- Face-to-face learning: Use role play or storytelling to directly link to learners' environments.



Accessible by design.

Design for everyone from the beginning.

Think about the whole learning journey when looking at accessibility and identify potential barriers that learners may face at each stage. Ensure every step of the learning or training is accessible, from the sign-up process to delivery and any ongoing support provided afterwards.

Practical tips

Use formats that everyone can access, not just one type of learner:

- Use [Microsoft's accessibility checker tool](#) when working in Word or PowerPoint. If learning materials are provided in PDF format, ensure they are created as accessible PDF files. Visit [WebAIM website for more information on PDF accessibility.](#)
- Build accessibility into your digital work. Make sure accessibility standards are included in the brief when working with suppliers. Use [WCAG 2 web content accessibility guidelines](#) to test accessibility standards alongside the user testing.
- Assign budget and time to create learning materials in alternative formats for learners who will require it. Common alternative formats include easy read, large print, British Sign Language translation and printed versions of online information.
- Cover the basics by making sure you use accessible fonts, font size, colours, clear layouts and add captions to videos. [Activity Alliance's inclusive communications resources](#) have lots of useful tips and guidance.



Use clear, inclusive language and imagery.

Communicate in plain, positive English with respectful images and words.

Use simple and welcoming language throughout your learning and images that genuinely reflect the diverse background of learners.

Practical tips

- Avoid using specialist terms and acronyms in your learning unless you explain them fully.
- Break learning content into bitesize modules and use short paragraphs and bullet points to ensure it is easy to follow.
- Visit the [Plain English Campaign website](#) for guidance and training on how to cut down the jargon in your learning and training opportunities.
- Consider arranging a photographer to attend one of your learner events, or a local sports session to create a positive photo library for when you develop new learning. [Sport England's image library](#) also has a diverse range of free to use images.





Flexible and personal.

Everyone learns differently. Create learning that adapts to each person and their goals.

Provide learners with different ways to learn, join in and respond, which meet their needs. Ask what works best for them.

Practical tips

Make your learning opportunities as flexible as possible:

- Ask learners if they have any accessibility needs during the sign-up process, e.g. do you have any accessibility needs we should be aware of to help with your learning?
- Provide learners with pre-session information and training materials ahead of time. Offer flexible attendance options where possible – attend a live session or watch a recorded version.
- Online learning: can you offer learners choices in timing, format and pace by enabling self-paced navigation and modular learning. Use tools such as narration, keyboard tabbing, appropriate button sizes and imagery.
- Face-to-face learning: Offer flexible seating options, movement breaks and adjustable group sizes.
- Ensure your phone and email details are easily visible for learners so they can contact you to ask questions about the learning or discuss their access needs.
- Taking a person-centred approach when developing and designing learning will help ensure you provide a positive experience for all learners. Also understanding different impairment types is useful when looking at how you can tailor learning. Check out [Activity Alliance's taking a person-centred approach resource](#).





Enable growth and progression.

Believe in every learner's potential. Create learning that supports their growth with the right level of challenge.

Start with what learners can do, not what they can't. Recognise and celebrate all progression. Offer gradual progression steps for learners ready for more and reassurance for those who need it.

Practical tips

- Encourage learners to log their reflections after each session, supported by coaching so that they can track their progress.
- Face-to-face learning: Create supportive spaces for debate, scenarios or simulation opportunities.
- Formal qualifications: Work with the qualifying body to understand where special dispensations can be made.



Learn together.

Peer interaction supports strong learning. Create inclusive spaces for sharing and collaboration.

Make it easy for learners to talk to each other safely and encourage everyone to listen and learn from different perspectives.

Practical tips

- Create learning environments that welcome contributions and diversity.

- Use communities of practice to encourage peer-to-peer support.
- Online learning: Provide learner forums where learners can share ideas and ask questions to each other and training leaders. Use breakout rooms, group tasks, shared reflection and problem solving, and buddy systems.
- Face-to-face learning: encourage group interaction through peer-led discussions, co-coaching sessions and community panels.



Reflect, apply, act.

Help learners connect ideas and theory to real actions.

Build in time for reflection throughout the learning journey, not just at the end. Ask learners – what will you do differently as a result of this learning?

Practical tips

- Encourage learners to test ideas in their own settings. Design learning so they can apply it to real world scenarios.
- Online learning: Build in journal prompts, polls or personal video reflection opportunities for learners.
- Face-to-face learning: Include structured pauses and group debriefs throughout sessions. Ask questions that stretch learner minds.



Monitor and improve.

Regularly check what's working and what's not.

Ask learners to provide feedback in simple, accessible ways. Be on the lookout for barriers that might prevent this and remove them.

Practical tips

- Offer multiple ways for learners to provide feedback e.g. accessible online surveys, phone, email and direct conversations with tutors or staff.

- Hold monthly meetings to review feedback so that you can make improvements quickly. Respond to learner feedback in a timely manner to show you value their input.



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**This document is also available in accessible Word format.
Please contact us if you need more support. Published in May 2026.**

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