MAPPING ME

A Toolkit for Exploring Identity, Learning Needs & Strengths

Introduction

This toolkit is designed to help you as a student to recognise and communicate your learning needs which reflects your own identity and life experience - to support your time at university.

This toolkit can be kept private, shared with a tutor, or used as a conversation starter. You are not required to disclose anything you are not comfortable sharing.

Using This Toolkit

This toolkit can be completed digitally in Adobe Acrobat using the fillable form fields for text and the drawing tools.

If you prefer to write or sketch by hand, you can request a printed copy by contacting creativeshift@arts.ac.uk, or click here to print your own.

You can:

1   Highlight, circle, write and draw in it

2   Share it with a tutor

3   Take your time and feel free to skip steps you don't want to do

Remember: You are always in control of what you choose to share.

Use this booklet as a tool for empowerment, not a form to complete.

Tip: Look at the areas you'd like to share, then use the conversation starters at the end of this document to help you express them in your own words.
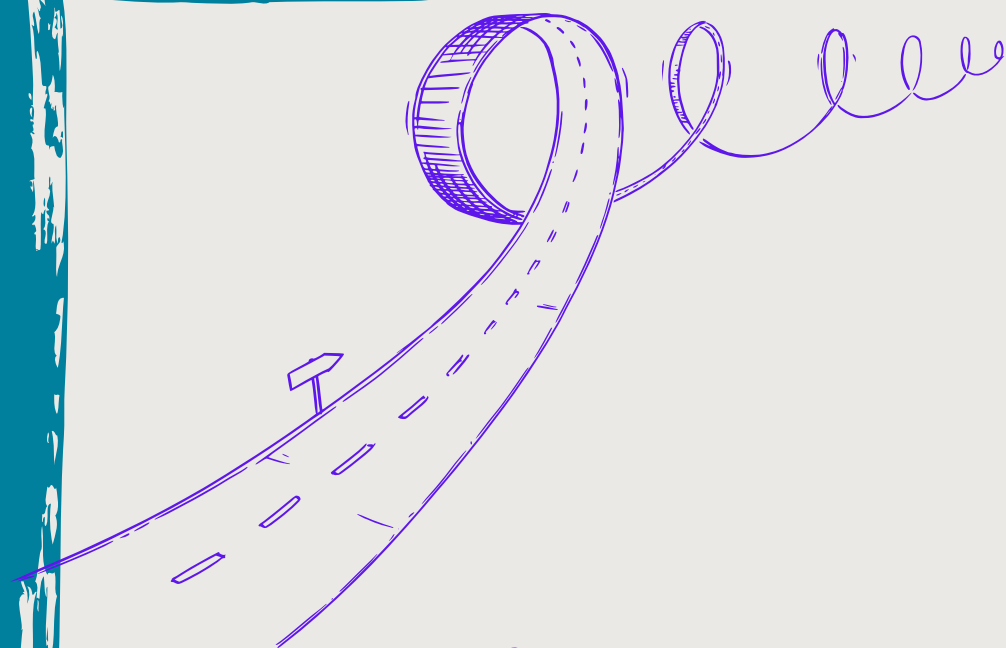
Mapping My Journey

This section is designed for you to pause, reflect, and respond.

Through a series of activities, you can develop a deeper understanding of how you learn, and what helps you thrive.

Identity Mapping

Why do this?

Reflecting on your identity can help you understand how you learn best and what you might need to feel supported. Learning isn't just about what we know, it's shaped by who we are, our experiences, and how we've been understood (or misunderstood) in the past.

Use the prompts below to reflect on aspects of your identity and experience:
Circle what feels relevant, and feel free to add your own on the next page.

Aspect of my identity	How this shapes my learning or experience	So I learn best when...
I'm a young, single mum	Sometimes I need to take calls during class, or I may seem distracted.	My circumstances are considered, and teachers know I'm not being rude or disrespectful.
I am neurodivergent	Group thinking can be hard without time to process first.	I can process ideas on my own before group work.
English isn't my first language	I sometimes need extra time to find the right words.	I'm given patience and time to express myself.
I'm often affected by assumptions about my ability based on my background.	I sometimes feel overlooked or that my contributions aren't valued.	My ideas are welcomed without assumptions, and I'm encouraged to participate equally.

Identity Mapping

Aspect of my identity	How this shapes my learning or experience	So I learn best when...

Learning Needs Inventory

Why do this?

Everyone learns differently. This checklist helps you notice what support helps you thrive without needing to label yourself.

I need support with sensory regulation (e.g. light, sound, textures) ☐

I experience anxiety or mental health needs that affect how I learn ☐

I need physical access considerations (e.g. fatigue, chronic pain, mobility) ☐

I need flexibility around time, energy or attendance ☐

I benefit from trauma-informed spaces (e.g. feeling safe, supported) ☐

I have cultural or religious needs that affect how I learn ☐

Other ☐

Use this space to expand on anything you've selected.
This can help you think through what you need, and may also help staff support you - if you choose to share it.

Reflecting on Intersecting Barriers

Why do this?

Sometimes parts of your identity overlap and affect your experiences. Check out the example below, then try your own on the next page – use words, sketches, or whatever feels right.

Have you ever felt excluded or misunderstood in a learning environment?

1 **Describe what happened**

I was called disruptive and asked to leave the class.

2 **What intersecting barriers were at play?**

I'm a black woman with ADHD

3 **How did it make you feel?**

It makes me feel misunderstood and isolated in class.

4 **What could have helped in that moment?**

If my teachers had more understanding of ADHD and offered flexible ways to participate, instead of assuming I was misbehaving.

5 **Do any values affect what information you share about yourself?**

Stigma in my community means I don't always share my ADHD, even when I need support.

Reflecting on Intersecting Barriers

Have you ever felt excluded or misunderstood in a learning environment?

1 Describe what happened

2 What intersecting barriers were at play?

3 How did it make you feel?

If it's easier pick an emoji 😔 🥶 😤 😵‍💫 🙈

4 What could have helped in that moment?

5 Do any values affect what information you share about yourself?

Access Practices That Support Me

Why do this?

This section helps you name what works for you in learning spaces, so you can feel more confident asking for it or setting it up for yourself.

Complete the sentence:

Use words, sketches, or whatever feels right.

1 **I learn best when...**

(e.g... I can process information quietly before discussing it.)

2 **It helps me when...**

(e.g... instructions are written clearly.)

3 **I feel more confident when...**

(e.g... I can ask questions without judgment.)

4 **I need others to know that...**

(e.g... I work better with short, focused tasks.)

Strengths Mapping

Why do this?

You bring valuable skills and experiences. This section helps you recognise your strengths shaped and enriched by your background.

Recognise your unique strengths, skills and knowledge:

The examples below show things you might be good at and the skills they reflect. Circle any that apply to you, and/or map out your own ideas on the next page.

	Complete the sentence	What skills does this activity require?
I enjoy...	Gardening	Research, problem-solving, observational, patience, organisation
I'm good at ...	Cooking	Time management, creativity, planning, experimental
Others appreciate that I ...	am humorous	Positivity, creativity, cognitive, social, creative thinking
I have supported others with ...	Listening and understanding	Empathy, patience, paying attention, reflecting, being present, open mind

Strengths Mapping

Map out more of your strengths and skills here. Need a hand? Ask your friends, family, or colleagues to help.

	Complete the sentence	What skills does this activity require?
I enjoy...		
I'm good at ...		
Others appreciate that I ...		
I have supported others with ...		

Communicating My Needs

This section provides scripts and guidance to help you share barriers you experience and request changes, if you choose to.

Remember, you are not required to share any personal information.

Scripts for Communicating Needs

Why do this?

It can be hard to explain what you need. These short scripts give you a starting point for expressing yourself clearly and confidently.

Use or adapt these simple scripts to express your learning needs:

The conditions that help me focus and succeed are...

I find it easier to engage when…

One thing I'd like you to know is...

Scripts for Communicating Needs

1

Can we talk about how I work best on tasks like this?

Add more about your ask here:

....

....

....

....

2

Sometimes I feel a bit singled out - is there a way we could approach this that feels more comfortable for me?

Add more about your ask here:

....

....

....

....

3

I'm not sure my experiences are being fully taken into account - could we chat about how to make things work better for me?

Add more about your ask here:

....

....

....

....

Exploring What is Possible

Why do this?

You might not always know what kinds of support are available, asking doesn't mean you're asking for too much.

Try saying:

1 I'm not sure what options are available - could we talk about what is possible?

2 Is there flexibility around how I do this, depending on what works best for me?

Managing Feelings of Being Overlooked or Singled Out

Why do this?

Sometimes teaching approaches don't meet learning needs, it's okay to speak up if you feel excluded or misunderstood.

Try saying:

1 Sometimes I feel a bit singled out, is there a way we could approach this that feels more comfortable for me?

2 I'm not sure my experiences / learning needs are being fully taken into account, could we chat about how to make things work better for me?

Asking for Support

Why do this?

Asking for support can feel risky, especially if you're not sure how it will be received. You deserve to feel safe when expressing your needs.

Try saying:

1 I'm still figuring out what works for me, thank you for being open to talking it through.

2 I know this might be a bit different. I really appreciate your support.

3 I'd like to share something, but I'm a bit nervous about how it might be received.

4 I've had experiences where my concerns weren't taken seriously - can we find a way to talk about this that feels respectful for both of us?

Sharing in Different Ways

Why do this?

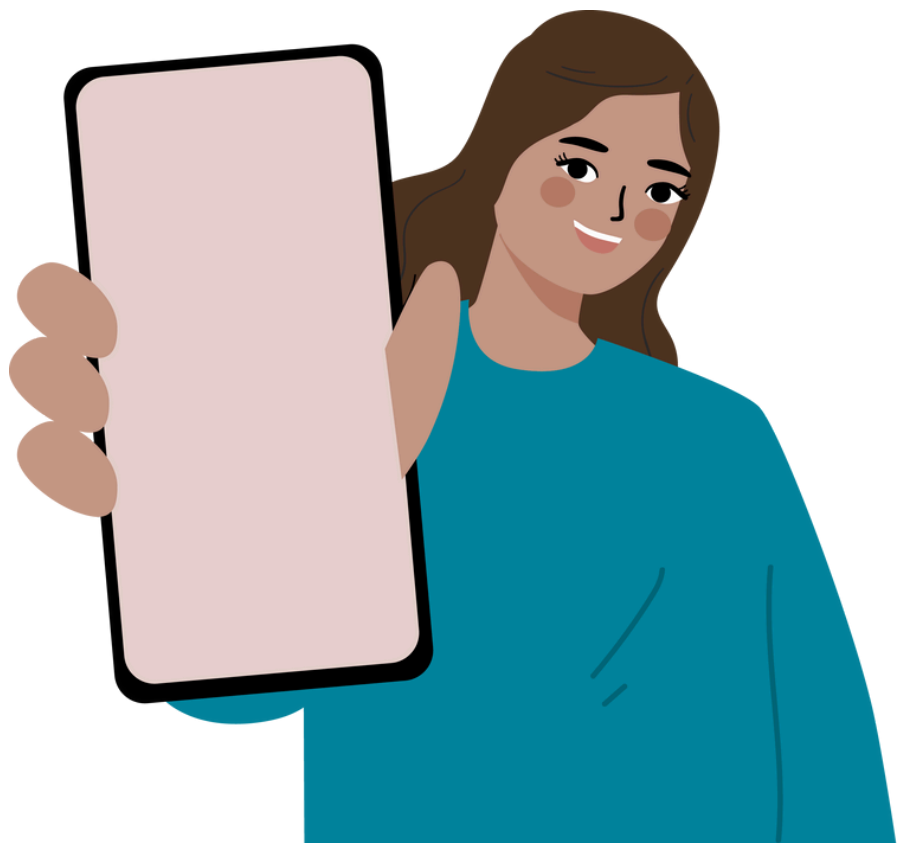You might prefer to communicate in writing, or at a different time - that's okay.

Try saying:

1 I've written some notes about what helps me, can I share them with you?

2 I'm not ready to talk right now, but I'd like to send you something later if that's okay.

What to do if you don't get the response you hoped for

Why this matters:

Asking for what you need takes courage and sometimes, you might not get the reaction you expected. That doesn't mean your needs aren't valid.

This section is here to help you keep going, even if things don't feel easy right away.

If the response is negative or unhelpful:

It's not about you.
Sometimes people respond based on their own limitations, stress, or lack of understanding. That doesn't mean you did anything wrong by speaking up.

Try not to get discouraged.
One person's "no" doesn't mean everyone will respond the same way. Is there someone else (e.g. a different teacher, tutor, or support staff) who might be more open or helpful?
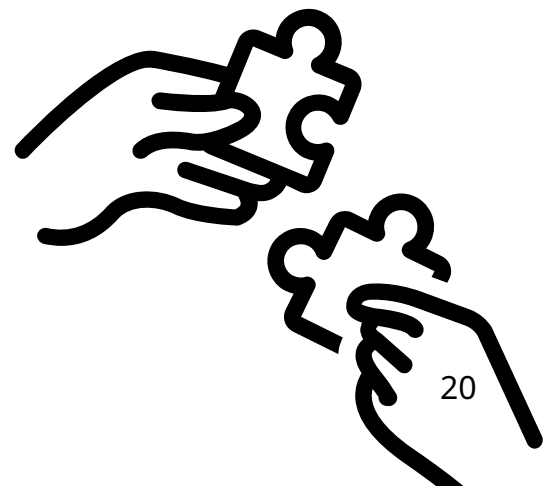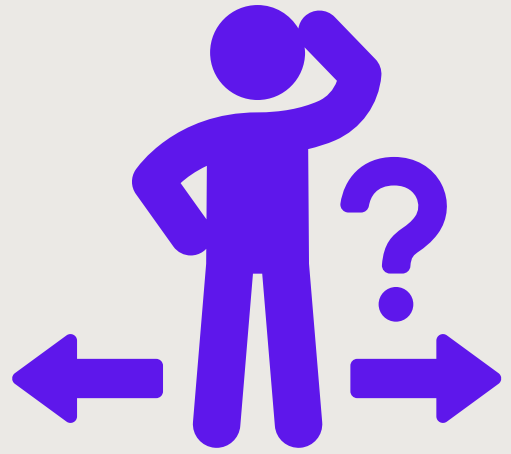
Keep the conversation going.
If a teacher says your request doesn't fit the curriculum or space, you can say:

"Can we work together to explore how to address this, as it might also affect other students?"

Collaboration can open up creative solutions.

Where Else to Turn

This section lists UAL departments and external organisations providing additional or alternative support.

UAL Support

UAL offers wellbeing, disability, and learning support services designed to help you succeed.

We recognise that seeking support can be challenging, and sometimes the services may not meet all your needs. If that happens, it's okay to keep asking questions, explore other options, and set boundaries that feel right for you. You deserve support that works for you.

Creative Shift

UAL's Creative Shift helps underrepresented students grow networks, confidence, and opportunities to succeed in the creative industries.

www.arts.ac.uk/creative-shift

Counselling, Health Advice and Chaplaincy

Support for your physical health, mental health or wellbeing. Appointments are available on college sites in person, online or on the phone.

www.arts.ac.uk/students/student-services/counselling-health-advice-and-chaplaincy

Disability Service

Professional advice and support for students who are disabled and neurodivergent.

www.arts.ac.uk/students/student-services/disability-and-dyslexia

Academic support

Face-to-face tutorials, workshops and other learning development activities to support with your academic skills, including essay writing.

www.arts.ac.uk/students/welcome/your-journey-to-UAL/get-support/skills#academic

Arts Student Union

Wellbeing resources and advice service - www.arts-su.com/support/

Clubs and Societies - www.arts-su.com/communities/groups

External Support

Community groups, peer networks, and charities can also help you understand your rights, build confidence, or talk through next steps. You don't have to figure this out alone.

Mental Health

The Ultimate Graduate Resource

Not just for graduates - this resource has a section dedicated to mental health charities, plus packed with links to support your creative career.

https://app.onlinesurveys.jisc.ac.uk/s/ual/the-ultimate-graduate-resource

Student Minds

Uk's student mental health charity.

www.studentminds.org.uk/

Student Space (from student Minds)

Support services designed for students - whether it's your mental health, your studies, money, housing or relationships.

studentspace.org.uk/support-services

Mind

Student life and mental health information and resources.

www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/student-life/

Top Neurodiverse Charities for Support in the UK.

Finding neurodiverse support can be tough when you are already struggling to cope. Here's a list of registered UK neurodiverse charities.

thruday.com/top-neurodiverse-charities-available-in-the-uk

Resources & Guidance

NeuroTribe UK

A neurodivergent-affirming, multicultural therapy service.

neurotribe.uk/

Disabled Students UK

Resources for disabled students including student guidance and knowing your rights.

disabledstudents.co.uk/resources/

National Autistic Society

Advice on disability discrimination in colleges, universities - www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/education/resolving-differences/disability-discrimination-in-further-and-higher-ed

Advice and guidance directory - https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance

Networks and Mentoring

Atypiqueers

A peer-led support group for LGBT+ neurodiverse individuals in London.

www.atypiqueers.org

One2One Mentoring Network

Tailored one-to-one mentoring and coaching for Black and minority ethnic individuals in higher education or starting their careers.

one2onementoring.com

Arts Emergency

A charity connecting underrepresented young people (ages 16–26) in the arts and humanities with professional mentors to help with career pathways.

www.arts-emergency.org/young-people/get-a-mentor

The 93% Club

Networks for state-educated students and staff, providing access to connections, knowledge, and opportunities traditionally reserved for the privately educated.
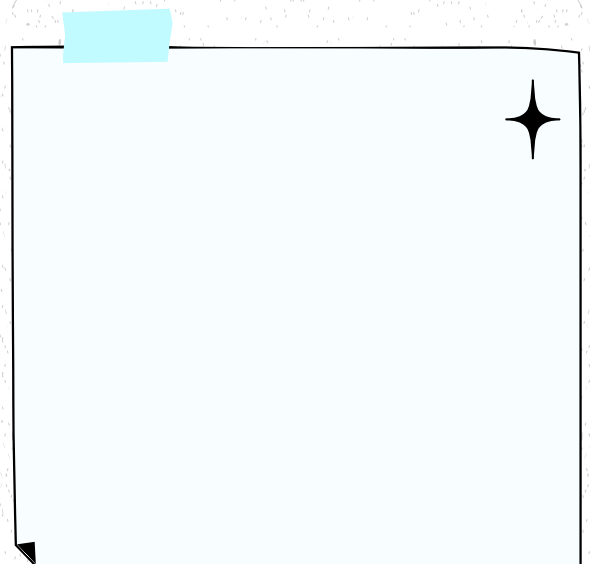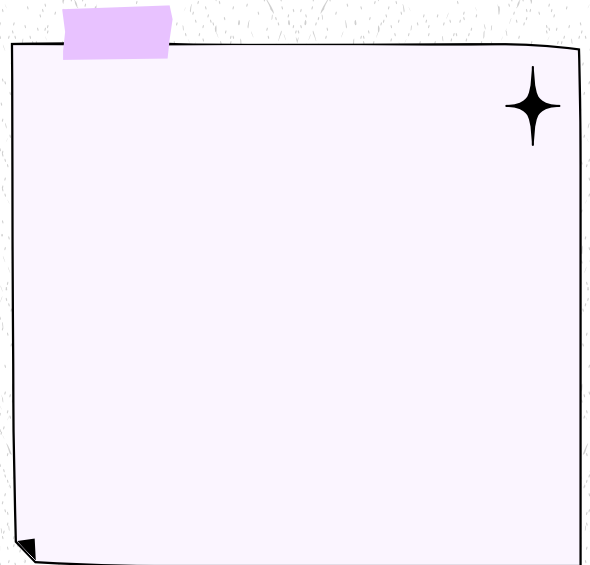
www.93percent.club
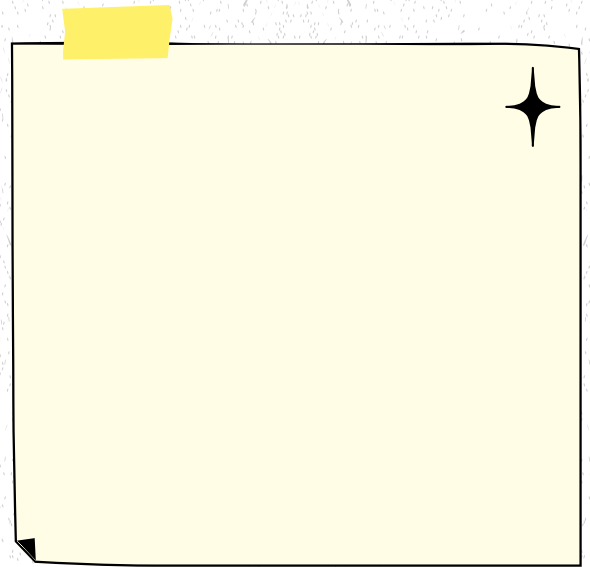
Government Support

Access to Work

Access to Work can help you get or stay in work if you have a physical or mental health condition or disability.
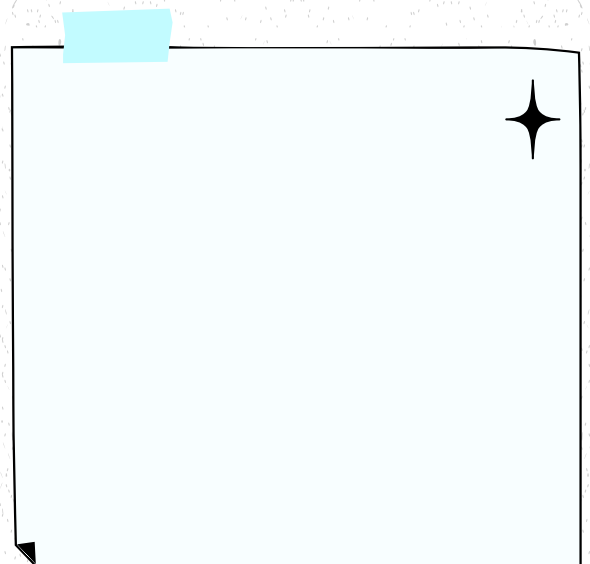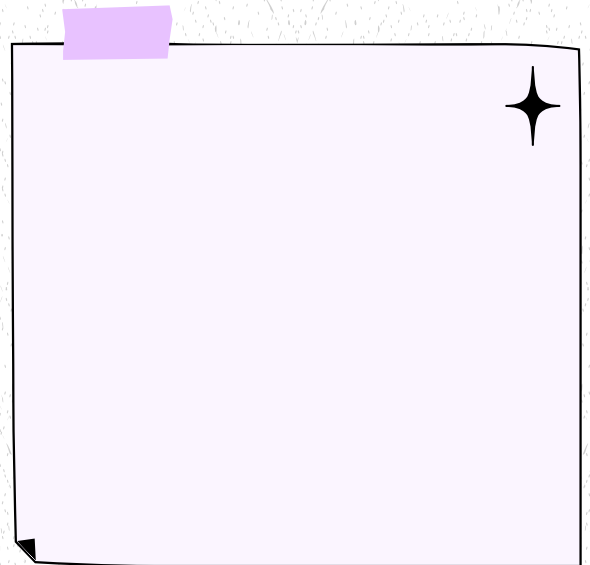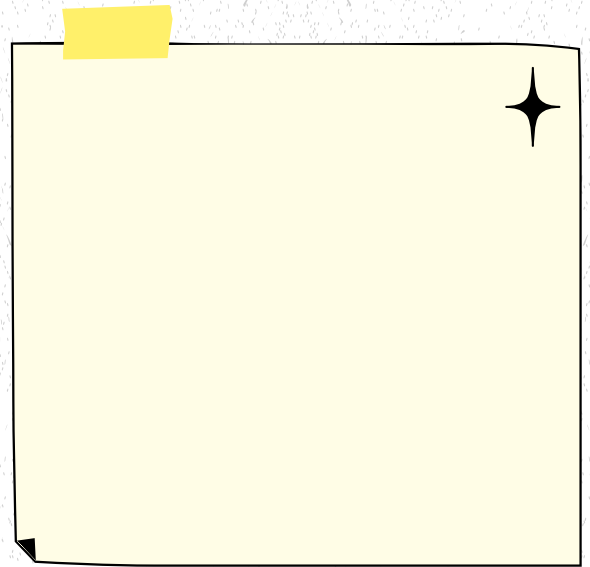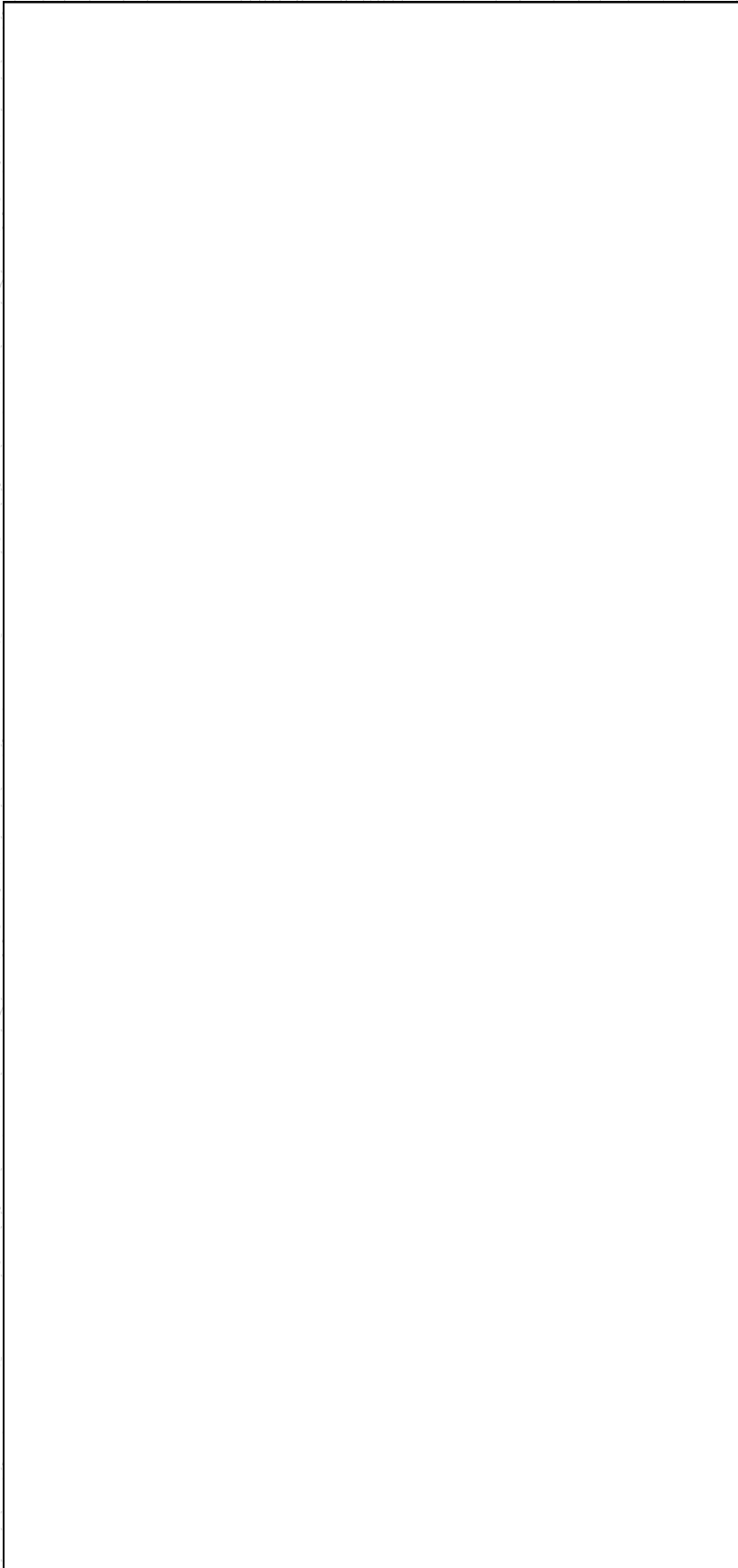
You can apply for:

- a grant to help pay for practical support with your work
- support with managing your mental health at work
- money to pay for communication support at job interviews
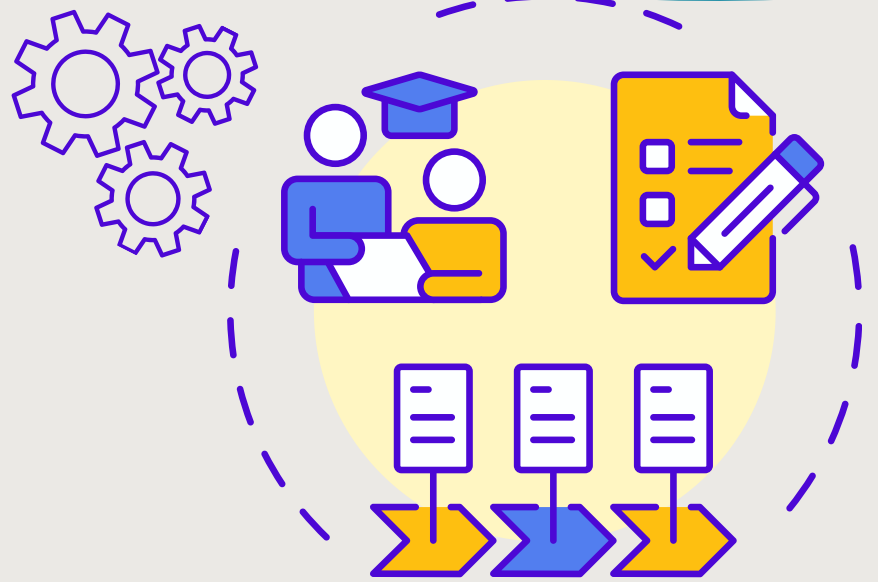
www.gov.uk/access-to-work

Notes :

Notes :

Guidance for Staff

This section offers tips for supporting students with the toolkit, along with optional reflective questions and resources to support your own professional journey.

Guidance for Staff

This toolkit is a student-centred resource intended to affirm identity, encourage reflection, and foster more inclusive teaching and learning environments. Staff can use this to better understand the needs and lived experiences of students - especially those with intersecting identities or neurodiverse traits.

Tip: You may find it useful completing this toolkit for your own reflections!

How to Support Students with the Toolkit

1

Encourage students to use this toolkit in their own time and share only what they are comfortable disclosing.

2

Emphasise that reflection is for self-empowerment – not to dwell on challenges or where a student thinks they're lacking.

3

Be mindful of students who may be new to articulating learning needs or who come from cultural backgrounds where this is unfamiliar.

4

Communicate using an asset-based approach, focusing on strengths, skills, cultural knowledge, and potential, rather than deficits.

5

Make time to listen actively, even if you're short on time or uncertain - because being heard can be as meaningful as any immediate problem solving.

Continue to next page for a deeper look at asset-based communication.

Examples: Deficit vs Asset-Based Phrasing

Here are some practical, student-centred examples illustrating how staff can respond in an asset-based way, especially when students voice difficulties with learning or teaching methods:

Situation	Deficit-Based Language (to Avoid)	Asset-Based Language (Recommended)
A student says they don't understand the material in lectures.	"You're not understanding this because you're not paying attention."	"I can tell you've been engaging - it sounds like this format might be challenging. Let's explore a different way that builds on how you learn best."
A student expresses frustration that tasks feel overwhelming or confusing.	"You need to catch up - you're behind."	"You've already grasped X concept—that's a solid base. How might we use that strength to tackle this part?"
A student is reluctant to participate or share due to lack of confidence.	"You're too shy; you don't speak up enough."	"You bring thoughtful insight when you do share. I'd love to understand more of your ideas, at your pace."
A student feels their perspective isn't valued, particularly experiences relevant to their cultural background.	"that view doesn't really apply here."	"That's a valuable perspective, it brings in another way of thinking that could enrich our discussion. Let's explore how it connects to the topic."

Reflective Questions for Staff

It's understandable to feel that there isn't enough time to give additional attention to individual students. But inclusive practice doesn't always require extra workload - small shifts in how we listen, affirm strengths, and adapt existing approaches can have a big impact. Even brief moments of acknowledgement or signposting to support can make students feel valued, and the adjustments you make for one learner often benefit the whole group.

1 How might you signal to students that their lived experiences are welcomed and valued in your classroom?

2 In what ways can you create space for students to exercise choice and agency in how they learn or demonstrate understanding?

3 Are there patterns in who participates most/least in your sessions? What might that reveal about accessibility or inclusion?

4 How do you currently acknowledge and celebrate the diverse strengths students bring (e.g., multilingualism, community knowledge, creativity, resilience)?

5 When students share challenges, do you balance empathy with clear pathways to support?

6 How might you model vulnerability or reflection to normalise these practices for students?

7 Do you check in with students about whether adjustments are working, rather than assuming?

8 How might you ensure that feedback highlights growth and progress as well as areas for development?

9 In moments of tension or misunderstanding, how can you respond in a way that de-escalates and affirms students' dignity?

10 How are you engaging with your own ongoing learning about equity, inclusion, and neurodiversity?

Support and Networks for Staff

Education Support

A UK charity supporting the mental health and wellbeing of all education staff (including HE). Offers a 24/7 helpline, counselling, and grants.

www.educationsupport.org.uk

London Higher

This forum provides an active discussion space for staff who support Racial Equity learners into and through HE, to share best practice and collaborate on practical projects.

londonhigher.ac.uk/

BAMed

A UK charity supporting greater representation and career progression for Black, Asian and minority ethnic educators through networks, events, and coaching.

www.bameednetwork.com/

Disability Rights UK

 A national pan-disability charity offering resources on workplace rights, accessibility, and inclusive practices. Useful for university staff navigating disability or long-term health conditions.

www.disabilityrightsuk.org/

Neurodiversity in Business (NiB)

A business-led forum that promotes workplace inclusion for neurodivergent staff. Offers resources, events, and best-practice sharing.

www.neurodiversityinbusiness.org/

Advance HE – Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI)

Runs national programmes, research, and resources on race equality, including the Race Equality Charter for universities. Staff can engage via events and professional development opportunities.

www.advance-he.ac.uk/equality-charters/race-equality-charter

UAL Support and Resources for Staff

Conflict in Learning Spaces Resource library

UAL and sector resources and material around conflict and arranged in 3 themed layouts:

- Engaging Positionality, Power and Institutional Dynamics
- Tools and Reflections Grounded in Student Experience
- Practising Care, Compassion and Critical Engagement

artslondon.padlet.org/schow/conflict-in-learning-spaces-2ji4h5tdj111sa4a

UAL student learning and engagement

The Student Learning and Engagement Team supports undergraduates at risk of disengagement by reaching out, understanding their needs, and connecting them with courses and services to help them succeed and stay on track.

Get in touch with the SLE Project Coordinators if:
- you would like to talk about learning and engagement support on your course
- you would like to find out more about the SLE work.

canvas.arts.ac.uk/sites/explore/SitePage/231581/ual-student-learning-and-engagement-pilot

Disabled and Neurodiverse Staff Network (DSN)

The Disabled and Neurodiverse Staff Network (DSN) is an independent group for disabled and neurodiverse staff, allies, parents, and carers. It provides peer support, shares experiences, runs events, raises concerns, highlights good practice, and contributes to UAL policies to improve inclusion.

canvas.arts.ac.uk/sites/explore/SitePage/46456/disabled-and-neurodiverse-staff-network-dsn

References

Scan the QR code or <u>click here</u> to explore the sources that helped shape the Mapping Me Toolkit. You might find them inspiring or useful for further exploration.

ual:

creative shift

shaping
diversity
in the
creative
industries

🌐 **arts.ac.uk/creativeshift**

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