

STUDENT DISABILITY POLICY





Title:	Student Disability Policy
Policy Owner:	Head of Education (with coordination from Head of Operations)
Policy Approval and Review:	This Policy was agreed by the Board of Governors in June 2026 and will be reviewed at the end of each academic year or more often as required.
Date made Effective:	Academic Year 2026-27
Date of last Review:	
External Verifier:	Aisling Owens, NRAC Consultant BSc (Arch) BArch (Queens) RIBA

1.1. Policy Statement

The purpose of Belfast School of Theology (BST) is to be a welcoming community in which God works to form his people by integrating spiritual, academic and practical education rooted in his Word, for growth in Christian life and service, locally and around the World.

In light of this purpose, BST is firmly committed to fostering an accessible and inclusive environment that welcomes individuals of diverse backgrounds and abilities. BST will not treat disabled students less favourably because of their disability and seeks to promote equality and diversity in all aspects of school community life and firmly believe that these values should be promoted and encouraged at all programme levels and in all programme areas. As stated, this ethos of accessibility is underpinned by legislation, which prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities. It places anticipatory duties on educational institutions and service providers to make reasonable adjustments to prevent substantial disadvantage, and to accommodate the range of needs of disabled individuals. In practice, this means that BST is not only committed to actively discouraging discrimination against individuals with disabilities, but also to promoting accessibility and the provision of equal opportunities for those wishing to work and study at BST.

The following policy and procedures apply to all students enrolled for courses at BST including undergraduate and postgraduate, full time and part time and it addresses any disability that would put a student at a disadvantage in learning or teaching activities, including medical conditions and/or specific learning difficulties.

1.2. Legal Framework

This policy has been written with reference to and in line with the current Northern Ireland legislative framework contained within the Disability and Discrimination Act 1995 and 2005 (DDA) and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Order 2005 (SENDO). Reference has also been made to the Equality Act 2010, which whilst currently only applicable in GB, contains principles of good practice which may become UK wide policy in the future.

1.3 Roles and Responsibilities

All staff share responsibility for creating an inclusive and accessible learning environment.

- Senior Leadership Team ensure strategic alignment and resourcing.
- Programme Leaders embed inclusive practices in curriculum and assessment.
- Teaching Staff implement inclusive methods and follow Support Plans.
- Disability Support Officer assesses needs, coordinates support and monitors implementation.

- IT Coordinator ensures technology meets needs where required and that any AT (Assistive Tech) is fully supported.

The Head of Education (with coordination from the head of Operations) will review the Disability Policy annually or more often as required and make recommendations for change when necessary.

Behaviour or actions that are contrary to the provisions of this Policy are grounds for disciplinary action.

1.4. Definition and Core Principles

BST follows the social model of disability which views disability as a result of societal barriers and exclusion, rather than solely from an individual's impairment.

The social model of disability distinguishes between impairment and disability. An impairment refers to a physical, sensory, intellectual, or psychological condition, while disability arises when society fails to accommodate these differences, creating barriers that prevent full participation in everyday life. Unlike the medical model, which focuses on "fixing" the individual, the social model emphasizes that disability is socially constructed through inaccessible environments, negative attitudes, and institutional policies.

Types of Barriers

Disability, according to this model, is caused by various societal obstacles:

- Physical barriers: Inaccessible buildings, lack of ramps, or poorly designed public spaces.
- Attitudinal barriers: Stereotypes, prejudices, or assumptions that disabled people "cannot do" certain activities.
- Institutional barriers: Policies, laws, or systems that fail to include or actively disadvantage people with impairments.

Implications

Adopting the social model encourages BST as an institution to:

- Design inclusive environments and services.
- Challenge negative attitudes and stereotypes.
- Promote independence, equity, and human rights for disabled people.

In essence, the social model reframes disability as a problem of society, not the individual, emphasizing that removing barriers can transform impairments into abilities and enable full participation in social, economic, and cultural life.

1.5. BST Commitment

Belfast School of Theology is committed to providing equal access for all. BST has an anticipatory duty to make reasonable adjustments to enable students with a disability to access the range of study opportunities and events which BST provides. BST will plan ahead for our disabled students.

This commitment includes:

- The provision of accessible information regarding the full range of courses and events provided by BST.
- Safe and inclusive access to campus for all as far as is reasonable and practicable.
- Promoting informed and constructive attitudes to disability amongst all sections of the BST community.
- Recognising the need to adjust practices and procedures to create equality of opportunity for people with disabilities.
- The need to accommodate, as far as is reasonably practicable, all qualified applicants irrespective of disability.



- Cooperation between BST and groups or organisations which represent and/or support people with disabilities.
- Ensuring that appropriate staff training and guidance is provided.
- Raising the profile of disability awareness amongst all staff and students.
- Working with university partner institutions to ensure that students with a disability have access to the full range of services open to them.

Overview of Disability Procedures

The following are areas in which considerations regarding disability are relevant.

1.6. BST Print Publications

BST is committed to ensuring that as far as is practicably possible, all documents produced for internal and external use will be produced in an accessible format or alternatively ensuring that an accessible format is available on request.

1.7 Digital Accessibility

Digital accessibility means making BST digital products, content and services accessible and usable for all. Everyone should be able to access the same information and use equipment, regardless of their needs and situation. We will address wider digital accessibility as well as personalised assistive technology on a case-by-case basis which may include referral to disabled student allowance.

1.8 Admissions

BST is committed to ensuring students are recruited and selected on the basis of their academic merit and will not refuse to admit an applicant on the grounds of disability without fully considering the specific support or facilities required for the applicant to undertake their course of study at the school.

In very exceptional cases, the school may not admit an otherwise qualified applicant if reasonable adjustments cannot be practically provided by the school. The school encourages students to declare a disability at the earliest opportunity in order that they can be made aware of possible entitlements and support available to them.

1.9 Assessment

BST is committed to ensuring that any student with a disability that may affect their performance in an examination or assessment exercise is not put at a disadvantage compared to other candidates. Reasonable adjustments will be made to compensate for any disadvantage, without affecting the validity of the assessment. Any request for special consideration in relation to examination and assessment procedures must be supported by medical or other evidence. Advice and assistance on obtaining such evidence can be provided by the Academic Registrar.

1.10 Student Retention

If a student acquires a disability whilst they are already studying at the school, they will be provided with support as may reasonably be possible to enable them to maintain or return to their programme of study or help them explore alternate programmes. The school will make reasonable adjustments to facilitate the continuation of the student's studies.

1.11 BST Premises

We will ensure BST premises provide safe, convenient, and unassisted access to all occupants and visitors.

1.12 Fitness to Study Policy

The Fitness to Study Policy which is available on the school website has been developed with regard to equality, diversity and inclusion legislation. Disability does not preclude application to study nor should it disadvantage students with disabilities in the assessment of Fitness to Study.

The Fitness to Study Policy sets out the scope, application, and principles to be applied in all cases. Applicants are required to declare conditions which could be viewed as having a potential impact on their Fitness to Study.

1.13 Examples of Reasonable Adjustments

It should be noted that reasonable adjustments must not affect the validity or reliability of assessment outcomes, nor must they give the learner an unfair academic advantage over other learners. Reasonable adjustments must not impact on any competence standards and must be permissible and practical for the particular circumstances in which they are implemented. All reasonable adjustments will be considered on a case-by-case basis taking into account a variety of factors.

BST Print Publications

BST will ensure as far as is practical that all print documents are created in an accessible format or alternatively ensure an accessible format is available on request.

For example, all staff will be encouraged to use a minimum font size of 12 points and choose sans-serif fonts like Arial or Helvetica and to avoid italics and underlining.

Digital Accessibility

Hardware and software used by students will have accessibility features available such as text to speech and dictation, caption settings, zoom and adjustment settings and translation and language tools and support provided for those who use them. We will consider accessibility when commissioning and building our website and look at alternative formats for all communications, including email attachments, text messages and social media.

Teaching and Learning Support

This form of support might include the provision of materials in accessible formats (e.g. ancillary aids, assistive technology, large print or coloured paper etc), permission to record lectures and notes provided in advance of class etc.

Examination Support and In-course Assessment

This form of support might include additional time, rest breaks, access to a quiet room under supervision, a scribe reader or interpreter (if approved and financed by Disabled Student Allowance), use of computer, recording of questions, assignment deadlines extension.

Library Services

BST library is committed to a policy of equal access to information/resources for all students and every effort will be made to respond to individual requests in a positive and proactive manner. This form of support might include extensions of short-term loan materials, loan of reference materials if viewing/reading equipment is required, reservation and/or renewal of ordinary loan material by telephone or email, one to one library induction tours and electronic resources with added accessibility features.

Award Ceremonies

All students have an entitlement to attend and participate in BST award ceremonies and arrangements can be made to ensure that access and support measures are in place, for example, wheelchair access or sign language during ceremonies.

Access and Egress

BST premises are accessible to students with mobility issues. There are wheelchair accessible lifts, doors, accessible toilets and designated blue badge parking spaces.

Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans (PEEP)



A PEEP is a customized plan that will be designed to help students who face challenges during an emergency evacuation. Unlike general evacuation plans, PEEPs focus on the specific needs of the student, detailing the assistance required, procedures to follow, and any equipment necessary to ensure safe evacuation. They are essential for providing equal access to safety for students with impairments and are a critical part BST's preparedness in emergencies.

1.14 Disability Disclosure

Students are encouraged to disclose disabilities at the earliest opportunity to enable timely support planning. Disclosure may be made confidentially to the Disability Support Officer or any other staff member, who must refer the student (with consent) to the Disability Support Officer.

Students control how much information is shared and with whom. Consent will be sought from the student before sharing information beyond the DSO unless there is serious concern for the student's safety and wellbeing, or that of others.

All personal data will be processed in line with the Data Protection Act (2018) and UK GDPR.

A student has the right not to disclose their disability or request that their disability is not shared with other staff across the school. The staff member informed, has a responsibility to document this in accordance with current data legislation, and has a responsibility to ensure that the disabled person is made aware of the impact this may have on making reasonable adjustments.

1.15 Harassment and Discrimination

The school has a legal duty to have due regard to the need to eliminate harassment and discrimination of students related to disabilities or the disabilities of others associated with them. Complaints will be taken seriously and dealt with as appropriate under the Student Complaints Procedure.

1.16 Monitoring and Review

The Academic Registrar and Disability Support Officer will maintain records of all students and potential students who declare a disability and will record details of support provided.

The School Business Manager will review the Disability Policy annually or more often as required and make recommendations for change when necessary.

1.17. Disabled Student's Allowance (DSA)

The Disabled Student's Allowance (DSA) is a supplementary allowance available to students who may have extra expenses, as a direct result of their disability, arising from students who may, as a direct result of a mental health problem, long-term illness or any other disability, incur extra study-related expenses when attending a higher education course. The allowance is designed to help disabled students benefit fully from their courses and it is not means-tested. Please refer to our 'Accessing Learning Support' document for more detailed information.

1.18. Accessing Learning Support

Prospective or existing students should contact the Disability Support Officer (dso@bst.ac.uk) if further information is required regards accessing learning support.