Diversity & inclusion in Archaeology: a personal experience, by Jonathan Charmley

Question from Rob (Hosfield, currently Head of Department): How do you identify? Briefly describe how your identity (e.g. disability) impacts you in relation to your undergraduate course (this might be in classroom teaching, fieldwork, as well as socially etc).

General:

I primarily identify as an archaeologist!

I don't want to let my disability define who I am.

But my sight loss does impact me, e.g. how I see the world and how I interact with the Department.

It takes me a lot longer to process information (e.g. finding my bearings with reading, jumping around sources etc). In the classroom, I need to sit near the board or have pre-provided slides etc open on my laptop.

There is also the issue of fatigue (from my brain injury), so managing my time and fatigue is important for me.

Timetabling can impact on my module choices, e.g., if modules are scheduled back-to-back.

I can struggle to read numbers of doors for teaching rooms.

Library staff support me because I can't browse the shelves.

Fieldwork:

I discussed field school options with Amanda (and ruled out Islay due to logistical issues, e.g. potentially being evacuated to a hospital on the mainland).

We (Amanda and I) agreed on an extra day off at Cookham (Thursday) and also not excavating all day (e.g. I worked on finds or with visitors in the afternoons), to support my management of energy levels.

I did a presentation on sight loss and its impacts on me when on site (through the use of sight-loss simulation glasses), enabling Amanda and Gabor to see the site through my eyes (and other students and trench supervisors also experienced this). This led to positive changes (e.g. a greater level of understanding of my sight condition and its implications, such as difficulties when using a dumpy level over long distances), resulting in adjustments of my specific tasks and roles (e.g. holding the staff rather than operating the dumpy level when taking long-range readings).

Another change was that I didn't excavate alone (because some tasks involve subtle visual changes, e.g. in sediment colours) and I didn't fill out context cards (because of the small text) alone.

The site will also use bright paint in 2024 to mark the edge of the trenches (as a safety measure) – this highlights a change that someone with depth perception would not necessarily think of.

I didn't feel there were negative outcomes of others being aware of my sight loss, and while my activities sometimes changed (e.g. no mattocking) I felt I was always in a position where I could make full contributions.

Teaching:

It would have been interesting to take the artefacts module (AR2FAO) after my sight loss (I took it prior to that), given the small artefacts (e.g. lithic artefacts) that are the focus of that module.

I've had to explain my specific condition to module convenors etc (which isn't the case for, e.g., students with dyslexia).

I came back to UoR in Spring 2022 to discuss returning to University, and had a meeting with Chris Parsons and Amanda Clarke, which was productive and we all started to work through the requirements of returning. However I was still a little uncertain of what to expect, what I would need, and what would be done to support me, in part because it was difficult to know certain things prior to re-starting (e.g. what my energy levels would be like).

Some tasks took a long time to sort out (e.g. it took about a year to get a parking permit) and needed high-level involvement (e.g. Elizabeth McCrum).

My initial teaching was on module AR2F17 (Forensic Archaeology & Crime Scene Analysis) and the module convenor Dr Claire Hodson was very supportive – e.g. providing digital resources and one-and-one support (to supplement the practicals).

Question from Rob: "Was that good practice (e.g. slides always being made available prior to classes) consistently shared with other staff?"

Answer: Yes and no. I sometimes needed to re-state my needs and provide/discuss assurances (for both parties – i.e. me and the member of staff) that everything can work smoothly.

Question from Rob: What EDI activities, initiatives or resources have you found useful ?

There is some recognition of my needs – e.g. preferential access to Quiet Time (e.g. at 3Sixty).

But not too much of the EDI material is aimed at students with physical disabilities (probably because of a lack of 'demand'). Much more of it is focused on neurodiversity, race/ethnicity issues, gender/sexuality etc (because of greater demand).

It is interesting that staff I've chatted to (e.g. Philippa Walton) also felt that there was little attention to physical disabilities in their staff training.

I have had less interaction with University-level support. But there has been good support, e.g. by Food Outlets (re: making digital menus available both before visiting and during visits).

Question from Rob: What EDI activities, initiatives or resources do you think could be improved or done better over the next 5 years?

There could be clearer communication of what support will be put in place and how things will operate.

Could staff do further awareness training (e.g. around sight loss in my case)? Where possible could staff adjustments and support be more proactive and less reactive (e.g. with regards to font sizes/colour on slides)?

Question from Rob: Are there any EDI training, activities, initiatives or resources externally you have found particularly useful?

Yes. I received support by the Guernsey Blind Association. In Reading there was external support from Berkshire Vision (which came through the Reading Association of the Blind). I would highlight the importance of specialist external support, alongside support in the Department.

Question from Rob: Are there any EDI training, activities, initiatives or resources you'd like to see SAGES staff (including those in leadership roles) undertake / engage with in the coming years?

I would love to do a sight-loss session for the Department, with the sight-loss simulation glasses, that highlighted challenging day-to-day tasks (e.g. asking participants to find a specific book in the library).

Question from Rob: Is there anything else you'd like to feedback to the Athena Swan Self-Assessment team?

The Department has been great with my return.

With many thanks to Archaeology student Jonathan Charmley, for generously giving up his time to talk about his experiences.

Note: Jonathan's feedback to the Field School Director (Amanda Clarke) in Summer 2023 led directly to changes being implemented at the Field School in 2024 (e.g. introducing modified context cards with a larger/more accessible font).

Rob Hosfield (Head of Department), 11th April 2024