# Access King's 2019 – 2020

## How far have we come?  How far have we got to go?

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Access King's is King's College London's Staff Disability Inclusion Community Network and is one of the five Staff Community Networks in the University.  Access King's held its first event in October 2019 and was officially launched one month later as part of the University's UK Disability History Month celebrations.  This report highlights the Network's areas of focus and its achievements during its inaugural year, along with its priorities and aspirations for the future.  The report is published to coincide with UK Disability History Month 2020, the theme of which is aptly "Access: How far have we come?  How far have we to go?"

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# Foreword by Access King's Senior Champion Renuka Fernando

It has been an unprecedented 2020. None of us knew what to expect. We felt the borders between our work and home shift with working remotely, coming onto campus, and caring for our loved ones. During times of uncertainty, Access by default is more important than ever.

We shine collectively when our workplace centres on diversity of mindsets and inclusive experiences. Research shows that inclusivity means greater innovation and leads to high-performing teams. As a person with dyslexia myself, I know professionally I am at my best and contribute the most when dyslexia is welcomed as a skill-set, not as a point of indifference.

Access King's brought accessibility front and centre over the past eight months. As a network, Access King's drove a two-way conversation across colleagues and our executive on what accessibility really means for people, particularly during COVID. It's meant a people-centre approach and mindful acts, from lip reading and face masks to processes on return to campus.

Access King's is about our Abilities. It is about *really* seeing people and embracing a workplace built on empathy and connection. King's is for everyone and Access King's is about making that happen.

I have never been prouder to sponsor such a brilliant cross King's network of People across students, academics, and Professional Services.


Kind regards,


Dr Renuka Fernando

Director Corporate Strategy

Access King's Sponsor

# Highlights

- Access King's was launched with a panel discussion on leadership, to coincide with the 2019 UK Disability History Month and International Day for Persons with Disabilities
- The Network gained huge momentum with a 7-fold increase in membership over its legacy staff disability group
- Access King's ran a successful events programme with positive feedback including online events
- Numerous events and activities were held that encompass relevant, helpful and interesting topics
- Several strategic areas of focus were developed, which was aided by a Purple Sky Thinking event
- The Network swiftly defined clear terms of reference and developed guiding principles, a mission statement, and a membership voice
- An active Access King's Management Committee of 12 members was established
- Dr Renuka Fernando joined Access King's as its Senior Champion
- The Network fed into the Return to Campus work, ensuring that messaging was clear, reducing anxiety and strengthening emphasis on safety and wellbeing
- Members of the Access King's Committee were influential in the introduction and support of Inclusive campus badges

# Guiding Principles, Mission and Network Voice

## Guiding Principles

- **A**ccessibility
- **C**ommunity
- **C**onfidentiality
- **E**mpowerment
- **S**upport
- **S**uccess for all

## Mission

The Network's mission is to be a conduit for access to support, communities, peers, advice, guidance, resources and spaces.  The Network aims to bring positive change and improve opportunities for its Network Voice at the University.  The Network

works closely with the Diversity & Inclusion team in Human Resources and other partners, to build a university where equity and equality of opportunity exist for everyone.

**The voices Access King's wishes to amplify**

- People with disabilities
- People with long-term and / or restrictive health conditions
- People with caring responsibilities
- People with an interest in disability inclusion
- People who manage or work / study alongside those with disabilities or long-term / restrictive health conditions

# Communications

A breadth of communication tools has been used to promote all events and initiatives, e.g.:

- Articles published on King's intranet front page & in King's Essentials, e.g.:
  - Meet Access King's Chairs (October 2019)
  - Access King's launch event (November 2019)
  - Disability History Month publicity (December 2019)
  - Access King's announce Dr Renuka Fernando as senior champion (May 2020)
- Articles published on the Diversity Digest blog, e.g.:
  - Disability History Month: King's Award (November 2019)
  - Wellbeing Month: Being part of the King's community (January 2020)
  - Top tips for accessible online meetings (May 2020)
  - Top tips for communicating whilst wearing a face covering (August 2020)
- Use of email newsletters and social media (Twitter @AcessKings, Yammer) to provide information and promote events and initiatives e.g. #PurpleLightUp
- Teams messaging
- Access King's Outlook email address set up
- Access King's webpage
- Diversity & Inclusion newsletters

A working group, led by Kathrine Horsham from King's Entrepreneurship Institute, is developing a logo for Access King's. Feedback on the final design options will be sought from the membership in early 2021.

## Membership Management Committee and Senior Champion

Access King's has 170 members as of 1$^{st}$ November 2020, as measured by its Teams site membership list. This is up from 55 in September 2019, shortly after this site was established by Access King's, and up from 24, the membership figure for the legacy Disability Inclusion Staff Group.

Access King's Co-Chairs were appointed in April 2019 with a remit to develop the then Disability Inclusion Staff Group into a wider King's Community Network. Access King's now has an active Management Committee of 12 members. The Committee meets regularly and role profiles for various positions have been developed, i.e. Co-Chair (Community), Co-Chair (Strategy), Business Secretary, Communications Officer, Events & Social Co-ordinator, Membership Liaison Officer and Project Co-ordinator.

The Network appointed Dr Renuka Fernando as Senior Champion, and Dr Fernando has supported Access King's, championing for disability inclusion at senior meetings including the review of Return to Campus policies and the development of the Individual Risk Assessment.

## Strategic Focus

Following discussions with members, Access King's set itself an extensive set of goals for 2019-2021. This was aided by a Purple Sky Thinking (Blue Sky Thinking on a disability theme) exercise, whereby members met to develop more aspirational targets. A clear set of goals was established, which the Co-Chairs appreciated was ambitious and, in places, longitudinal. However, it was important not to lose sight of issues that were important to the Network's members.

**2019-2021 Goals**

- To raise awareness of Access King's throughout the University, in order to promote its availability to potential members

- To maximise the contribution of our members to inform decision making at King's with the voice of the network in mind
- To (i) promote the provision of and (ii) increase the awareness and knowledge of accessible spaces and routes throughout King's to help ensure individual needs are accommodated
- To (i) promote the provision of and (ii) increase the awareness and knowledge of accessible materials and support / tools available for staff / students at King's, to help ensure individual needs are addressed
- To ensure all staff have an increased awareness of relevant support and guidance available at King's, putting forward appropriate improvements
- To ensure all staff have an increased awareness of relevant academic knowledge available at King's
- To identify and improve the visibility of role models to provide inspiration and build confidence
- To add value by improving knowledge and awareness of issues faced by our network members
- To explore and promote established and new training options, aligned to our network voice
- To create a network that fosters a supportive community for its members

Having limited and voluntary resources, the Network has focused its work in particular areas over 2019-2020, to facilitate progress across several goals through specific actions.


## Events

The Network has run a successful series of meet-ups and events that have encompassed relevant, helpful and interesting topics.  Prior to March 2020, face-to-face meet-ups were held:

- Purple Sky Thinking (21/10/2019) – blue sky thinking on a disability theme, lots of new and creative ideas on potential improvements for work and study spaces
- Network launch (04/12/2019) - panel discussion on disability & accessibility in a Higher Education context, in line with the 2019 UK Disability History Month theme of Leadership, Resistance & Culture.  The launch event was also held to celebrate the UN International Day of Persons with Disabilities (03/12/2019)
- Much Taboo About Nothing (joint event with Proudly King's; 14/02/2020) – Q&A discussion on relationships in the context of disability and LGBTQ+

From April onwards, the Network's meet-ups moved online, and topics were introduced that focussed on responses to the pandemic:

- Neurodiversity awareness (20/04/2020)
- Working from home with a disability – transition experiences (29/04/2020)
- Being active during lockdown (12/05/2020)
- Work from home wellbeing (21/05/2020)
- A space to talk (17/06/2020)
- Traveling to & from campus post-lockdown (24/07/2020)
- Creating accessible digital teaching materials (14/09/2020)
- Do one thing for World Mental Health Day (09/10/2020)

Access King's also participated in "Making work better with Community Networks at King's" online drop-in (13/05/2020) to celebrate Staff Networks Day.  The various events have raised the profile and awareness of the Network and disability inclusion throughout King's.  Moreover, importantly, they have provided support and an ethos of community at a challenging time.


**Maximising the contribution of members to inform decision making**

Access King's Co-Chairs sit on the King's Equality Diversity & Inclusion Forum (EDIF), which reports into the Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Committee (EDIC).  The EDIC, in turn, reports into King's Senior Management Team.  Membership of EDIF has provided opportunities to feedback, with the voice of the Network in mind, on key issues such as accessibility and Equality Analysis.  The Forum has also enabled an opportunity to feedback on King's response to the pandemic, encompassing home working equipment provision, dealing with uncertainty, communications, Return to Campus processes and mental health & wellbeing support.  The introduction of the new EDI governance structure has provided a platform for the Network to add value as a community by improving the knowledge and awareness of issues faced by its members, whilst also influencing decision making.  Furthermore, the Access King's Co-Chairs are updated on the King's Disability Inclusion Action Plan, which resides with the Equality, Diversity & Inclusion function in Human Resources. With an opportunity to provide comments.

Access King's is represented on the King's Flexible Working Group, which ensures the views of the Network are considered in an area that is highly relevant for persons with a disability.  The Flexible Working Group is a King's-wide group that

is tied in with King's Athena SWAN submission, and which aims to make flexible working available equitably to all staff and to make recommendations for improving the working experience of all.

The Co-Chairs represented Access King's at the Principal's Networks round table meeting, communicating on the Network's guiding principles, mission, voice, important issues, events, and social media platforms.

Members of the Committee were influential in the introduction of inclusive campus badges, to allow the individual, without explanation, to make people aware that they are exempt from wearing a face covering, or from other measures in place.  The available badges are "Exempt from face coverings", "Priority lift access", "I sign BSL" and "I'm a lip reader".

## Promoting the provision and awareness of accessible materials

Initiatives have taken place to increase the knowledge of accessible materials and the support / tools available at King's, to help ensure individual needs are addressed.  Training sessions were facilitated on TextHelp Read & Write and Office365 accessibility features.

## Exploring and promoting new training options

Access King's is collaborating with Dr Hester Velthuis from the IoPPN on the development of a new WorkRite training module on neurodiversity.  This interactive and engaging e-learning training course will be available to all staff and students, and will teach about hidden disabilities, disabilities and the  law, and the benefits of inclusive practices.  The core aims of the module include helping people who experience difficulties functioning optimally in their role or who consider themselves neurodivergent and lowering the boundary for an individual to ask for adjustments.

A Knowledge Beats learning session has been provided by Abbie Russell on Disability & Neurodiversity Inclusion at Work and Beyond.  Knowledge Beats are interactive learning sessions for staff across the Health Faculties.

**Seeking feedback from members**

A major membership survey was conducted in April 2020. The survey has provided several recommendations, to help guide future direction.

**Establishing external links**

Access King's has established links with the National Association of Disabled Staff Networks (NADSN), the London Regional Network of the NADSN, the Business Disability Forum, University College London, the University of Brighton, the University of Kent and the University of Reading.

# The Future

Access King's will build upon its strong foundation with a continued focus on its activities and strategic initiatives highlighted in this report, but with a greater emphasis on the following highest priority goals:

- Workplace adjustments provided as standard with funding system in place
- Flexible working options provided as standard
- Universal disability awareness training options available
- Safe routes & building evacuation for wheelchair users and an improvement in physical accessibility where needed

The Network will also place priority on the following activities, which consider the recommendations emanating from the membership survey. These activities should enhance many aspects of the Network.

- Initiate a regular newsletter which highlights major news, activities and events, whilst continuing to use Teams and Yammer for keeping the internal Network conversation going. The first Newsletter in this format was recently circulated.
- Continue to develop a Network Logo
- Continue with the development of a new website, to effectively sign-post to information, both internally and externally
- Build social connection opportunities between members
- Maintain remote ways to connect even as people return to campus

# Disability History Month 2020

UK Disability History Month (UKDHM) is an annual event that creates a platform to focus on the history of the struggle for equality and human rights for disabled people.  The 2020 UKDHM runs from 18th November to 18th December and this year's theme is "Access: How far have we come?  How far have we to go?"  Access King's has organised an extensive programme of events for this year's UKDHM:

- Ableism in Academia[3] - a cross-Institutional event with guest speakers: Dr Nicole Brown (University College London), Dr Jennifer Leigh (University of Kent) and Dr Carla Finesilver (King's College London)
- Access King's with AccessAble
- Launch of the King's Accessible Branded Templates (this report uses the accessible version of the branded report template)
- Lockdown 2.0  - Staying Connected
- GTAs and Teaching Staff Training – Improving Accessibility and Inclusion: Disabilities and Neurodiversities
- Disability Histories, Disability Futures
- Access King's – Ask Us a Question
- From Feeling to Knowing

## Purple Light Up

Access King's continues to support #PurpleLightUp on 3rd December to coincide with the UN International Day for Persons with Disibilities, and to reshape the narrative around disability and demonstrate that inclusive organisations create inclusive societies.

## Conclusions

To answer the questions posed in the title of this report, Access King's has made a rapid positive impact on the King's  community, providing a conduit for access to support, communities, peers, advice, guidance, resources and spaces.  However, although the Network has come a long way in a short time, there remains a long way to go as it aims to use its influence, and help bring further and significant

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[3] Brown, N. and Leigh, J. (Eds.). (2020). *Ableism in Academia Theorising lived experiences of disabilities and chronic illnesses in higher education*. UCL Press.

positive change and improve opportunities for its Network Voice. We look forward to the progressive evolution of Access King's and continuing to work with all of our partners.

## Acknowledgements

The Access King's Co-Chairs wish to thank the following for their support and contributions:

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