

As an older student with both mental and physical disabilities, I have lived experience of and have witnessed first and second hand what life can be like at Hartpury and in the “real world” for disabled people. The more I learn and experience, the more I am saddened by what the “normal” can be for some people. It has made me determined to speak out and aim to improve others’ lives, as well as my own, while at Hartpury.

A little about me- I’m Aja, I’m twenty-five, and I’ve been running my own business for the last four years. I came to Hartpury to become a qualified canine behaviourist and to experience university life.

I’m ADHD, Autistic, have Tourette’s, HEDS (Hypermobile Ehlers Danlos Syndrome) and numerous other health conditions. But enough about me, I want to encourage other disabled students to reach out and help me to support them in getting their voices heard and needs met.

That’s my goal- it’s very black and white to me as to why I want to do this- (Because - remove) it’s the right thing to do, needs doing, and I feel that I’m in a good place to be able to really make a difference here for students who find accessing education harder than others.

With a 20% population of disabled students, Hartpury has appealed to many of us. While Hartpury offers unique opportunities and courses which can be more accessible to disabled students, I feel it has a long way to go before feeling truly “inclusive” to us.

Hartpury needs to know what it is like for disabled students (As it varies hugely).

Remember- anyone at any time in their life can become disabled- whether temporarily or permanently, it affects everyone. Born with it or not, improving accessibility will have a huge positive impact on all.

Things like accessible teaching styles, accessible software, safer footpaths, education on your rights, and what is already accessible for you will help everyone to get all they can from this learning establishment.

My Goals:

- To improve accessibility to be able to get your voice heard and raised – making avenues easier to access in the first place- clear, easy to understand and be made aware of how to, having feedback on what you raise- creating a basic protocol of what happens when someone raises an issue or something they need support with.
- Provide a resource base for law, Hartpury regulations, and other resources to ensure Hartpury and the university course/ college course are doing what they can to see you succeed and supported educationally, physically, and mentally
- Push for more accessible access across campus and to extracurricular activities, as well as socialising opportunities and supporting different ways of learning in lectures and practicals,
- Raising awareness to non-disabled and less aware disabled individuals on perspective, equity, what they can do to help and support, where they can learn more without infantilisation, bigotry, and assumptions.
- Supporting everyone’s communication needs when accessing additional support eg. DSA – Disabled Student Allowance - giving realistic expectations to students on what is not under the control of Hartpury but also providing options and support while students have to wait for procedure to go through.

My campaigning for all students to be heard started as soon as I got on campus. When I started noticing issues that needed addressing, I knew I had to aim to bring things up and help others to do the same.

With the right guidance, Hartpury has the potential to be a great ally to all its students, especially the 20% of them that are disabled.