A reflective journey with the HESTIA initiative

# Summary

HESTIA, launched during UK Disability History Month, embodies disability inclusion in the College of Science and Engineering. Volunteer efforts, notably a diverse team of staff and students, drove its success. This emphasises the need for associated workload to be agreed in advance and recognised within the local workload model. Outreach through a Sway-hosted newsletter and dedicated website effectively disseminated information, with positive feedback affirming their impact.

Our key initiatives yielded the following insights:

* Successful online events like neurodiversity discussions and language cafés emphasised the importance of tailored strategies such as effective induction processes in supporting our disabled colleagues.
* In-person gatherings, such as inclusive field library launches and discussions on menstruation management, celebrated achievements and prompted meaningful discussions on fieldwork equality.
* Lessons learned include the importance of face-to-face communication, recognising the need for longer planning times, and leveraging existing networks for efficient engagement.
* Upcoming projects, such as an 'Experts by Experience' poster campaign and a self-reflective document on accessibility in university spaces, highlight HESTIA's continued legacy.

## Introduction

Launching the HESTIA initiative during UK Disability History Month (16th November to 16th December) and the International Day of Disabled Persons (3rd of December) was a deliberate move to actively start a discussion around disability within the College of Science and Engineering (CoSE).

The initiative, entitled HESTIA, draws inspiration from the hearth's nurturing symbolism of the Greek goddess HESTIA, embodying a commitment to building a supportive and inclusive community through *Honouring Everyone's Strengths Through Inclusive Action* (=HESTIA). Motivated by a desire to create a welcoming space, HESTIA sought to ensure every individual, regardless of ability or background, feels valued.

This journey was prompted by insights from our Colleague Engagement Survey, revealing that staff who identified as disabled or preferred not to say had the lowest scores, including in comparison with disabled colleagues in other parts of the University. This stark contrast to those staff indicating they were not disabled underscored the need proactive steps.

Despite challenges in engagement, valuable feedback from attendees has been crucial in shaping HESTIA's ongoing evolution. Persistent efforts are in place to involve staff across the CoSE in the future. This report encapsulates feedback, reflection, lessons learned and insights, representing our continuous efforts to nurture a more inclusive academic community in response to the disparities revealed in our Colleague Engagement Survey in 2022, as well as 2023.

## HESTIA team

Our team was a diverse blend of staff and student volunteers from the CoSE and beyond. Those staff and students kindly volunteered their time, making the success of HESTIA a priority. While their dedication has been instrumental and heartening, it also presents challenges, adding to their already demanding workload or study loads. This is something must reflect on in the future, as well as how to make sure those staff and students receive the recognition for their efforts.

*A huge thanks is extended to all those who have contributed their time and passion to make HESTIA a meaningful and impactful initiative.*

## Newsletter and other media

Our dedicated newsletter, hosted on Sway, served as a comprehensive resource for the HESTIA initiative. It featured an introduction, editorial and a calendar of activities. Feature articles delved into various themes, such as campus accessibility and practical steps taken by estates within the university, an interview with Christine Barr (Disability Equality Champion) and a reflection on the work of the Equality and Diversity Unit. The newsletter also provided useful tips and resources, showcased staff in the disability and accessibility space, and reached a substantial audience, with >500 people reading it. The overwhelmingly positive feedback included remarks such as ‘*very interesting’*, ‘*Really helpful to gain an overview of what's going on behind the scenes*’ and ‘*Super useful resources I will check out in the future*’.

In addition to the newsletter, HESTIA had a dedicated website featuring detailed project descriptions, a calendar of activities, and sign-up links. Our website also provided an in-depth exploration of the initiative's initiatives and served as a hub for engagement and participation.

## Activities and Events

Reflecting on each initiative provided valuable insights. The feedback we gathered from organisers and participants facilitated a thoughtful examination of key learnings, contributing to the foundation for future initiatives and insights into the challenges our disabled colleagues face.

### Event: Introduction to Wellbeing Hub (online)

**Summary:** The "Introduction to Wellbeing Hub" event attracted an attendance of 21 participants. The session delved into the newly launched Wellbeing Hub, an internal resource designed to bolster various aspects of staff wellbeing, including social connectivity, mental resilience, spiritual growth, physical wellbeing and financial management.

**Feedback:** The session received overwhelmingly positive feedback, with all participants awarding it 5/5 stars. Attendees noted the session's insightful, friendly and engaging nature, acknowledging it as a valuable resource. Additionally, all participants expressed that they would recommend the session to their colleagues.

**Reflection:** The high level of satisfaction and unanimous positive feedback indicates a strong interest and appreciation for initiatives focused on holistic wellbeing. Filming and making the session available could enhance accessibility, ensuring broader participation and the continued positive impact.

### Exploring neurodiversity in the workplace for HR Advisor Network (online)

**Summary:** The session on "Exploring Neurodiversity in the Workplace" brought together members of the HR Advisor Network, fostering a positive discussion. Key takeaways emphasised the effectiveness of individual approaches and underscored the importance of collaboration, highlighting that working together is crucial. The induction process was identified as a key factor in building trust.

**Feedback:** Positive feedback emerged during and after the session, with participants expressing satisfaction with the information provided and subsequent discussion.

**Reflection:** The positive feedback and emphasis on individualised approaches and collaboration underscore the importance of tailoring workplace strategies to accommodate neurodiversity. The recognition of the significance of the induction process in building trust suggests a need for targeted onboarding practices. Moreover, utilising existing networks works well and should be used for initiatives in the future. The session's success encourages ongoing engagement and further exploration of neurodiversity initiatives across the university.

### Inclusive Language Café (hybrid)

**Summary:** The Inclusive Language Café, attended by four participants, provided a platform to explore person-centred inclusive language in a relaxed setting. Attendees engaged in meaningful discussions, fostering understanding and respect. Dr Anna Bochorishvili's presentation shared valuable research insights, offering a glimpse into current work within the Centre for Disability Research.

**Feedback:** Attendees appreciated the insights gained from Anna Bochorishvili's presentation. The discussion delved into the medical and social model of disability, and underscored the importance of language being person-centred. Positive feedback indicated increased confidence in language use, with a suggestion to implement training or a summary presentation within EDI committees.

**Reflection:** The success of the Inclusive Language Café in promoting person-centred language and fostering understanding is evident in the positive feedback received. Anna Bochorishvili's presentation not only provided valuable insights but also served as a catalyst for discussions on language and disability models. The suggestion to incorporate training within EDI committees aligns with the goal of continuous engagement around disability, ensuring that the impact of such events extends beyond the individual sessions, in particular if attendance is low.

### Insights from the Colleague Engagement Survey: a disability-focused workshop (in-person)

**Summary:** The workshop provided an opportunity for colleagues to gather and discuss the results of the Colleague Engagement Survey, focusing specifically on responses related to disability. There were only three participants, with two being organisers of the event. The discussion, however, was still meaningful. The session involved in-depth discussions and analyses of select survey questions, aiming to foster a deeper understanding of the experiences and perspectives of our diverse workforce.

**Feedback:** While the participation was lower than expected, the workshop was nevertheless valuable in extracting insights from the survey. The need for better engagement was reflected upon, recognising the importance of encouraging more colleagues to contribute to discussions around colleague engagement survey results and participation in disability-related initiatives.

**Reflection:** The workshop served as a platform for in-depth analysis of survey data, shedding light on the challenges faced by colleagues with disabilities. The lower-than-expected attendance prompts a reflection on strategies to enhance engagement for future sessions. The ongoing initiatives of the College EDI Committee, especially the intensified focus on disability-related matters and the consideration of additional surveys or workshops, demonstrate a commitment to addressing the identified issues and fostering a more inclusive environment. The challenges highlighted in the survey results, such as the performance of CoSE compared to other colleges and the lower scores in specific themes, underscore the need for targeted interventions and ongoing efforts for colleagues with disabilities. The emphasis on prompt responses to colleagues with disabilities and the need for a shift towards a culture defined by inclusivity and university values, as discussed in the workshop, highlight actionable areas for improvement. The identified challenges in diagnosis times, website signposting, and lack of support materials underscore the importance of addressing specific pain points to enhance the overall experience for colleagues with disabilities. Additionally, the acknowledgment of differences in experiences linked to diverse managerial approaches and the need for intersectional data provide valuable insights for tailoring strategies to meet the diverse needs of the university community. The discussion around outdated teaching materials advocates for a cultural shift towards disability inclusion, emphasising the importance of updating resources to create a more inclusive learning environment.

### Fieldwork: best practice library launch (in-person)

**Summary:** The launch of the 'Best Practice in Fieldwork' library drew an attendance of 13 people, including staff at all levels and undergraduate student. This work has been led by staff from Geographical and Earth Sciences who have invested significant time and resources on working on a Code of Practice for field courses – facilitating more equal and inclusive field experiences as well as the best practice fieldwork library. The event sparked a great discussion, providing a platform for both staff and students to come together and discuss the needs and approaches in the fieldwork and fieldcourse domain, while celebrating the good work staff have been doing.

**Feedback:** The feedback from the attendees was overwhelmingly positive, expressing delight in hearing about positive developments and highlighting the tireless work staff are doing on field courses. The launch was seen as an excellent opportunity to discuss needs and approaches collaboratively. The need for peer mentoring in field courses emerged as a prominent theme, and discussions with Student Academic Services led to significant progress in this area, with a peer-mentoring course taking place early 2024. The event was described as motivational, beneficial, insightful, and celebratory.

**Reflection:** The library launch successfully brought together staff and students, fostering a collaborative discussion on the needs and approaches in fieldwork. The emphasis on positive developments and the need for peer mentoring reflects a commitment to enhancing the overall student experience while taking some pressure off staff. The progress made during the event, particularly in discussions around launching a code of practice and implementing peer mentoring for field courses, highlights the tangible outcomes of such collaborative initiatives. The motivational and celebratory nature of the event underscores the importance of recognising and applauding efforts towards fostering inclusion and accessibility. The launch serves as a promising first step, with a commitment to continued efforts in collecting more stories to inspire and inform future initiatives aimed at promoting inclusion and accessibility in fieldwork activities.

### Understanding and managing menstruation and menstrual conditions in the field (in-person)

**Summary:** This interactive session focused on understanding and managing menstruation and menstrual conditions in field environments and was attended by nine members of staff and students. The first hour provided a safe space for those assigned female at birth to discuss various menstrual products and strategies for improving conditions in the field and workplace. The subsequent session was open to everyone, outlining the fundamentals of menstruation, common conditions, and solutions to enhance conditions in the field. Positive feedback highlighted the enjoyment of the event and the challenging discussions.

**Feedback:** The session received positive feedback, with participants expressing enjoyment and finding the discussions challenging, but in a positive way. The event provided helpful and eye-opening discussions, showcasing advancements in field kit and emphasising the need for effective communication around periods and period-conditions. Attendees considered implementing the learnings across universities with field course components, suggesting a train-the-trainer approach. Interest was noted from various student societies (e.g. caving), field course staff, and students. 5/6 participants providing feedback formally said they would recommend the event to a colleague, with one responding ‘not sure’, with all giving it 5/5 stars and one participant commenting: ‘*This should be made obligatory for staff teaching in the field’*.

**Reflection:** The success of the event, as indicated by positive feedback and interest from diverse groups, underscores the importance of addressing menstruation and menstrual conditions in field or outdoor-based activities. The focus on different strategies and product options reflects a commitment to inclusivity and creating supportive environments. The discussions prompted reflections on how field kit has evolved and highlighted the need for effective communication. The consideration of implementation across universities and the train-the-trainer approach suggests a potential ripple effect, contributing to a broader awareness and understanding of the challenges associated with menstruation in outdoor and field environments. The event's eye-opening nature and the willingness of participants to recommend it to colleagues indicate the potential for broader education and advocacy efforts in this important area. The collection of formal feedback further solidifies the positive impact and usefulness of the event.

The presence of only one male staff member prompts reflection on societal attitudes towards menstruation discussions. It raises questions about the broader hesitancy among those not assigned female at birth to engage in these conversations. This underscores the ongoing need for inclusive environments and educational initiatives that dismantle stigmas and ensure participation from all genders. The limited male representation serves as a reminder of the collective responsibility to foster open and supportive discussions that contribute to a more informed and empathetic community.

### Experiences of students with disabilities (online)

**Summary:** Wren Alvarado Reinoso, SRC’s Disability Equality Officer and a disabled Sociology PhD student, shared insights into the experiences of disabled students and was attended by 23 staff. The talk, well-attended despite a change in date, delved into Wren's personal experiences and master's thesis. It highlighted the impact of accessibility, or the lack thereof, on various aspects of daily life for disabled students at the University of Glasgow.

**Feedback:** The session garnered positive feedback, with attendees expressing gratitude for the insightful talk. The eye-opening nature of the discussion provided valuable perspectives on the challenges faced by disabled students. Requests for a copy of the talk to share with SUERC staff and the interest and potential impact of the content.

**Reflection**: The enthusiastic engagement and positive response underscore the paramount importance and widespread interest in understanding the experiences of disabled students. The talk resonated with the audience, emphasising the critical need for more attention to the opinions of disabled students. The talk also underscored the importance of staff understanding not only legal requirements but also the profound significance of implementing good practices. The discussion highlighted that inclusive practices benefit all students, emphasising the shared duty of care owed to both disabled and non-disabled students. The post-session inquiries further demonstrated the impact of the talk. Several attendees expressed a keen interest in obtaining the presentation, a written summary, and the possibility of sharing the talk in a similar format in the future. Quotes, such as "Thanks for arranging this talk: it was insightful and hopefully others watching also got a lot from it," and "The talk about disabled students' experience was very eye-opening and gave a lot to think about", encapsulate the positive and thought-provoking impact the session had on its audience.

### Walking Tuesdays (in-person)

**Summary**: We introduced the weekly communal campus walks, providing a 30-minute stress-relief break starting at 11 am from the main gate every Tuesday. These themed walks, aligned with the University of Glasgow's broader project on walking and wellbeing, aimed to connect participants with nature.

**Feedback:** While attendance rates were low (on average 3 participants), participants who joined expressed genuine enjoyment. We discussed the advantages of building a walking community, with feedback highlighting the potential for physical health benefits, positive impacts on mental wellbeing, and the fostering of a sense of community through shared experiences in nature and on campus.

**Reflection:** Despite low attendance the initiative's succeeded in providing an break and promoting the benefits of walking for overall wellness. Looking ahead, HESTIA aims to further explore collaborations with existing walking projects within the university, seeking to highlight and align with broader walking communities for enhanced community connection and shared purpose. As such, School of Geographical and Earth Sciences have been running 'mental health walk-and-talks' for PGR and staff post-covid, which might present an opportunity to link.

### Introducing Health Assured (online)

**Summary:** We hosted a session introducing Health Assured, an external service offering confidential support for staff wellbeing. Although attendance was low with only two attendees, the session was recorded and will be made accessible to staff.

**Feedback:** With minimal attendance, the session prompts a consideration of alternative ways to engage staff in learning about the valuable resources provided by Health Assured.

**Reflection:** The decision to record the session for later viewing aligns with HESTIA's commitment to accessibility. Future efforts may focus on promoting recorded sessions and exploring innovative approaches to ensure staff awareness of available support services.

### Disability office hours (mixed format - online and in-person)

**Summary:** Disability Office Hours aimed to facilitate conversations between disabled academics and students within the CoSE. Sessions were available through various formats, including bookable or drop-in options, both in-person and online.

**Feedback:** Despite low attendance rates (i.e. interest/ attendance from three students), meaningful interactions occurred, addressing specific concerns such as exam adjustments. One student engaged over email.

**Reflection:** The unexpected engagement through email highlights the potential for varied participation modes, such as email or Teams chat (i.e. a completely anonymous meeting platform). Factors such as the time of year, particularly before end of year holidays and during exam periods, may have influenced attendance. Reflecting on the format's effectiveness and considering optimal timing will be crucial for future iterations, ensuring broader accessibility and student engagement.

### Zoom jam sessions (online)

**Summary:** We organised two Zoom Jam Sessions for Moodle training, hoping to provide participants with the opportunity to engage with online training modules at their own pace and reflecting together after. Training covered topics such as implementing reasonable adjustments and addressing age bias or menopause awareness.

**Feedback:** Unfortunately, no participants attended the sessions, prompting a need for re-evaluation and more effective strategies to engage our community in training opportunities.

**Reflection:** Clearly, there is a need to reassess the timing and format of training sessions. We could address this by incorporating training into events like away days, where participants are already gathered, emerged as a potential solution. This approach could provide a more conducive environment for learning, discussion, and reflection, fostering a collaborative and interactive learning experience.

### SUERC day out (in-person)

**Summary:** Invited to the Scottish Universities Environmental Research Centre (SUERC), a neurodiversity presentation was delivered. The session covered neurodiversity, challenges, interview and reasonable adjustments and individual actions. A vibrant discussion ensued, particularly focusing on the reasonable adjustment passport. Following this, an Experts by Experience poster launch showcased six posters, with more to come. The event provided valuable insights and facilitated lively discussions.

**Feedback:** Positive feedback was received, highlighting the engaging discussion on the reasonable adjustment passport. Colleagues shared challenges and lived experiences, contributing to a positive and insightful atmosphere. The poster launch generated excitement, with anticipation for more posters.

**Reflection:** The in-person attendance significantly enhanced the event's impact. The dynamic exchange of ideas, challenges, and experiences during the lively discussions affirmed the value of such gatherings. The positive feedback and enthusiasm for future poster launches indicate a receptive audience. Reflecting on the success of attending in person underscores the importance of face-to-face interactions in fostering engagement and collaboration. Despite the logistical challenge of the main campus's distance, SUERC staff, in this instance, felt thoroughly engaged in the events programme through virtual attendance.

# Other in progress

Collaborating with the School of Health and Wellbeing, in 2024, we are gearing up for the launch of our 'Experts by Experience' poster campaign. Featuring 12 posters, this initiative will spotlight the experiences of colleagues with diverse hidden conditions. We aim for these posters to offer unique insights into their daily lives, fostering greater understanding and empathy across the college.

Additionally, we are also excited to introduce a reflective document designed to guide both colleagues and students in evaluating shared spaces comprehensively for accessibility. This tool goes beyond the obvious, prompting users with thoughtful questions to encourage a holistic consideration of all aspects of accessibility within our environments.

Our COSINE newsletter will continue to be a source of valuable information and insights, reflecting on our HESTIA journey as we move onto 2024.

# Lessons learned

* Actively addressing identified issues from the Colleague Engagement Survey proved a positive first step to engaging with staff and students.
* Considering additional surveys or workshops is essential for a comprehensive understanding of diverse staff experiences (including those who prefer not to declare their disability status).
* Encountered difficulty in achieving widespread participation, especially from those staff/students with less direct interest or lived experience.
* Face-to-face communication remains crucial for effective engagement.
* Longer timescales are needed to accommodate sessions in busy diaries. Scheduling activities during times when people are more likely to attend is important.
* Catering has proven to be a positive factor in encouraging participation.
* Experienced pressure on staff/ students organising activities, highlighting the need for more support and recognition in the future.
* Consider collaboration with the communications team for improved communication and dissemination strategies.
* Leverage existing meetings or networks for initiatives could enhance efficiency and participation.
* In opening HESTIA to all staff and students from Glasgow University, we demonstrated an openness to lead and collaborate across the university for the collective benefit. However, in the future it would be useful to identify opportune timings within the academic calendar and aligning with relevant campaigns across the university as part of a more strategic approach to event planning.

**L Bach**

Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Officer

College of Science and Engineering