

Leading Figure on Inclusive Higher Education Praises University of Worcester



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A national expert on widening participation in higher education has described the University of Worcester as a “leading light” on inclusion.

Speaking ahead of a conference, hosted by Worcester, on how to further promote inclusivity in universities, Professor Geoff Layer highlighted evidence of the University’s commitment to this agenda and to making its facilities accessible to all.

Professor Layer is Chair of the Disabled Students Sector Leadership Group, a sector-led group, supported by the Department for Education, that produces guidance for the higher education sector.

“It’s [Worcester] a leading light [in the sense of inclusivity],” he said. “In terms of the culture, in terms of learning and the environment. It has good guidance in terms of reasonable adjustments in assessments to make sure they are accessible. It is on other universities to follow that lead.”

He highlighted the University of Worcester’s inclusive attitude towards existing student halls of residence, whose design ensures that wheelchair users can move easily in all spaces.

Professor Layer, who is Vice Chancellor of the University of Wolverhampton, said universities needed a shift in their attitudes to access and inclusion. For example, instead of equipping disabled students with specialist equipment he argued that all equipment should be updated with specialist software.

“It’s a culture change; it’s thinking about anticipatory judgements,” he added.

“If you meet the needs of disabled students you meet the needs of all students.”

He said although not every students’ specific personal support needs could be predicted in advance, some aspects can, such as the likelihood of students with dyslexia, using wheelchairs or dealing with mental health issues and that this should be provided for.

During his speech at the RAISE inclusivity SIG conference, Professor Layer said: “It’s very clear that there are different agendas politically, but the work we do is crucially important to the success of all our students and to looking at real social mobility. Social mobility is not about whether you get students in higher education. It’s what happens to them in life and how they use it and have they been equipped to use the skills and knowledge we have introduced.”

University of Worcester Vice Chancellor and Chief Executive, Professor [David Green](#), spoke at the conference about some of the University’s achievements in inclusion.

He told delegates about the [University of Worcester Arena](#), the first sports hall designed with the wheelchair athlete in mind, winning a Guardian University Award in the ‘Buildings that Inspire’ category in 2015.

He also spoke of [The Hive](#), Britain’s first joint university and public library and its benefit to the community.

“Every day we know there is a battle for inclusion going on. Universities at their best are great engines for inclusion,” he added.

“The University of Worcester strives to do its best to include. Our aim is to help people of ability from all backgrounds to make more of their own rich human potential.”

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