# Sit back, have a big sigh, then work around it.

## Experiences of print-impaired students using library resources

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MCLIP, SFHEA, National Teaching Fellow 2017
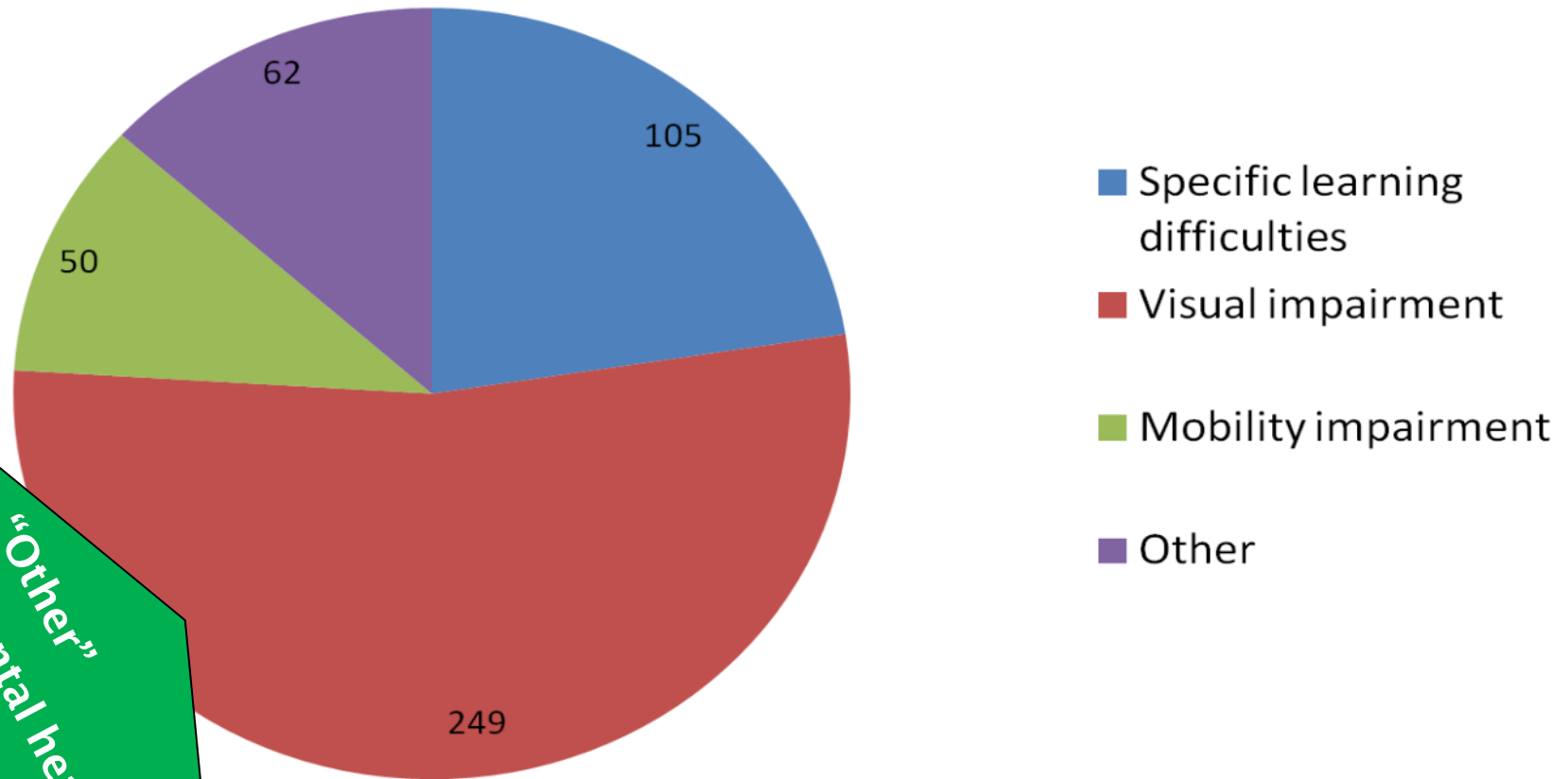
# What is print impairment?

Defined by SENDA in 2001

Any impairment meaning a student cannot use printed resources

Legal obligation for libraries to supply alternatives (alt-formats)

No matching obligation on publishers to supply them!

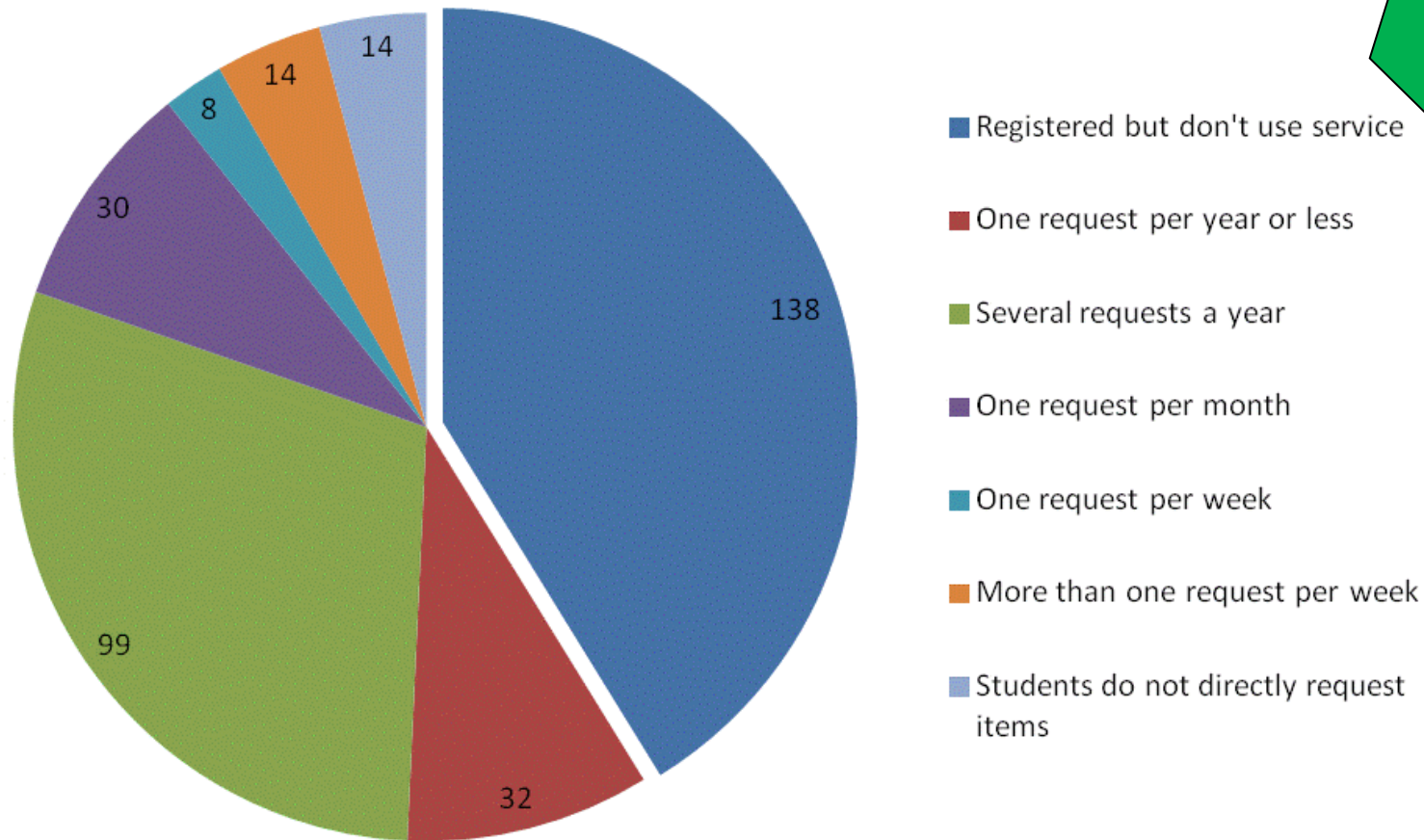# What kind of impairments cause students to request alt-formats?

62

105

50

249

- Specific learning difficulties
- Visual impairment
- Mobility impairment
- Other

"Other"
- Mental health issues
- Neurological conditions
- Autism

2018 Survey of 20 Library / Disability staff supporting 500 students, processing nearly 7000 requests

# Time taken for alt-formats to arrive
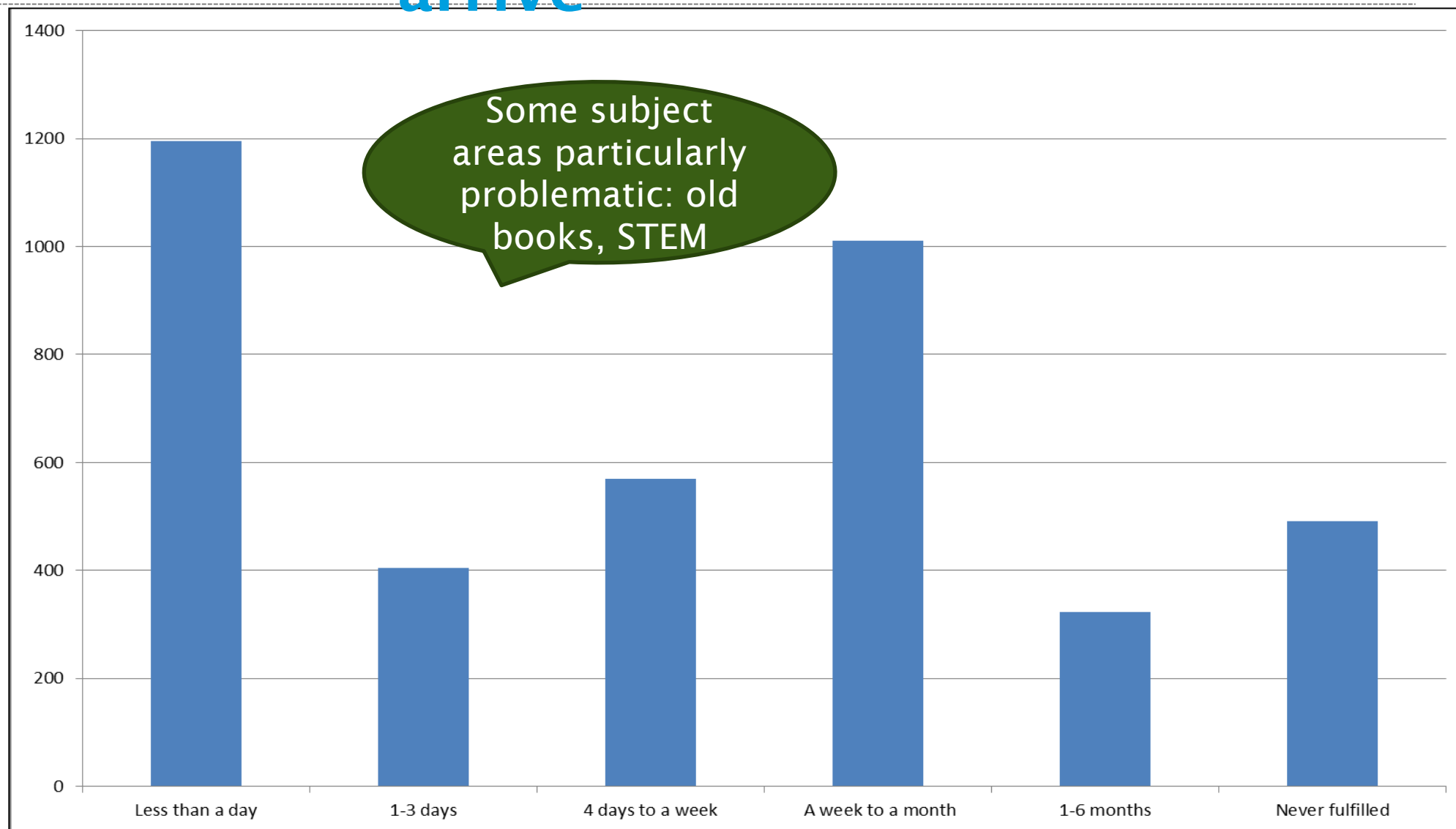
# Staff view of alt-formats services

Improves student confidence, achievement and exam grades

Gives access to books that they otherwise would not have been able to view comfortable/at all.

It goes some way to balancing the playing field

increased confidence, greater participation in the classroom, equality of access to educational resources.

Encourages more wide reading, particularly beyond what is set on reading list

Greater independence in what and how they learn.

The time lag in supplying, even when it is speedy and uncomplicated, still disadvantages students, who can't just pick up the book they want and start studying.

The availability of content in an accessible form influences the essay topics and modules which they pursue and thus affecting the wider nature of their degree

Students have to plan ahead further in advance of their peers in order to be in with a chance of having access to content in a timely manner around deadlines etc.

# Why not just

**Not always available**

**Styling**

Library staff have been pretty passive about this [accessibility of electronic resources] up to now but I suspect it's going to change sometime soon – it only takes one learner to sue one institution for one inaccessible ebook platform and there will be a scramble for platforms with decent guidance on their accessibility features. (McNaught, 2013)

**Usage restrictions**

**Ebook audits**
2011: OU Database audit
2013:  UoB10-week pilot
2014: UoB Summer project
2016: National ebook audit
2017: U of Queensland audit by people with Visual Impairment
2018: ASPIRE National audit and resulting database

# "An administrative problem"
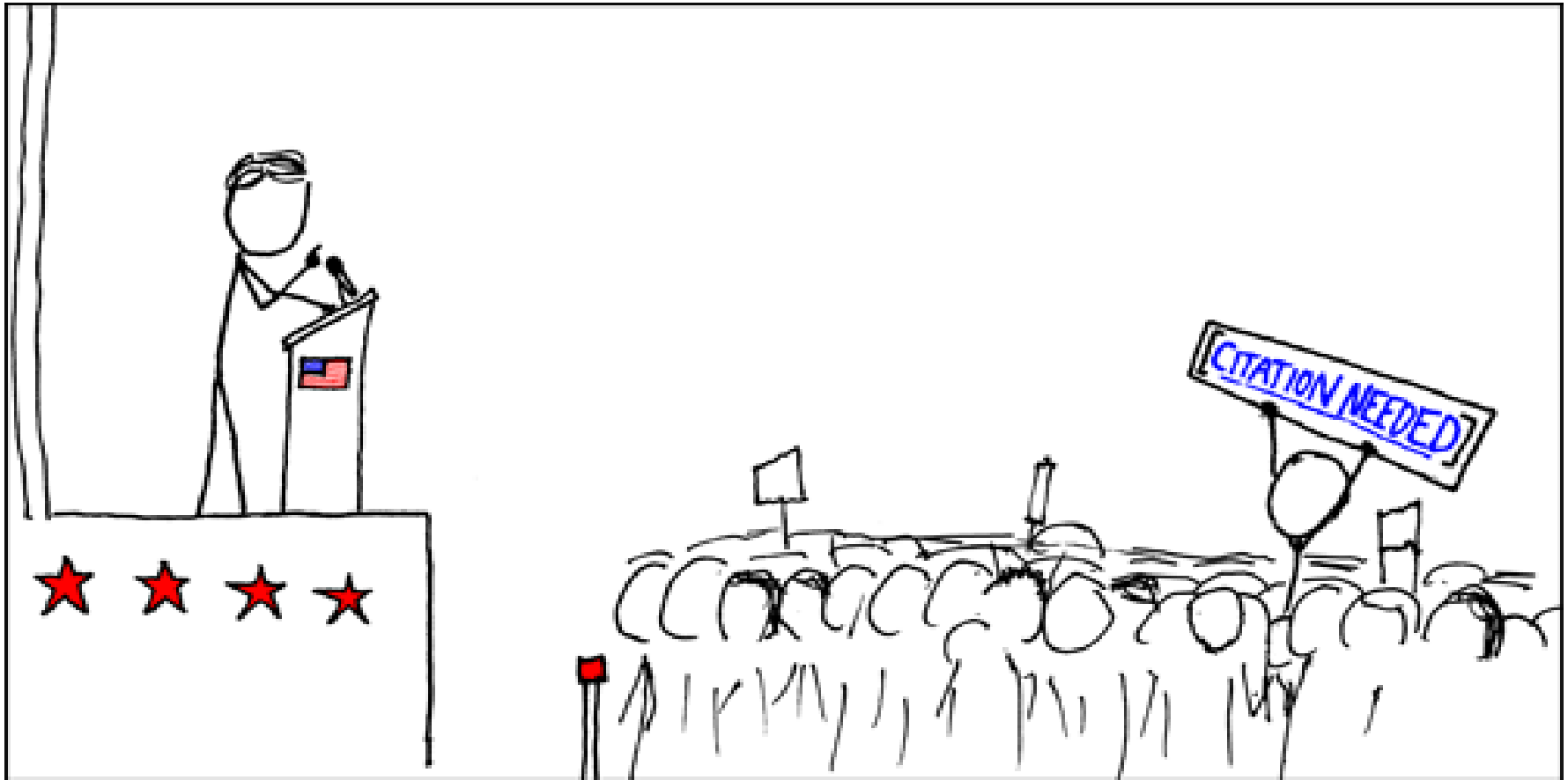


Munroe, R (2010) Wikipedian protestor

https://xkcd.com/285/

# What we don't know

How does reliance on alt-formats impact students' learning?

How do print-impaired students not using alt-formats get information?

# How can we find out?

# Why don't we just ask them?

- Semi-structured interviews with students with print-impairments
  - Face to face, online, written
- 3 Universities involved
- 5 interviews (so far)
- Variety of subjects from sciences to fashion
- Levels from Foundation to PhD
- Variety of impairments
  - Visual impairment
  - Specific Learning Difficulties
  - ADHD
  - Mobility
  - Depression / anxiety
  - Developmental disabilities
  - Fatigue

# Limitations and caveats



- Small sample!
- Self selecting
- Students known to library
    - Cunning plan
- If you're planning something like this, be aware of:
    - Ethics
    - Interviews
    - Transcripts

https://lindanee.wordpress.com/2017/11/05/restrictions-and-limitations-medical-disability-and-occupational-incapacity/

# Themes

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- Time to find stuff
  - Informal means of access
  - Finding alternatives
  - Trying to make things work
- Time to read it
  - Including bits that people normally skip
    - Images
    - Footnotes
    - Citations
  - Technical issues
    - Reading order
- Waiting for people
- Waiting for alt-texts
- Waiting for training
- Lack of ability to browse
- Health problems

I definitely am spending a third, if not more, of my time, not studying like I would be. Easily. But I'm not given any extra time either, because it's not an "exam"

When they do not receive things in correct formats or in advance it makes you become very behind and you have to work twice as hard firstly to reformat the materials before trying to complete assignments.

It takes me three times as longer to basically get something into my head

https://www.wallpaperflare.com/time-machine-wallpaper-lightning-tardis-space-doctor-who-wallpaper-tmktr

Even in the third year now, I've got a good relationship with pretty much everybody in the department , they all know I'm visually impaired and they're still sending out documents that aren't accessible. it's a tricky one. They're not doing it on purpose. But a little bit of thought....

"It's easier for you because of all the software you've got"

The head of the department at [...]he just said "she will never be able to study, She'll never be able to do this".

When tutors did not provide materials in advance of lectures. I found it very hard to follow sessions. Due to visual impairment cannot see very far so cannot follow things displayed on white board screens [They] just point to things and do not describe what they are pointing to eg diagrams. Or if questions displayed they did not always read the questions out so as VI student cannot full participate.

People, academics included, who can put many un-thought-about barriers in the way, or actually who don't see a barrier for basically what it is in any form for people with any kind of impairment.

For seminars when we have a week's notice to get hold of these texts and read them, that's always fun because not all of them are readily available instantly. Some of them you have to do a bit of tinkering with, you have to send them off to SensusAccess and use that and that's not always instant as well.
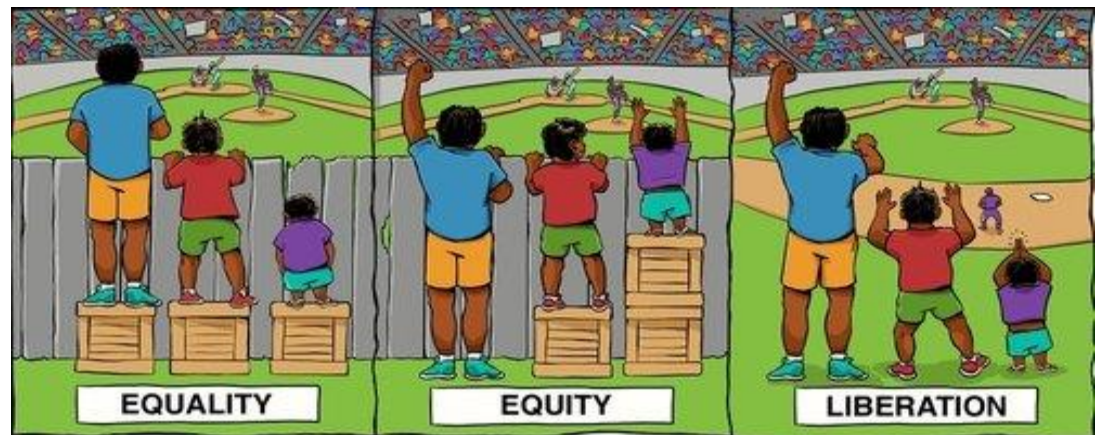
Academic people who are of higher range will never understand [about impairments] Because it doesn't affect them

University of Bradford

# Equity
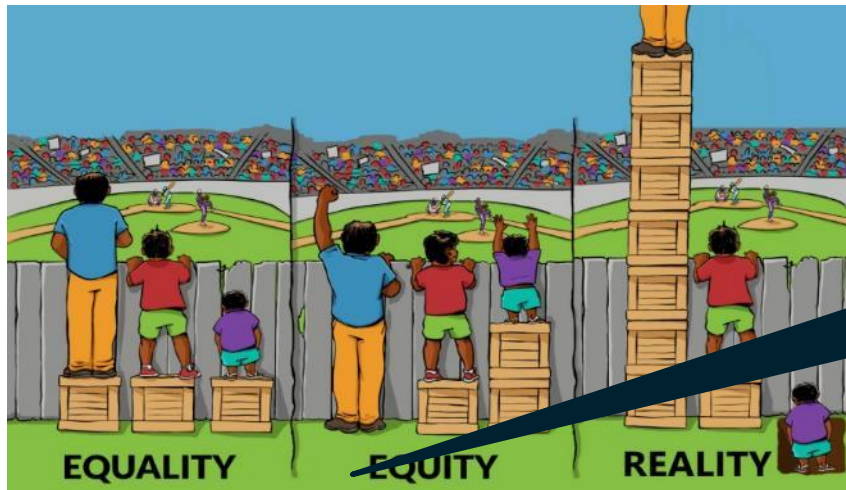
I've got a quarter of the chance of succeeding. Compared to a student like me. That doesn't have my conditions. At this level. So, if that's true, and there's three drop-outs that's three people you're wasting money on. Maybe it's just because you didn't give them enough RAM. You know, it's just another mind-boggler

I just want to be in the room with everyone else. I want to sit at the table with everyone else. All of that software, it evens the playing field for people like us

We're already fighting an uphill battle with things like this and I think that lack of forethought is not helping.

https://www.storybasedstrategy.org/the4thbox
https://www.flickr.com/photos/136820825@N05/26798396924

- No choice!
- Has to be on their own terms
- Students have their own strategies
- One size does not fit all
  - But only one sort provided

The test in an assessment is supposed to be "what do you know"? It's not supposed to be, do 25% IT skills as well but no-one's giving me 25% extra time

Just the specific things: because everyone's unique and everyone has a different way of accessing these documents. Some people prefer PDFs, some people prefer Word and some people need different formats. I think an ability to identify what those people need is key to success at university

Get yourself in the know as to how things work and, like, find the way and find your own style of how things work for you because.... Things don't work in the same way for everybody that's just fact, that's life. You can't have everybody doing the exact same thing in the exact same way.

# Adaptability

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When you come across stuff that's only available in the library in physical print you have to sit back and have a big sigh then work around it, come up with ways around it. Sometimes you have to drop that key text.

My dissertation had to be tailored to what was accessible. Certainly in the past there have been topics for essays, for journal critiques and whatnot where I've had to go to lecturers and say "I'm finding that a lot on this subject isn't accessible, can I do something else" and all the time they come back and say yes, and they always help me in finding a topic that's actually accessible but....

Then I can actually like plan what areas, what stuff I have to do, and they I can add on bits that I can do with that stuff as soon as I've got it

But there's usually a book, it might not be The Book but there's usually a book

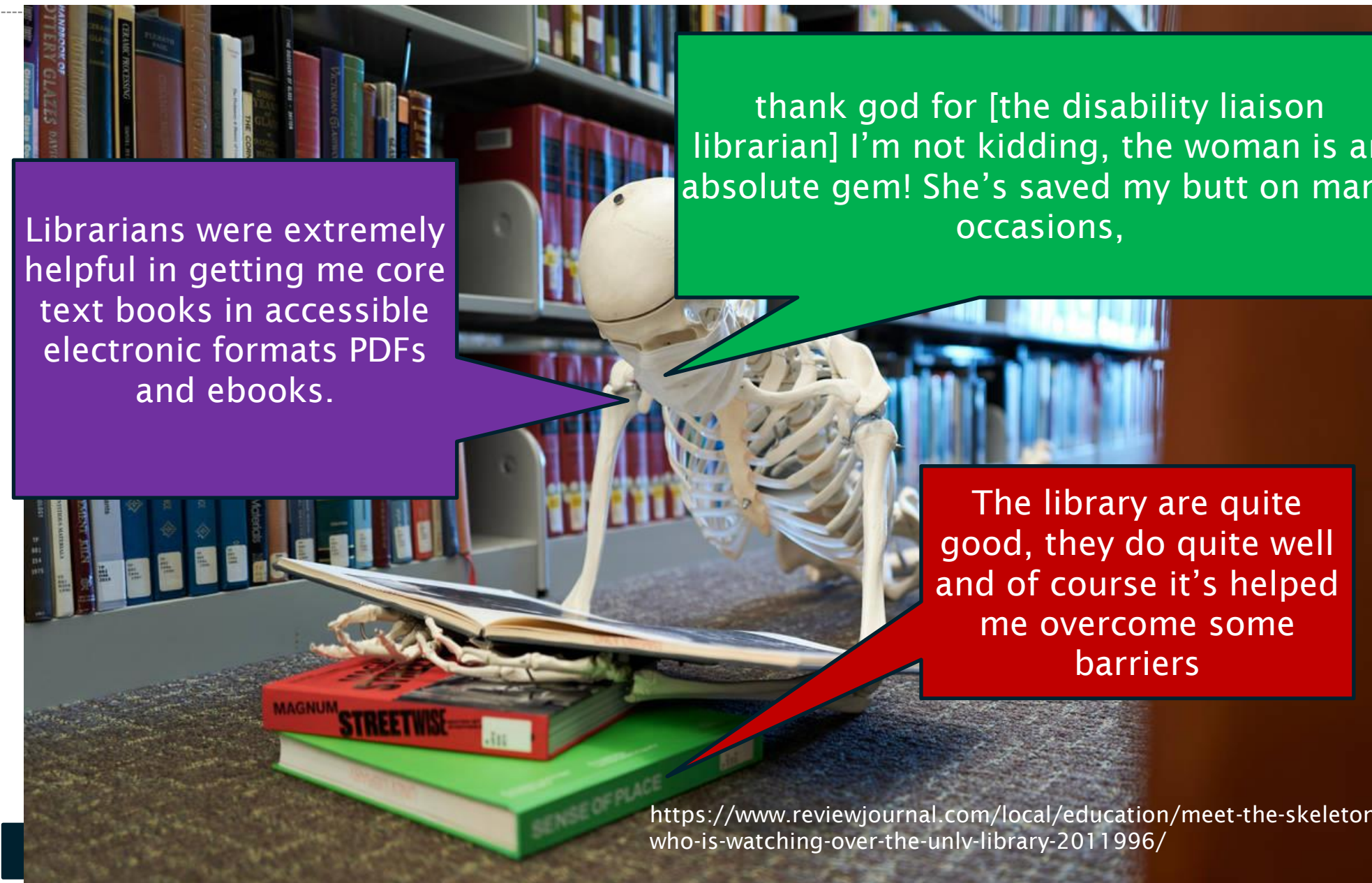https://www.flickr.com/photos/tambako/5950321085

**Support**

If people would resolve the problems for me instead of making me resolve all my own problems, that would be better

So thank god for the ICT desk in the library because I swear to god, every other week I'm there, saying it's not doing this, what is it doing

One thing I would say is that: get the training, get the software, get yourself in the know as to how things work.

So it's quite dependent on other people and it's difficult, because when you're time constrained and you're relying on other people to meet up with you or send you back an email, obviously it's not their fault but it's just frustrating...because you can't access the work until you've met your own personal requirements.
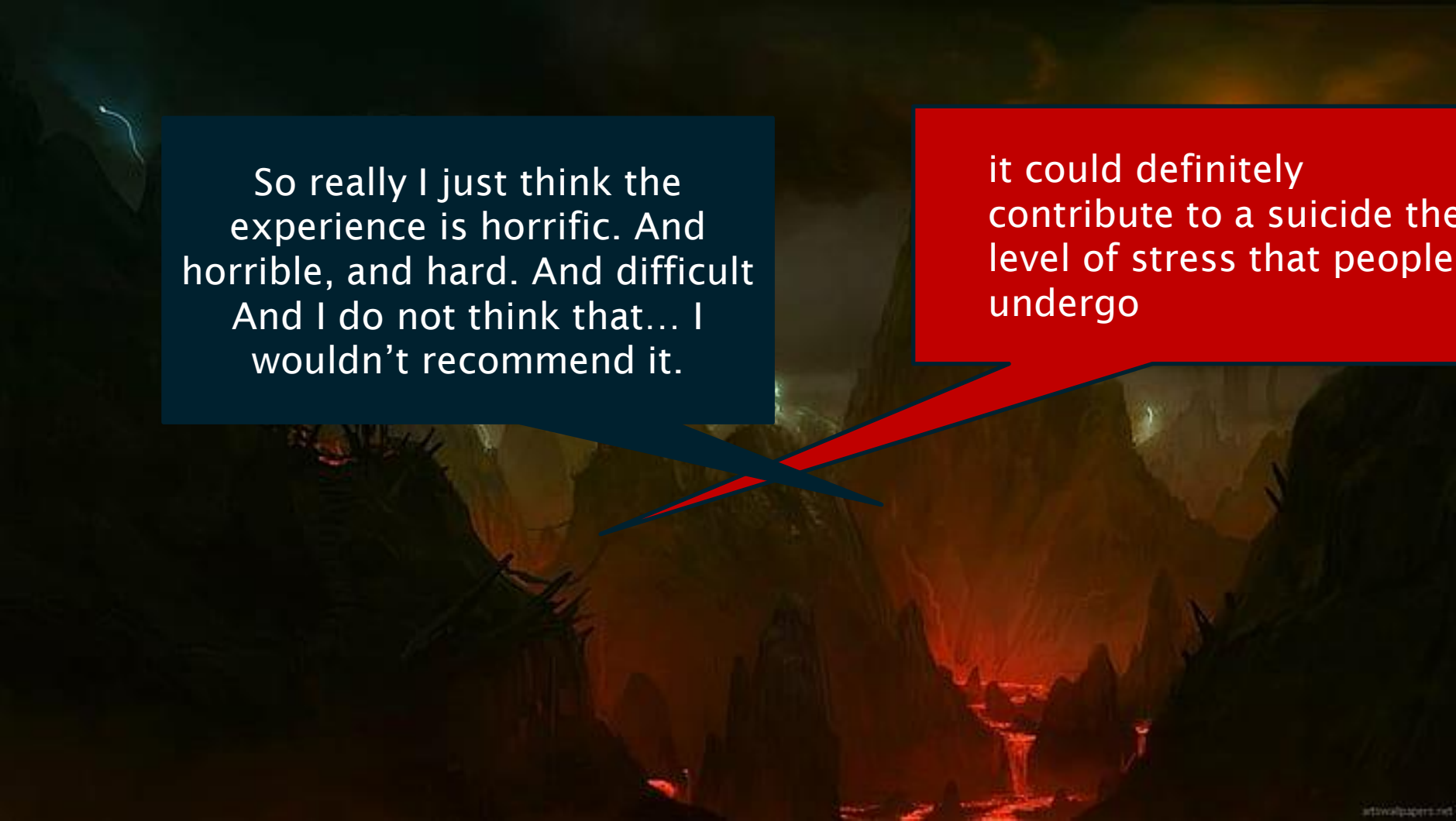
https://www.flickr.com/photos/crdot/6212750258

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So really I just think the experience is horrific. And horrible, and hard. And difficult And I do not think that… I wouldn't recommend it.

it could definitely contribute to a suicide the level of stress that people undergo

# Be part of the solution!

- Awareness
  - Medical / deficit model
  - Unconscious bias
  - One size fits all
- Advocacy
- Finding alternatives
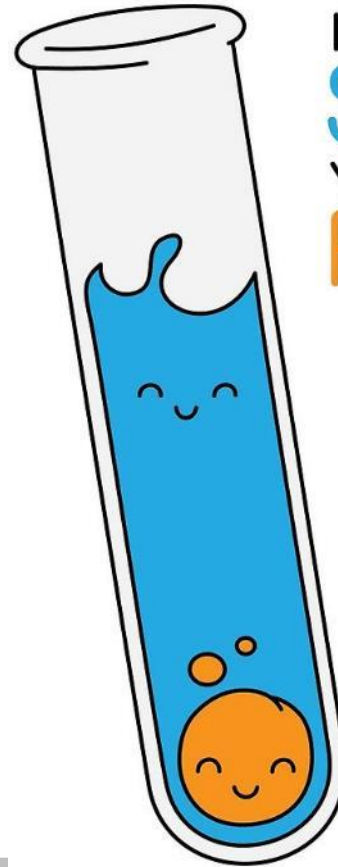
IF YOU'RE NOT PART OF THE
SOLUTION…
YOU'RE PART OF THE
PRECIPITATE!

We need to get people to be more open-minded and innovative all that but, you know, if you need a bridge you've still got to build it

It's down to us, we need to do it. If I'm here, so are you. Let's see what kind of impact we can make. Shall we see how things can change? It starts with us to pave the way.

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