



## Meg Knight Role Model Profile

Student - MSc International Public Policy

### What is your area of study at Queen Mary? What do you do?

I am currently studying for a master's in international public policy, through Queen Mary's part time distance learning programme. Whilst the course is a more general application of public policy theories, approaches, analysis and case studies, my passion for disability campaigning and advocacy has meant that I have managed to study disability issues in greater depth and weave them into many of my assignments to date. I am coming towards the end of my studies, with only my dissertation left – which will examine the role of institutional ableism, as a barrier for the representation of disabled people in UK Parliament and public policy.

### What is your experience of being disabled at Queen Mary (or in your life more generally)?

In 2015, I acquired both a physical (Spinal Injury and Significant Nerve Damage) and mental (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) disability, following an injury on duty as a police officer in the Metropolitan Police Service. I found adapting to life with a disability incredibly difficult. I naively believed that I would be able to access the support I needed to lead an independent life, both more easily and quickly. The reality didn't match my expectations and I have found it a struggle to overcome the repeated barriers in both my professional and personal life, in terms of accessibility, equality and nondiscrimination. I had also previously never understood the extent to which the built environment of our society and social attitudes towards disabled people, is so pervasively exclusionary. Of course, every disabled person's experience is different, it will vary on your type of disability. I am also not saying that society is entirely inaccessible, but there is still much progress to be made and when it comes to disability it appears to be an afterthought for many.

The fact that the course was being delivered part time and via distance learning was also a huge factor in my decision to return to education. It was one of only a handful of institutions which offered flexibility, but also didn't compromise on academic expertise and knowledge. It was really refreshing when I enrolled at Queen Mary University to find that I didn't have to struggle or fight to have my needs met. I was quickly assessed for my disabled student's allowance, along with the equipment and support I was eligible to receive throughout my studies. Plus, the [Disability and Dyslexia Service](#) have been brilliant, they regularly communicate with me and make sure that everything contained in my student

support summary is delivered. They even arranged for the regular course reading lists and materials to be sent to me a week in advance, as they knew it took me longer to prepare than other students. I have not once felt like a burden or fearful that requests for adjustments would be denied. I have undergone a few operations over the duration of my studies and their support during these times especially has been brilliant.

### How could Queen Mary better support its disabled community?

Greater visibility and representation particularly in positions of leadership, are extremely important for tackling exclusionary barriers faced by disabled people, within the university itself and society more widely. With more disabled people in leadership positions it will contribute to ensuring that disability is not an afterthought and that impact assessments around disability are considered in terms of University decisions and policies. The visibility of disabled people in these positions will go a long way in challenging the stigma of disability as an inability, contributing to disabled people being viewed on their merits.

### Why do you think role models are important?

When I lost my frontline policing career, I lost my purpose in life. Then in 2018, I began volunteering with my local Girlguiding organization. Not only did I find my sense of purpose again, but I also became inspired by some of the women who became my own personal role models. They have taught me a lot about myself and the world around me, they have encouraged and supported me, they have helped shape the person I am today. I have also learned how important role models are through the young ladies we work with and the comments made by their parents and carers. Our young ladies have done some amazing things, many of whom have disabilities themselves. By having role models, they have learned that their disability is not something to be ashamed of, or something that will prevent them from achieving their aspirations.

### What do you want staff and students at Queen Mary to know or understand about disability and the disabled community?

Our experiences are not always the same, which is why it is important not to view disability through a one size fits all approach. Ask a disabled person what works best for them based on their experiences, you will help them a lot more by asking them questions, instead of making assumptions or making decisions on their behalf.